

LEFT OUT: A REVEALING LOOK INTO THE EVERYDAY FASHION CHOICES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH  
MOBILITY DISABILITIES

EMMA KATELIN THOMPSON

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ABSTRACT

Based on interviews with individuals with mobility disabilities, this thesis argues the lack of mainstream clothing available and the geriatric style of clothing often associated with physical disability is largely a result of the embedded notion that disability is a problem to be solved by the individual – a perspective influenced by the medical sociology of disability. As appearance plays a role in interactions, the stereotypes surrounding physical disability are perpetuated by an appearance that cannot be changed due to the absence of clothing one might desire to wear.

DEDICATION

I owe many thanks to the individuals who contributed to the primary research for this thesis. Your stories and experiences were invaluable to me.

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*“You always want to be accepted for everything, you don’t want to be left out of certain things and you’re always being left out of something” (T2)*

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the diverse negotiations that occur when creating an image of the self through clothing from the perspective of individuals with mobility disabilities, a group that is left out of mainstream fashion design. Attention needs be directed to the clothing uses, needs and desires of those with mobility disabilities, not only so that they can be seen beyond the Other, but also to recognize that clothes can mean different things in various daily experiences. The lack of availability of clothing designed, and how clothes are designed for persons with physical disabilities are viewed, is a reflection of society’s view of persons with physical disabilities. This perspective is heavily influenced by the medical sociology of disability, which incorrectly sees disability as the problem of the individual. These views are related to bodily perfection, normal versus abnormal, able/disable, and language used surrounding clothing alterations. This introduction will begin with a brief overview of clothes designed for persons with physical disabilities, the function of clothes in everyday life, and Symbolic Interactionism which functions as the theoretical framework for this thesis.

A *Modern Hospital Journal* headline reads: “Clothing for the handicapped makes fashion news in London.”<sup>1</sup> A different type of fashion show than those typically making headlines, this article captures the view of clothes for persons with physical disabilities or those requiring more functional options, in 1970. The article describes a fashion show hosted at a British hospital, put on by the organization Disabled Living Foundation to showcase the functional clothing available for hospital order. A survey conducted in 1964 concluded health care practitioners were unaware

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<sup>1</sup> "Clothing for the Handicapped Makes Fashion News in London," *Modern Hospital Journal* 114, no. 6 (1970): 154.

of what was available for order and continually ordered items that did not serve their intended purpose. For example “nightshirts with small square neck openings tore consistently but were reordered because nurses failed to mention the problem.”<sup>2</sup> As quoted in the article, clothing coordinator Susan Adams remarks “designing and marketing hospital and outpatient clothing is a neglected area”<sup>3</sup> and thus the fashion show sought to address this need.

A quick Google search of “wheelchair clothing” today reveals that designs and marketing for clothes for individuals with mobility disabilities is still an overlooked area. Of the six results and three paid advertisements on the first page of a casual search, all except one company design clothing or accessories for seniors in care facilities. Evidently the area of clothing for persons with physical disabilities, or “outpatient clothing” is still largely neglected, as it is not only seniors with mobility disabilities who require ‘functional’ or ‘adaptive’ clothing. Fashion and clothing is an inherent part of day-to-day life for everyone.

To think about fashion is to think about how we go from one configuration of daily existence to another. The everyday is what we sally forth into when we wake, before we direct ourselves to some specific sector of more specialized activity. Fashion inheres in the everyday as part of the backdrop to our lives, accounting for the ambience of particular times and places.<sup>4</sup>

While French literature professor Michael Sheringham adequately describes the role of clothing in our everyday lives, what he terms fashion misses the reality of the body in clothes. Alexandra Warwick, professor of English and cultural studies, and writer Dani Cavallaro describe the body through its representations of ideologies and how it will “always bear witness to a society’s validation of certain attitudes and stigmatizing of others.”<sup>5</sup> When the role of clothing in day-to-

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<sup>2</sup> “Clothing for the Handicapped,” 154.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Sheringham, “Envisioning Fashion: Barthes, Benjamin, Baudrillard, and Others,” in the *Everyday life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, ed. Michael Sheringham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 180.

<sup>5</sup> Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and Body*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998), 6.

day life combines with society's concepts of deviance, some bodies are left out. And while one could be left out in many ways, this thesis looks at the role of clothes in the daily lives of individuals with mobility disabilities: their dressing practices, shopping practices, the meaning of clothes, and 'making do' with what is available when little clothing is designed for the seated body.

In order to explore clothing from the perspective of individuals with mobility disabilities, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who use wheelchairs. The interviews presented not only a variety of opinions and experiences with clothes, but when assembled, the perspectives on clothing and appearance referred to how the individuals in the study felt they are perceived by society in general. As a result, this thesis takes the perspective that clothing, appearance, and stereotypes of physical disabilities are not only inextricably linked, but that the absence of fashion forward clothing designed for the seated figure is unambiguously related to the assumption that persons with disabilities are not contributing or productive members of society.

Concerning the relationship between appearance and stereotypes of disability and the wheelchair as an object, Symbolic Interaction describes how these perspectives of disability are perpetuated by assumptions made based in appearance but also how individual interactions are what establish the social norm. Thus if individual interactions treat persons with physical disabilities as Other, the social perspective will be the same. Specific to this thesis, is how the stereotypes of physical disabilities appear in the lack of clothing designed for the seated body. This leads to an unending cycle of judgments and stereotypes being made based on appearance, this appearance being dictated by the lack of clothing available that meets functional or comfort needs and is something one might desire to wear. The stereotypes based on appearances sustain

the view that the disability is the problem of the individual to solve. It is this perspective, known as the medical sociology of disability that not only identifies disability as an individual problem but also portrays disability as socially deviant. While there are other conceptions of disability found in the social model of disability and critical disability studies, the medical view has had and continues to have a significant influence on the paradigm through which disability is understood.

The literature review chapter will begin with an exploration of the medical sociology of disability. To show the reach of this framework, examples of clothing studies that are focused on designing clothes for persons with disabilities and follow the view that disability is the problem of the individual to solve and that physical difference is deviant, will be analyzed. Attention will then be directed to clothing and dressing guidebooks published for persons with physical disabilities and how these coincide with the deinstitutionalization of persons with disability and further invoke the medical view of disability will be discussed. A shift to the sociology of disability and critical disability studies understanding of disability and society's role in perpetuating views of 'disability' as the individual's problem will be explored alongside clothing studies that reflect these views. This thesis locates itself within the aforementioned understandings of disability and how disability only exists in tandem with ability especially with respect to the functions of the body and the standards to which it is held. Finally the literature review will discuss the politics of design, specifically who is seen as the expert in designing for persons with physical disabilities and the ramifications of this expertise.

Symbolic Interaction (SI) will be employed in chapter three to explain the role of appearance in an interaction as well as how through interactions individuals come to develop a self. Furthermore, the role of interactions on one's view of the self and how these can alter one's

behaviour will be noted. The writings of Symbolic Interactionists Erving Goffman, George Mead, and Herbert Blumer are drawn upon to explore the role of interactions on the dressed body and the reverse, as well as meanings associated with clothing. According to SI it is through social interactions that meanings associated with objects, clothes and the dressed body, are formed.<sup>6</sup> Social interactions with others are also necessary to develop the ‘self’ as an object.<sup>7</sup> According to SI our concepts of ourselves are only developed as a result of our social interactions. Goffman’s framing of daily life as a performance, one influenced by the interpreted responses of others, is also be explored especially with respect to what goes on “backstage” as one readies themselves for his or her performance.

In chapter four, the reasons for choosing interviews over participant observation, the methodology preferred by SI, will be articulated. Through citing relevant clothing and fashion studies, both with and without persons with disabilities as participants, why interviews were chosen over qualitative methods such as questionnaires and surveys will be established. Important to this thesis was carrying out a methodology that in no way was linked to positivism, the authority awarded to scientific knowledge, or Othering the individuals that contributed to this study.<sup>8</sup> This chapter also negotiates when identifying disability is appropriate and inappropriate with respect to identifying individuals eligible to participate in a study.

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969), 50.

<sup>7</sup> George H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society: from the Standpoint of Social Behaviourist* 1934, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago And London: Chicago University Press, 1962), 138.

<sup>8</sup> I have chosen to refer to the individuals interviewed for this research as contributors. I do not use a wheelchair and thus I am relying on the stories and accounts told to me by the interviewees to contribute to my knowledge in order to complete this research. Furthermore, I am aware of the power dynamic that can exist between ‘researcher’ and ‘participant’, something thoroughly outlined by Hansen (2002), especially when the participant is a person with disability as a result of the medical control of disability. Thus I chose to attempt to remove my research from this dynamic by referring to those who assisted in shaping my knowledge by sharing their own personal stories as contributors. This was a concept that took sometime for me to develop, I knew before I began writing my thesis that I did not want to refer to the individuals who had generously shared their time and personal lives with me by a term that has been tainted by positivist notions of study. Contributor is fitting as these individuals gave their own stories and notions of their individuality to me to assist in the research for this thesis.

Another area that has received little critical attention in dressing practices is the use of the words “works” and “right” when describing outfits and different pieces of clothing. For example “they just work”, in reference to a pair of pants. Affect theory will be applied to this vaguely discussed practice of deciding what to wear, using it as the preconscious knowing of clothes that can be matched together in the wardrobe, in chapter five of this thesis.<sup>9</sup> While this discussion is taking place in a body of work that is focused on individuals with mobility disabilities, deciding what to wear and using affect to explain this wardrobe moment is relevant to all bodies. This in-between of getting dressed will be explored primarily through the writings of social theorist Brian Massumi, literary theorist and political philosopher Michael Hardt, philosopher Baruch Spinoza and academic Sarah Ahmed. Getting dressed will also be considered as a form of affective labour, as dressed bodies require work that is largely unrecognized in the current capitalist system. Here Hardt and Antonio Negri, will be drawn upon to articulate the value that is derived from one’s own dressed body, but also from interactions with others. Arguing the daily practice of dressing is a form of labour is important from the viewpoint of persons with physical disabilities as the energy and time required to do so is unapparent.

The analysis of the experiences, stories, and perspectives shared in the interviews is carried out in three sections in chapter six. The first section, Fancy Pants, weaves together the many discussions that took place in the interviews surrounding pants. These conversations included practical concerns, changes in the body, and what one’s goals in getting dressed might be. While this section seems garment specific, pants was often how the discussion began about designing clothes for all bodies. Pants, as a result of this study are one of the pieces of clothing

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<sup>9</sup> Emma Thompson, “Wardrobe Affect: Addressing Decisions about What to Wear,” *Catwalk: The Journal of Fashion, Beauty and Style*, 4, no.1 (2015): 37-50.

that the contributors ‘make do’ with the most. In the second section of the analysis, the contributors’ questions surrounding whom clothes are designed for and reflections on clothes designed for the standing body are brought together. In wearing clothes designed for the standing body, many contributors spoke of ‘making do’ with clothes available and trying to create a sense of personal style while wearing clothes that are comfortable and functional. The final section of the analysis, entitled Clothing, Appearance and the Wheelchair, explores the self-reflexive comments on clothing and identity creation commented on by the contributors. As creating an identity through one’s appearance inevitably involves the wheelchair, perspectives on the wheelchair as a cultural object are relevant. Also in this section is a discussion of the role of the attendant or personal support worker when getting dressed using Goffman’s theory of the backstage.

This thesis will refer to dress, fashion, and clothes. “Dress” will be primarily be used to refer to an individual’s clothed appearance, such as “manner of dress.” The use of the word “fashion” will align with concepts of modern dress, referring to the cycles of styles of clothing. And “clothes” refers to the material object of clothing, the pieces that are donned and doffed everyday.

“Left Out” focuses on dressing patterns and negotiations of what to wear by persons who use wheelchairs. Through a series of stitches and intertwined threads the focus is on the bodies that are left out. Left out because they are not the fashion croquis, considered the norm, which are translated into the real life fashion model for which ready-to-wear clothes are arguably designed. They may also be left out because they have bodies with different length limbs, amputations, arthritis, or curvature of the spine. And then there are bodies that are always seated and they are arguably left out because the design requires the body to be considered seated and

not standing. Through this consideration of the clothing available for persons who use wheelchairs, this research does not focus only on exclusion, but calls upon the focus of disability culture to “decenter the discourse away from the dominant ethnocentric able-bodied cultural hegemony”<sup>10</sup> in the practices of the fashion industry but also in our day-to-day interactions.

The article from *Modern Hospital Journal* discussed alterations to clothes to make them more functional for the individuals wearing them. For example, “A back seam on a man’s jacket can be fastened with an adhesive and is designed to be opened easily by a wheelchair patient.”<sup>11</sup> The clothes shown in this 1970s hospital fashion show were functional, not at all concerned with allowing the individual to create an identity through his or her clothes. This is not surprising as the first symposium looking at clothing designs for persons with physical disabilities concluded doctors should address clothing concerns with their patients.<sup>12</sup> Outside of medically focused circles, there is little consideration of clothes for persons with physical disabilities. Designer Graham Pullin notes, “the design issues around disability are underexplored, and demand and deserve far more radical approaches.”<sup>13</sup> It seems long overdue that not only concepts of disability, but clothing for persons with physical disabilities break from the medical view that sees the individual as the problem. This thesis will shed light on the clothing and fashion needs, desires, and perspectives of persons who use wheelchairs and have arguably been left out and how this is related to the perceptions of persons with physical disabilities.

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Peters, "Is There a Disability Culture? A Syncretisation of Three Possible World Views," *Disability & Society* 15, no. 4 (2000): 585.

<sup>11</sup> “Clothing for the Handicapped,” 154.

<sup>12</sup> Jane M Lamb, "Disability and the Social Importance of Appearance," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 19, no. 3 (2001): 136.

<sup>13</sup> Graham Pullin, *Design Meets Disability* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press Books, 2009), 303.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

The following literature review argues the lack of critical attention to clothing for persons with physical disabilities is a result of the medical sociology of disability. This view, also known as the medical view of disability, has had a large influence on clothing designed for persons with disabilities, both with respect to the style of clothing but also how bodily difference is viewed as an obstacle. The reach of this perspective on disability extends to guidebooks describing how to modify clothing designed for the able body. In addition, studies conducted looking at the perspectives of persons with disabilities on clothing often missed a larger critique of ableist design practices and standards in their conclusions. There have only been a handful of publications that do not see the individual different body as a problem through the attitudes of critical disability studies. These studies also critique the structures through which persons with physical disabilities are left out of mainstream fashion design. Through the following analysis the role of the medical view of disability as well as design politics have mired and prevented attempts to design clothes that individuals with physical disabilities might want to wear. The threads of this perspective as well as the unavailability of clothing are part of the larger cloth that describes society's view of individuals with physical disabilities.

Disability researcher Carol Thomas explains, there is a large difference between the medical sociology of disability and disability studies. Thomas argues that medical sociology frames disability and illness through social deviance.<sup>14</sup> Disability studies focuses on “an explicit commitment to assist disabled people in their fight for full equality and social inclusion,” where as medical sociology is focused on a “commitment to pursue sociological scholarship *per se*, or

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 2007 and Carol Thomas, “How Is Disability Understood? An Examination of Sociological Processes,” *Disability and Society* 19, no.6 (2004).

to inform policy-makers and professionals in the disability services arena.”<sup>15</sup> This is a complex academic field with many theoretical frameworks differing in how disability is understood, however most frameworks fall under disability studies or the medical sociological view of disability. The first section of this analysis looks at the medical sociology of disability and how it has impacted the ways clothes have been designed for persons with disabilities, but also how they are addressed as a group, specifically the language used. The medical view of disability is also present in the guidebooks published around the same time as individuals with disabilities were being deinstitutionalized, and how institutions established a way of thinking about disability will be discussed. The focus of this review then shifts to critical disability studies. This thesis aligns itself within critical disability studies, coming from disability studies, including the poststructuralist approach to disability and also closely with feminist disability studies, specifically situated scholarship and the politics of appearance. Clothing literature from the critical disability perspective will be interpreted with respect to this thesis in this section, and at the same time the recent presence of persons with disabilities on the runway will be analyzed. Finally the politics of design, as shown through a few clothing studies will be acknowledged.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY OF DISABILITY ON CLOTHING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Thomas locates the notion of disability as deviance within the structural-functionalism framework, tracing it back to the work of French sociologist and social psychologist Emille Durkheim.<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of structural-functionalism, a healthy population or group of individuals is fundamental to a well-functioning social network. Those who are described as ‘normal people’ are needed in order to maintain a stable economy, healthy families and

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas, “How Is Disability Understood?” 571.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*.

relationships, social networks, and the like.<sup>17</sup> As a result, this framework implies there is no place for the disabled body in the current capitalist system. Using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory, persons who are chronically ill are framed as having an attitude or mentality that makes them susceptible to being ill. From this perspective the understanding that with the right mindset and way of thinking, individuals should be able to cure themselves is prevalent. Thus when the individual is not cured he or she is to blame.<sup>18</sup> This view of disability is critical for understanding research that has been done in the past surrounding clothing choices and alterations for individuals with disabilities in general, as it establishes disability as the responsibility of the individual.

One's responsibility over his or her disability as seen through clothing is exemplified in a case study conducted by social history of clothing researcher Laura Kidd, "A Case Study: Creating Special Occasion Garments for Young Women with Special Needs." This project, involving a senior design student, set out to create four gowns for four young women with Spina Bifida or Osteogenesis Imperfecta. After reviewing what was available on the market Kidd noted that most styles available for the young women were more functional than style conscious.<sup>19</sup> While this study was fascinating as it detailed the entire process of the garment design for persons with disabilities, from selecting a style through to the final fittings, something not often seen in fashion literature, the language used is very problematic and seems to come from the medical view of disability. The language and phrasing of the case study makes the individual young woman's body the problem because the usual drafting or draping techniques practiced by the designers could not be followed. In addition Kidd and her student designer counterpart saw

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Laura K Kidd, "A Case Study: Creating Special Occasion Garments for Young Women with Special Needs," *International Textile and Apparel Association* 24, no. 2 (2006): 161.

the braces or orthopedic shoes worn by the young women as obstructing the design process, when they are the reality of these young women's day-to-day lives.<sup>20</sup> The necessity of the braces should have been viewed as an additional parameter for the designers to take into consideration, not a problem. Designers should be willing to take many constraints into consideration and the nature of design is that everything requires a few drafts.

The naming of the medical diagnosis in the study seemed to exacerbate the notion that the bodies of the young women were 'different' and therefore a problem – asserting the medical sociology view of disability as a problem to be solved. Kidd discussed the design and range of “fitting challenges” among the young women.<sup>21</sup> They included the young women not being able to stand for extended periods of time during fittings, problems with grain lines, “severe asymmetry,” and issues with measurement taking, leading to draping instead of pattern drafting methods.<sup>22</sup> Kidd never articulated that the purpose of the study was to compare the typical clothing design methods to the ones that were used in the study, and yet it seems that this is what occurred. Kidd noted, “the alterations had to be exaggerated because of the severity of the fitting problems.”<sup>23</sup> This statement in particular implies that there is a certain amount an alteration should be, and there is a fit range from normal to severe.

While the word “severe” could have been poorly applied its use here “enfreaks”<sup>24</sup> the young women that are being designed for. Kidd goes on to explain in two of the dresses, the zippers were put in the right side of the dress: “conventionally, side zippers are applied in the left

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 163-165.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>24</sup> Enfreak or enfreakment was originally used by David Hevey to describe the photographic work of Diane Arbus as he argued, “Arbus’s images problematically frame disabled people as freaks, outcasts, and derogatorily abnormal ‘Others’” (Anne Millet, “Exceeding the Frame: The Photography of Diane Arbus,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2004)). By framing persons with disabilities as freaks one is “enfreaking” them. Garland-Thomson argues “such representations construct and circulate stereotypes of disability” as their bodies are made into a spectacle. (Millet, “Exceeding the Frame,” para 4.)

side seams of women's garments."<sup>25</sup> Kidd makes this rather minor design change quite dramatic. In reality, it does not matter what side the zipper goes on and thus one can begin to question the purpose of sewing standards. The dressmaker is not wearing the dress, and thus one would think that the sewing standards would be manipulated for the individual who requested the garment. Granted there are sewing standards for many different reasons; however, the standard of having the zipper on the left does not serve the user. These standards in fact seem to be best serving concepts of Fordism, where standards mean the garment can be made faster, as long as you want it in black with a zipper on the left.

Interpretive sociology holds a similar view to disability as structural-functionalism also belonging to the category of medical sociology of disability.<sup>26</sup> It argues illness is a symptom of social deviance, but this framework differs as the deviance is created through straying from social norms. Thus those who are labeled disabled are done so through their social interactions based on difference.<sup>27</sup> Interpretive sociology focuses on interactions between individuals and groups as well as "the symbols, signs, gestures, and informal 'rules' in play."<sup>28</sup> Thomas explains that once an individual is labeled with a mental or physical disability, in the eyes of interpretive sociology, this causes an understanding that he or she is of "inferior moral character"<sup>29</sup> and this will go on to function as his or her master status. This creates an interesting tension with the use of the Symbolic Interaction (SI) framework used in this thesis, as it also focuses on the interactions between individuals and this is how value and meaning is created. However, SI allows for the meaning of a gesture to evolve, and while this difference may initially be assigned a negative meaning, it can be re-understood.

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<sup>25</sup> Kidd, "A Case Study," 169.

<sup>26</sup> Scholars associated with Interpretive Sociology include Max Weber and Georg Simmel.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 21.

Jung Chang, retail and consumer behaviour researcher, Nancy Hodges, consumer, apparel, and retail studies researcher, and Jennifer Yurchisin, identity and consumption researcher, conducted a study that was published in 2014 looking at the clothing selection of persons with disabilities. The researchers sought to “understand what clothing means to disabled consumers, regardless of disability type” interviewing eight women.<sup>30</sup> After the interviews were transcribed the researchers established the following themes from the data: “form and function, self-expression, social identity, and symbols of victory.”<sup>31</sup> As the other themes are prevalent in literature on clothing, the theme of “symbols of victory” should be queried as it inadvertently labels clothing as a challenge for persons with disabilities.

The “symbol of victory” theme is used to describe situations where the individual is dressing to show that she has overcome her disability by dressing to communicate something such as “being diagnosed and learning to live with her disability marked triumph for Susan.”<sup>32</sup> The authors do not readily establish how this is different than the theme they identify as using clothing as a form of self-expression. In addition this theme is somewhat problematic as it shapes persons with disabilities as overcoming obstacles with their clothes. By and large these are obstacles that have been constructed by ableist society, and thus the individual being victorious only perpetuates the concept of normalizing the self to the standards of ‘able’ invoking the medical view of disability as well as the able/disabled binary. Especially with respect to clothing where the needs of individuals differentiating from the ‘ideal’ are unconsidered, using the language of “victory” does not in anyway assist in critiquing the current able/disabled dichotomy. Also, the self-efficacy quality that the researchers give to these

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<sup>30</sup> Hyo Jung Chang, Nancy Hodges, and Jennifer Yurchisin, “Consumers With Disabilities: A Qualitative Exploration of Clothing Selection and Use Among Female College Students,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 32 no.1 (2014):37.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

individuals creates the understanding that the clothing choices of the individual are an accomplishment that others with disabilities do not achieve, and, more specifically, that these individuals have solved their problems, here located in appearance.

Furthermore the authors note in the discussion section of their article that their findings demonstrate that clothing serves a large role in the lives of “disabled consumers compared to nondisabled consumers in general.”<sup>33</sup> While this may be true, the researchers did not solicit individuals who identify as nondisabled in their study and thus this conclusion does not seem relevant or consistent with the purpose of the study. They go on to explain that the role of clothing may “enhance their ability to manage their disabilities and, in turn, improve their sense of well-being and mental health.”<sup>34</sup> Chang, Hodges and Yurchisin do not explain specifically how one would go about managing his or her disability through clothing choices. It seems unlikely that wearing a particular piece of clothing would assist in maneuvering a wheelchair up and down stairs when there is no ramp or elevator.

The use of the word “manage” in their explanation begins to frame the researchers perspective as one where disability is a form of deviance – something that needs to be controlled, which associates it with the medical sociology view of disability. For example, in the article there is a chart that uses pseudonyms, to identify each participant alongside their medical diagnosis, like a ‘disability legend.’ While Chang, Hodges and Yurchisin never state where their research falls within disability studies, the language and arguments in their article imply they view disability as a problem to be solved. Historically, persons with disabilities have been categorized on spectrums quantifying their distance from the norm. English language and literature professor Jay Dolmage explains that through these methods, “it became easier to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

justify their institutionalization and erasure, and this contributed to the medicalizing of disability through an array of scientific terms.”<sup>35</sup>

Understanding the medical sociology perspective of disability is important to this research as many of the individuals interviewed have had much experience with the world of medicine, but also the reality that the sentiment of disability being an individual problem exists in day-to-day life. The two clothing studies reviewed here were chosen because both the clothing design process and the practice of getting dressed are articulated and demonstrate what a clothing or fashion text influenced by the medical view of disability inadvertently communicates about disability. Both studies clearly listed the medically diagnosed disabilities of their participants, as if these were their primary identifiers. As well, these studies signified by wearing nice or clothes with a good fit, that one’s disability might be made ‘easier.’ Kidd, Chang, Hodges, and Yurchisin fail to realize that their approaches are not inclusionary and in fact Other and further exclude persons with disabilities. Overall, the medical sociology of disability has had an impact on the clothes available for persons with physical disabilities and the clothes available or recommended to them. As will be noted in the analysis chapter of this thesis, there also exists a reality that some individuals who require assistance in donning and doffing clothes, end up dressed in what is easiest for the personal support worker to dress them in. This lack of choice relates to the uniforms worn in institutions for the disabled, to the present day. As well, in the analysis section of this thesis the views of disability as difference with a negative connotation, such as inferior moral character implying slob, will be discussed.

#### DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION AND DO-IT-YOURSELF

It is with the deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities that books available in

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<sup>35</sup> Jay Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 37.

public libraries describing techniques and methods of getting dressed alone or with little assistance were published.<sup>36</sup> These books entail tips for camouflaging bodily difference, the styles of clothing that should and should not be purchased by persons with physical disabilities and alterations that can be made to clothes to make them easier to don and doff. *Clothes for Disabled People* by designer and seamstress Maureen Goldsworthy functions as a guide on how to alter, or purchase clothing for persons with physical disabilities.<sup>37</sup> It provides examples of how to alter store bought clothes, and how to create extra openings for ease in donning and doffing. It also lists different aids available for sewing, ironing, knitting and even getting dressed. Goldsworthy recommends four essentials to look for in choosing or altering garments: selecting clothes that are in the current style and conceal the disability, constructed of light and warm fabrics, knits are highly recommended, looking for pieces that allow easy donning and offing, and garments that are easy to care for.<sup>38</sup> As well Goldsworthy lists styles that are easy for donning and doffing, comfortable, practical, and flattering for an individual who uses a wheelchair.

The techniques and tips through which clothing can and should conceal the bodily variance, according to these books, is evidence of desires to control and conform bodies as detailed in the medical sociology of disability. Through these techniques such as not wearing bold patterns or stripes, making bodily difference invisible, solves the problem of disability. According to Critical Dress and Disabilities scholar Biz Hayman, these books were also created to reintegrate those once institutionalized into society as independent,<sup>39</sup> thus enabling persons with disabilities to be the full contributing members of society detailed in the expectations of the

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<sup>36</sup> Biz Hayman, "Dress & Disability: Identifications and Interpretations," PhD diss., University of Technology, Sydney, 2012, 57-58.

<sup>37</sup> Maureen Goldsworthy, *Clothes for Disabled People* (London: Batsford, 1981).

<sup>38</sup> Goldsworthy, *Clothes for Disabled People*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Hayman, "Dress and Disability," 58.

body through the medical view of disability. These views of concealing bodily difference and forcing it to conform to an ideal was evident in Kidd's case study as well, specifically through avoiding center front and center back seams, so the curvature of the young ladies' spines would not be noticeable.

However it is not bodies that need changing or conforming, it is the paradigm through which we view them. As a result of institutionalization, persons with disabilities were kept out of the public eye and thus little attention has been paid to what persons with disabilities wore historically, but also what they wear today.<sup>40</sup> Hayman writes:

human life in the past will have always been impacted to a greater or lesser degree by that which we currently refer to as disability, no matter how 'disability' has been historically determined or named. There will always have been clothing that has existed which has accounted for human difference, yet we have little in the way of objective evidence for this.<sup>41</sup>

Rarely are the histories of clothing worn by persons with disabilities noted and yet they not only speak to the treatment and care they suffered, but also the lack of dignity inflicted by not being allowed to choose one's own clothes. This speaks to the attitudes surrounding bodily difference as Other. A way of appreciating and viewing human difference as important and not deviant is found in the sociology of disability and critical disability studies.

#### SOCIOLOGY OF DISABILITY AND CRITICAL DISABILITY STUDIES: A SHIFT IN FOCUS

Turning to frameworks that are critical of, and work to subvert the medical sociology view of disability, conflict theory, medicalisation, and poststructuralism are frameworks that set the stage for the discussion of disability in terms of inequality and social conflict. For conflict theorists it is not the individual, but society that would be labeled "sick" or "pathological" as it is through social institutions that control is exercised through economic and ideological channels

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 44 and 48.

<sup>41</sup> Hayman, "Dress & Disability," 43.

on individuals with disabilities.<sup>42</sup> This is potentially a result of a capitalist economy, as it pushes different groups to poverty and through workplace accidents; individuals who are injured, are no longer seen as supporting society. Medicalisation is a concept that explores the reach of medicine into many practices historically not associated with medicine: “child bearing and birthing, sexual activity, the management of emotions, ‘lifestyle’ behaviours.”<sup>43</sup> Medicine has entered many of these areas with its expertise to become the social institution that disciplines and restrains different populations. This is apparent in how prominent the medical sociological view of disability was in the first seminar on functional clothes for persons with disabilities in the United States in 1966.<sup>44</sup> At this time it was concluded that doctors should educate patients on appropriate clothing and dressing practices.

Thomas notes that by and large persons with disabilities are more impoverished as they lack access to social systems and this lack of resources in turn, is a consequence of social oppression found through identifying disability.<sup>45</sup> With respect to poststructuralism and how it challenges the medical sociology of disability, “poststructuralists insist on the fragmentary, heterogeneous and plural character of social ‘realities’ and refuse to acknowledge the social actor as a ‘rational knowing subject.’”<sup>46</sup> This presents the large difference between poststructuralist understandings of disability and that of structural functionalism. Poststructuralism values the varying identity and argues that no one can understand an experience outside of his or her own.<sup>47</sup> Understanding that no experience is more important or valuable than any other is key to consider and thus through poststructuralism the concept that the medical field holds the solution is dismantled.

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>44</sup> Lamb, "Disability and the Social Importance of Appearance," 136.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 32-33.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

A theory that relates to the medicalized view of disability, specifically institutional and individual power to control the body is biopower. Thomas explains, “biopower governs the bodies and behaviours of individuals and populations through techniques of external surveillance and internal self regulation.”<sup>48</sup> Biopower is a way of understanding institutions that control individuals bodies and actions, and to a degree, concepts of disability are enforced through this power. This sense of controlling and being in control of the body could be extended to appearance, the clothes one wears, and by appearing in the ‘right’ clothes one is perceived to have discipline.

Persons who are physically or diagnosed abnormal are subjected to stricter forms of scrutiny and inspection under medicinal and welfare techniques.<sup>49</sup> Biopower describes normalizing procedures invoked as a form of power that is different from medicine and economics.<sup>50</sup> Biopower parallels the concept of medicalisation in the sense that medicine has become a structure that controls bodily difference, and can be considered an institution through which power over bodies can be gained. Physicians, seen as experts, have their diagnoses and prescriptions taken as absolute, with respect to how to control the body and have it behave normally – a type of labour that is assigned to the individual. Helen Meekosha and Russell Shuttleworth, social sciences researcher and critical disability sociology researcher respectively, point out that there is a complex institutional discourse occurring here however. The research, knowledge, and techniques applied by medical practitioners often keep persons with disabilities alive, and thus the practices of medicine cannot be eliminated.<sup>51</sup> Thus perhaps it is more important to consider to what extent power over a body is achieved. For example, is difference

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>50</sup> Helen Meekosha and Russell Shuttleworth, “What’s So Critical About Critical Disability Studies?” *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 15 no.1 (2009): 57.

<sup>51</sup> Meekosha and Shuttleworth, “What’s So Critical,” 57-58.

being suppressed or are attempts being made to allow this difference to survive? This is undoubtedly a spectrum of control with slight differences between ‘overcoming’ and allowing an individual existence to continue.

A similar critique of the concept of biopower offered by both Thomas and Joanne Entwistle, is that it does not offer the individual enough agency or power to choose. Specifically Entwistle states from a clothing scholars perspective, “seeing bodies as ‘passive’ and thereby failing to explain how individuals may act in an autonomous fashion” is problematic.<sup>52</sup> With respect to disability, the diagnosis of Spina Bifida could be subverted by choosing to not identify with the term and seek out a more complex and nuanced definition of the self, but it does not mean that the individual will shed this identity, especially in the eyes of medicine. Through biopower disability can be seen as a social construct and a form of oppression instead of an individual problem.

The term *disablism* becomes relevant when considering disability as a form of social oppression. Paul Abberley, writer and disability activist, coined this term to represent ideologies that “oppress/exclude/disadvantage” persons with impairments. This term follows the pattern of racism, sexism and ageism as a form of social oppression.<sup>53</sup> Abberley explains how disability begins to function as a stereotype, a problem, not a person. He elaborates, “as in the cases of women and black people, oppressive theories of disability systematically distort and stereotype the identities of their putative subjects, restricting their full humanity by constituting them only in their ‘problem’ aspects.”<sup>54</sup> Abberley critiques liberal views that negate the differences of disability, similar to approaches to race relations, which removes “the authenticity of an

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<sup>52</sup> Joanne Entwistle, “The Dressed Body,” In *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction*, ed. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 148

<sup>53</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Abberley, “The Concept of Oppression and the Development of a Social Theory of Disability,” *Disability, Handicap & Society* 2 no.1 (1987): 16.

impaired person's experience, dissolving real problems into the soup of an 'attitudinal change.'"<sup>55</sup> Here, by simply changing one's attitude, any disability could be overcome, returns us to the view of disability from structural-functionalism. That disability, in all its differences should be valued, and recognized as realities and not problems, is important. He goes onto question what the benefit of this oppression is and posits "the main and consistent beneficiary must be identified as the present social order, or, more accurately, capitalism in a particular historical and national form."<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, that others profit from this oppression, seen through a social strata, with persons with physical disabilities being relegated to the bottom consistently removes the issues and problems facing these individuals from the fore. An example of this is stylish and functional clothing for persons with mobility disabilities. Routinely removed from the priorities of design, as a result of their 'place' on the social strata, persons with physical disabilities needs and wants are left unconsidered.

Thomas, like many other disability theorists, considers chronic illness a form of impairment, as with these impairments the individuals are categorized as 'different'.<sup>57</sup> Marxist and materialist perspectives on disability also see it as a form of social phenomenon. Disability as a form of social oppression began as a way of looking for connections between the social status of individuals with disabilities and other marginalized or oppressed groups in order to entirely shift the perspectives on disability.<sup>58</sup> Citing writer and disability activist Vic Finkelstein's work in the 1980's in disability studies, Thomas shows the link between social oppression of persons with disabilities and how this is linked to productivity in a capitalist society.<sup>59</sup> Brendan Gleeson, professor of social policy and disability studies and Abberley, have

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<sup>55</sup> Abberley, "The Concept of Oppression," 16.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 49, 55.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 53.

questioned why one's value in society is based on participation in industrial work.<sup>60</sup> Gleeson points out that the material practice of work is one example of a society's expectations. It is through these practices that built environments are created, and these reflect the "assumptions of powerful groups about the different types of bodies that occur in human society."<sup>61</sup> As a result of the critiques of understanding disability as difference we arrive at what is called the social model of disability.

In considering the concept of disablism, a similar concept known as ableism, should also be discussed. Eli Clare, disability writer, speaker and activist, explains from a disability activist's perspective, contrary to what late capitalism and consumer culture have us believe, our bodies do not need work and in fact it is 'ableism' that needs changing. Clare articulates "disability oppression, as reflected in high unemployment rates, lack of access, gawking, substandard education, being forced to live in nursing homes and back rooms, being seen as child like, and asexual – that needs changing."<sup>62</sup> Clare does not stop his critique with ableism, he goes on to explain that our understanding of our bodies needs to change so they do not become weighted down with what one might call 'body baggage'<sup>63</sup> or the constant feeling that one's body is inadequate or wrong.<sup>64</sup> While this begins to enter back into concepts of biopower and how the body is an object that must be worked on in order to be considered a valued member of society, the perspective it offers on the view of persons with disabilities as those who should be kept out of sight and locked away in institutions, is one that continues to arise in texts discussing

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Brendan Gleeson, "Beyond Goodwill: The Materialist View of Disability," *Social Alternatives* 18 no.1 (1999): 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Eli Clare, "Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness," *Public Culture* 13 no. 3 (2001): 360.

<sup>63</sup> I began using the name 'body baggage' after a pilot interview to allow myself a way of dealing with and referring to the emotional weight that I found I was taking on when the interviewee discussed her own dissatisfaction and realities of her body. Similar situations occurred throughout the interviews as the contributors shared their perspectives and feelings about their bodies – something that seemed very similar to emotional baggage. I would argue that in my experience from the interviews that there are rarely opportunities for people to voice their own opinions and feelings about their bodies and this is why the comments that were shared about bodies were as substantial as they were.

<sup>64</sup> Clare, "Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies," 363.

persons with disabilities. This concept also extends to what is seen as available clothing as very easily it could be assumed that since the individual does not have a job or does not leave his or her home or care facility that ‘nice’ clothes are unnecessary.

Otherwise known as the social barriers approach, the social model of disability originates in criticisms of human value being awarded through capitalist definitions of productivity and being a contributing member of society found in Marxism and materialist frameworks.<sup>65</sup> Specifically the social model of disability was seeking “a conceptual distinction between ‘impairment’ as a functional limitation and ‘disability’ as a socially generated system of discrimination.”<sup>66</sup> From this understanding, the social model of disability argues that disability is a result of social constraints placed on persons with impairments according to Thomas.<sup>67</sup> This frame of thought focuses on how persons with impairments are excluded from social systems and realms, and that attention should be directed to their medical diagnoses or classifications as disabled.<sup>68</sup> It is through these diagnoses and classifications that medical professionals and support workers try to normalize individuals with impairments and make them independent.<sup>69</sup> An excellent example of this are the dressing books published in order to teach individuals with physical disabilities methods so they could dress themselves – ultimately so they would not require any extra assistance.<sup>70</sup>

The social model has faced scathing criticism for ignoring the realities of the physical body, as professor of history and the classics David Turner explains the social model, “sought to explore disability as the product of social and material forces, with an emphasis on exposing the

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*.

<sup>66</sup> Meekosha and Shuttleworth, “What’s So Critical,” 50.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 57.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Maureen Goldsworthy, *Clothes for Disabled People* (London: Batsford, 1981), G. M. Cochrane and C.J. Kelly, *Clothing and Dressing*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Mary Marlborough Lodge, Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, 1989), Nancy Thornton, *Fashion for Disabled People* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd. 1990).

ways that social and spatial factors serve to disable impaired individuals.”<sup>71</sup> In doing this, Turner argues, the differences between the natures of disabilities have been ignored and that in order to be included in society, individuals must identify themselves as disabled.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the category or label of disability must remain. Furthermore persons with disabilities could also face oppression through sexism, racism, and the like, in addition to social oppression as a person with a disability, something the social model does not explore.<sup>73</sup>

Christopher Faircloth, professor of sociology, makes an interesting deduction noting that if all barriers for disabled persons were to be removed, persons with physical disabilities would still face challenges. As well, Faircloth argues, “that if the disabled are to claim their civil rights, the society must provide them with extra and supplementary resources to overcome their disability or impairment, not simply remove discrimination.”<sup>74</sup> This, in Faircloth’s eyes, is the difference between disability and other identity politics such as racism or sexism. Ultimately focusing on the social structures that oppress ignores the physical realities of the body, which play a critical role in defining disability.

However, the social model was never supposed to be an “explanation, definition or theory of disability.”<sup>75</sup> Thomas continues: “disability is not equated with, nor defined by, restrictions of activity *per se*, as it clearly is for Shakespeare, Watson, Bury and Williams.”<sup>76</sup> Instead what was being sought was a way of thinking so the term disability could be changed, allowing for the concept of disablism to succeed.<sup>77</sup> Thus the social model of disability was

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<sup>71</sup> Turner, “Approaching Anomalous Bodies,” 3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Christopher Faircloth, “Disability, Impairment and The Body,” In *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, edited by Brian S. Turner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 259.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas, “How Is Disability Understood?” 577.

<sup>76</sup> Theorists who believe that impairment has a direct effect on the limited day-to-day practices of individuals, defining disability (Thomas, “How Is Disability Understood?” 577.)

<sup>77</sup> Thomas, “How Is Disability Understood?” 578.

developed as a way of mobilizing the concept of disablism and not in fact a theory that was supposed to redefine what it means to be disabled. While this is a very interesting concept Turner's criticism that more needs to be done than solely removing institutional discrimination against persons with disabilities is key to changing the current perspective of persons with disabilities.

One of the more prominent views of persons with disabilities is seen through concepts of normal versus abnormal or disabled. Poststructuralism seeks to break down the "dominant social discourses and representations"<sup>78</sup> of disability that lie in medicine, academia, literature and popular culture. The focus here is on shifting the language surrounding persons with disabilities in order to disrupt concepts of normal, as without normal there is no disability.<sup>79</sup> These concepts of normal or ideal are, for poststructuralists and for other theorists, tied to the use of measuring bodies in the early-nineteenth century, and "the concept of the bell curve – the 'normal curve.'"<sup>80</sup> The poststructuralist framework has had a large influence on feminist thought with materialist, socialist, feminist/realist perspectives, which seek to explore gender, difference and oppression.<sup>81</sup> Poststructuralism also finds categorization problematic as it negates the value of personal experience. Thomas cites sociologist Anthony Giddens's concept of self-identity, as coming from the individual and where he or she identifies,<sup>82</sup> to explain that an individual cannot know a reality or experience outside their own. Acknowledging that lived experience is subjective is essential for realizing how the labeling of disability removes any sense of individuality, and thus subjective experience. This sense of labeling can be carried to the labeling of clothes "for disabled persons," as "adaptive," or as "functional." Certainly there

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 64.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> Carol Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness* (Basingstroke, UK, & New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>82</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 80.

could be any number of people who could benefit from clothes design to be more comfortable when sitting, easier to don and doff and so on. But by placing the label of ‘disability’ on the clothes, it becomes exclusive to those who may choose to identify as disabled.

This perspective of disability studies that places emphasis on the experience of the individual is imperative to this research as symbolic interactionism is the primary framework. Acknowledging the value of an individual’s experience is fundamental, but also noting that much of the language used with respect to persons with disabilities influences their perceived roles in society is important as well. Examples of this appear in some of the early studies looking at dress and disability, especially how discussions of symmetry, hiding difference, and alterations occur. Meekosha and Shuttleworth point out that critical disability studies is currently focused on “how to conceptualise a diversity within a radical agenda to restructure cultural meanings, social processes and a carnally relevant politics.”<sup>83</sup> Critical disability studies draws on critical theory in order to offer its exacting perspective. Critical disability theory acknowledges the social model of disability as an understanding of disability, which has assisted in the way it is theorized (Turner, 2006; Titchkosky, 2006; Clare, 2001; Church, 2006; Faircloth, 2012; Siebers 2010, 2008). The three main differences between critical disability studies and disability studies lie in moving away from binary understandings of disability, looking to the psychological, cultural, discursive and carnal affects of disability and not focused on normalizing the body.<sup>84</sup> In addition critical disability studies argues disability cannot be squarely rested at the feet of “economic relations in capitalistic society”<sup>85</sup> as is often done with disability studies. The concept that in an agrarian society disability has a ‘place’ is being naively idealistic.<sup>86</sup> Rupturing the

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<sup>83</sup> Meekosha and Shuttleworth, “What’s So Critical,” 56.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

medical view of disability, still largely present in many of the clothing studies cited in this literature review, is necessary to begin to appreciate diversity and recognize persons with disabilities as subjects, not objects and this is why the perspective of critical disability studies is also vital.

In consumer studies researcher Jane Lamb's article published in *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* in 2001, she reflects on unexplored intersections of appearance and disability.<sup>87</sup> It is in this article that we find one of the only serious critiques of inequality and exclusion found on clothing and appearance for persons with disabilities. In her article, Lamb shares a reflection on clothing: "rather than assume that individuals have dressing problems because of their functional limitations, I wondered why so many fashionable garments required fine motor skills to don and doff."<sup>88</sup> From this inquiry, questions surrounding whom clothes are designed for when the wearer finds difficulty in getting them on can begin to be asked. Lamb continues that many persons with disabilities "must do the best they can to locate and acquire desired garments in a marketplace structured for non-disabled users."<sup>89</sup> From this notion of 'making do' Lamb goes on to discuss barriers, access, equal opportunity, images and identity, all with respect to dress and disability.

While considering equal opportunity, Lamb focuses on items that are made available for identity construction by designers and retailers. Here she is considering whether or not persons with disabilities have equal opportunity to what is available on the market, in combination with extra costs that might be incurred in alterations or other modifications.<sup>90</sup> Finally Lamb looks at identity as a core theme in disability studies as many disabled feminists have pointed to

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<sup>87</sup> Jane M. Lamb, "Disability and the Social Importance of Appearance," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 19 no.3 (2001): 134.

<sup>88</sup> Lamb, "Disability and the Social Importance of Appearance," 136.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

“oppressive experiences” when trying to appear as the cultural norm of attractiveness.<sup>91</sup> Lamb argues “cross-cultural and longitudinal research could illuminate how males and females construct appearances reflective of multiple identities.”<sup>92</sup>

Lamb has highlighted many pertinent points in research looking at fashion or dress and disability. Unfortunately, as remarked by Hayman, this article has not had much influence in generating further published articles and study with respect to clothing and disability, at the time of her writing.<sup>93</sup> According to Hayman, this is the only published dress and disability article to address clothing from the social model of disability.<sup>94</sup> In the research conducted for this thesis, aside from Hayman’s dissertation, Lamb’s is the only article discussing dress and disability from the perspective of the social model of disability where individuals are addressed as subjects and not problem filled objects.

#### FEMINIST INFLUENCES ON DISABILITY STUDIES

This research also aligns itself with feminist understandings of disability, which poststructuralist views of disability have influenced. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, a professor of English with a research focus on disability, writes feminist disability studies focuses on moving away from views of persons with disabilities that function on stereotypes, towards the lived experience of being a person with a disability – something critical to the argument in this thesis.<sup>95</sup> What is useful about a feminist approach, specific to this research is how it “illuminates the social processes of identity formation.”<sup>96</sup> This thesis looks at identities created through clothing for individuals with a mobility disability when they have been unconsidered by mainstream fashion design and also allows for an identity in tandem with disabled. The language

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>93</sup> Hayman, “Dress & Disability,” 65.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies,” *Signs* 30 no.2 (2005): 1557.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

that is used by feminist disability studies is also useful, especially in the sense of dismantling normal bodies so “readers do not fall back on essentialist definitions of disability as inferior embodiment.”<sup>97</sup> Again, this is decisive, especially with respect to phrasing the need for clothing that individuals with mobility disabilities would like to wear instead of what has been prescribed.

Situated scholarship is a specific area of feminist disability studies, which seeks to “to humanize disabled subjects and to demetaphorize and depathologize disability.”<sup>98</sup> As this research originates in fashion and culture, but focuses on individuals with mobility disabilities to draw attention to their experiences of identity creation through dress, it is a form of situated scholarship. Seeking to understand these experiences and note the desires to be seen beyond the wheelchair, this research seeks to humanize disability. Additionally, this research relates to feminist disability notions of constructivism. The goals of this area are to deconstruct disability as “natural biological form of inferiority”<sup>99</sup> and show it as a social construction. “Left Out” draws on these aspects of feminist studies as they articulate criticisms of the way in which disability is thought of that are important to establishing that it is not the problem of the individual. In an attempt to draw attention to those with mobility disabilities with respect to clothing, this research will articulate that solely because the bodies of persons with mobility disabilities may be different from the pattern block of a standing body, does not mean that these bodies should be considered difficult to design for or less worthy of design.

Garland-Thomson outlines the area of politics of appearance, which largely relates to the theoretical framework for this thesis. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the role of appearance in interactions and how these interactions shape meanings and future interactions. Garland-Thomson explains: “bodies whose looks or comportment depart from social

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 1558.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1573.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 1575.

expectations—ones categorized as visually abnormal—are targets for profound discrimination.”<sup>100</sup> By having a lack of fashionable clothing, and the wheelchair functioning as a visual abnormality, persons with mobility disabilities stand out and are arguably removed from normal expectations. Individuals who find it easiest, for a variety of reasons, to wear comfy clothes or the grey sweat suit, are thought of as slobs or as people who do not take good care of themselves.<sup>101</sup> These assumptions can work as forms of social exclusion and discrimination, which relates back to the position on the social hierarchy that persons with disabilities are assigned. In drawing attention to, and seeking the experiences of identity and emotion through clothing for individuals with mobility disabilities, this research also locates itself within the framework of feminist disability studies.

#### WHEELING DOWN THE CATWALK

In the past, however, feminist texts have viewed disability as a problem that needs to be solved. Alison Kafer, a professor of feminist studies, cites *Women on the Edge of Time* (1976) by novelist and poet Marge Piercy as an example of this.<sup>102</sup> This text describes a feminist utopia in year 2137 where all sexual orientations, genders, and citizens in terms of economy, are equal, and all decisions are made in a democratic manner. In this utopia there are no persons with disabilities aside from those described as having mental disabilities. However, these are addressed as something the individual is working through to fix, thus employing a medical view of disability. Kafer notes the absence of disability in this utopia, reinforces the perspective that persons with disabilities are not desirable or what Kafer describes as “an unredeemable

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 1579.

<sup>101</sup> Sandra Phillips, “Dressing,” In *Out From Under* (Exhibit Catalog), ed. Catherine Frazee, Kathryn Church, and Melanie Panitch (Toronto: Warren’s Waterless Printing Inc., 2008), 20-23.

<sup>102</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

difference.”<sup>103</sup> According to Kafer’s interpretation of *Women on the Edge of Time*, the way to solve the problem of disability is to use technology to genetically eliminate it. From this understanding of disability, and the desire to remove it from an ideal place to exist, the view that persons with disabilities are not a priority precipitates. One can begin to create the connection that if persons with disabilities are not valued, it then follows that their needs and wants would not be a focus for designers. Instead of disability being seen as a valuable difference, it is viewed as helpless and thus may provide an explanation as to why there has been a general lack of clothing for persons with mobility disabilities specifically.

A concept that needs to be interrogated, and one that often creeps up without recognition, is that of walking as the normal state. This is specifically with reference to those with mobility disabilities and something Kafer explores with respect to making wilderness trails accessible. Kafer questions the notion that walking is a critical aspect of being human noting being in nature is only for certain bodies when wilderness trails cannot be made accessible.<sup>104</sup> A similar concept exists in clothing. As seen in a fashion design text: “of equal importance to the visual and aesthetic appearance of the body is its attitude and appearance in motion ... she [the model] is asked to ‘walk,’ ...in a simulation of what will be expected of her on the runway...to see how it interacts with the body in movement.”<sup>105</sup> Here the walking body again occurs as the normal state, but this time for wearing clothes. And thus it seems that the limited accessibility of clothing for persons with mobility disabilities is not something only occurring in the shopping mall, but something that may be influenced by the unchallenged perception that the walking body is the ‘normal’ body that exists in nature.

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<sup>103</sup> Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 74.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>105</sup> Jenkyn Jones, *Fashion Design*, 101.

Recently however, there have been examples of models in wheelchairs coming down runways and mannequins sitting in store windows. These include the Spring 2014 advertisement campaign for Diesel Jeans titled *We are Connected* featuring Ms. Mercatto a 26-year-old New Yorker with muscular dystrophy who uses a motorized wheelchair. As well Dr. Sheypuk was the first model to go down the runway in a motorized wheelchair in the Carrie Hammer show at the 2014 New York Fall Fashion Week. Closer to home, ultramarathon runner Amy Palmiero-Winters walked the runway in a lower leg prosthesis designed by *ALLELES Design Studio* in the Fall 2014 show for *VAWK* at Toronto Fashion Week. Nordstrom touts using models with mobility disabilities since the early 1990s in an attempt to accurately reflect its customers.<sup>106</sup> Finally, at the Spring Summer 2016 New York Fashion Week *FTL Moda* designed by Antonia Urzi partnered with *Findazione Vertical*, a spinal cord injury foundation, and sent models with spinal cord injuries, Down Syndrome, amputations, and wheelchair users, down the runway. While these examples seem inclusive, they are representative of what is defined as “supercrip.” Supercrip is “the stereotypical disabled person who garners media attention for accomplishing some feat considered too difficult for disabled people.”<sup>107</sup> This concept is also referred to as “overcoming” disability by Dolmage and is explained as how a “person with a disability overcomes their impairment through hard work or has some special talent that offsets their deficiencies.”<sup>108</sup> These examples arguably lead one to believe that the needs or desires of those with mobility disabilities are being met and considered, as people with disabilities are normally not seen in the role of the fashion model. Yet, the media has labeled the prosthesis worn by Ms. Winters a “designer prosthesis.” Here ‘designer’ implies exclusivity – not accessibility.

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<sup>106</sup> “Profiles in Excellence: Nordstrom’s Advertising Reflects Its Shoppers,” last modified 2000, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.disability-marketing.com/profiles/nordstrom.php4>.

<sup>107</sup> Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 141.

<sup>108</sup> Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*, 35.

These examples of persons with disabilities appearing on mainstream fashion runways and the photo spread, function much like the supercrip that Kafer describes: “stories that rely heavily on the individual/medical model of disability, portraying disability as something to be overcome through hard work and perseverance.”<sup>109</sup> This perspective is very similar to that of the medical view of disability, that the individual can solve his or her disability. Because the examples above have overcome the ‘fashion hurdle’, they make it seem as though others are not trying hard enough to do so. This notion arguably casts more social shame on those who feel that the ‘grey sweat suit’ is really their only option for reasons of function and comfort. In Hayman’s, dissertation entitled *Dress and Disability: Identifications and Interpretations*, she notes the use of disabled models does not challenge our social conceptions of disability. Hayman writes,

“...whilst appearing to offer a strong take on human alterity, their conceptual play with non-normative corporal body shape and states rarely makes direct engagement with actual instances of disability. Rather, each designer pushed corporeal boundaries whilst insisting on catwalking their designs on stereotypical model bodies”<sup>110</sup>

Hayman furthers that disability has a natural place in fashion because it has a natural place in life, and yet this is clearly not the case. The *FTL Moda* show made the news with headlines such as: “These Models with Disabilities Featured In an Inspiring New York Fashion Week Show: One model became the world’s first male amputee to walk on the NYFW Catwalk,”<sup>111</sup> “Disabled Models Boldly Storm the Runway in Wheelchairs at New York Fashion Week.”<sup>112</sup> If we consider when ‘firsts’ are normally awarded, such as the first man in space or the first woman to

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Hayman, “Dress & Disability,” 87.

<sup>111</sup> Rossalyn Warren, “Week Show: One model became the world’s first male amputee to walk on the NYFW Catwalk,” *BuzzFeed*, Last Modified February 17, 2015. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/rossalynwarren/these-disabled-models-featured-in-an-inspiring-new-york-fash>

<sup>112</sup> Candace Amos, “Disabled Models Boldly Storm the Runway in Wheelchairs at New York Fashion Week,” *US Weekly*, Last Modified February 17, 2015. <http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-style/news/disabled-models-runway-wheelchairs-fashion-week-photos-2015172>

fly solo around the world, this furthers the belief that fashion and the catwalk is a challenge for individuals with disabilities to overcome, not their natural place.

#### CLOTHED EMBODIMENT

Shifting from fashion on the catwalk for persons with mobility disabilities to the lived experience of wearing clothes, in Nancy Hansen's dissertation, *Passing Through Other People's Spaces: Disabled Women, Geography and Work*, we are given a glimpse of how women who are physically disabled use their physical appearance to appear competent, invoking a meaning through a non-verbal interaction. Hansen writes: "time, energy and fatigue are indeed all too often realities in the daily life of physically disabled people ... depending on the nature and severity of the disability or condition, it may take longer for a person with a disability to complete personal care or domestic tasks."<sup>113</sup> Here one's appearance, including the practice of getting dressed, is limited by the time and energy available to the individual. However, the expectation of looking 'put together' that could be found in the workplace does not take these limited resources into consideration. Furthermore, appearance is tied to perceptions of competence, as revealed by Hansen's participants.<sup>114</sup> The time it takes to perform such tasks such as getting dressed is overlooked, according to Hansen, "but it is the real work that begins the working day for many disabled women."<sup>115</sup> While Hansen's study only looked at women with physical disabilities, certainly the same could be said for men as getting dressed is not a gendered practice. As well, the women in Hansen's study were trying to appear 'normal' or like every other woman in their workplace, thus relating to the fashion or appearance 'hurdle' as they recognize a correlation between one's appearance and one's perceived level of competence.

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<sup>113</sup> Nancy E. Hansen, "Passing Through Other People's Spaces: Disabled Women, Geography and Work," PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2002, 167.

<sup>114</sup> Hansen, "Passing Through Other People's Spaces."

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

In his *Disability Aesthetics*, Siebers, explains why appearance plays such a significant role in appearing competent, which could easily be translated to appearing ‘normal’: “aesthetics is the domain in which the sensation of otherness is felt at its most powerful ... the emotional impact of one body on another is experienced as an assault on autonomy and a testament to the power of otherness.”<sup>116</sup> With the concept of the physical other, we can understand that the way one’s body is perceived by others can play a large role in feeling like one belongs, especially in the attempt to appear ‘normal’, as a result of society’s stigmatization of being the Other. Belonging is fulfilling a set of requirements or expectations, and in this case these expectations are reflected in the ‘normal body’ and its appearance. Through disability studies, according to Siebers, we are able to see “how truly unreal and imaginary are non-disabled conceptions of the human body.”<sup>117</sup> As a culture, we are focused on perfecting the body.<sup>118</sup> This aim is primarily found in medicine, and we have already seen how medicine views disability as a problem the individual is to solve. Siebers argues that the current goal of providing everyone with a perfect body and preventing death is never questioned: “we hardly ever consider how incongruous is this understanding of the body – that the body seems both inconsequential and perfectible.”<sup>119</sup> Not only do we have standards of the ideal, perfect body, but also the ideal becomes an identity that works to exclude bodies, an exclusion the participants in Hansen’s study were trying to circumvent. Disability is used in combination with the norm to function as the Other, allowing concepts of “‘normal’ life, and ‘normal’ bodies and thus ‘normal’ societal structures and artifice to remain unquestioned.”<sup>120</sup> Here in the able/disable binary is where identity and representation

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<sup>116</sup> Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 25.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>118</sup> Siebers, *Disability Theory*.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Titchkosky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*, 165

become intertwined. Individuals with a disability are portrayed as negatively different, and this, through the politics of identification, becomes their identity.

Titchkosky notes that since disability is widely accepted as “an individual issue, caused by individual bodies, minds or sense that have gone wrong and do not function normally,”<sup>121</sup> this not only has ramifications on leading society to believe disability is not as common as it really is, but places the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities on the individual. It seems that there are two types of individuality coexisting, the one that posits we cannot know a reality outside our own and thus each person has a different sense of reality, and the one that is broken off and isolated from social society that shares no common points in its existence.

Garland-Thomson states that women and the disabled are the cultural representation of bodies that need controlling and that they have been relegated into Foucault’s concept of “discipline” as described earlier through biopower.<sup>122</sup> Garland-Thomson explains, “together, the gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and ability systems exert tremendous social pressures to shape, regulate, and normalize subjugated bodies. Such disciplining is enacted primarily through the two interrelated cultural discourses of medicine and appearance.”<sup>123</sup> Medicine and appearance are greatly intertwined in controlling bodies, but there are other systems involved, including late capitalism and political institutions as have been noted in the discussion of disability as a social construction. Garland-Thomson writes that the unmarked body, or the norm/beautiful body goes unnoticed and that for non-normal bodies, efforts are made “to *not*

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>122</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” *National Women’s Studies Association Journal* 14 no. 3 (2002).

<sup>123</sup> Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability,” 10.

look disabled, queer, ugly, fat, ethnic, or raced”<sup>124</sup> and that in our consumer pursuits of beauty we end in sameness.

According to Siebers, collective representations are used as indications of community, but done so under the veil of “sacred ideas.”<sup>125</sup> He states these work as tools for unification, and “representations originate most powerfully when embodied in material objects.”<sup>126</sup> Disability is indicated by a perception of inferiority via the body, as achieved through our current social systems. Persons with physical disabilities can be identified as such unless they have worked, through getting dressed for example, to show that they are normal, which further invokes concepts of ableism and normalcy. It seems that the current social system has the ultimate power of grouping and creating ‘identifiabilities’, to use Siebers concept. However, as the wheelchair could be used in order to identify, this problematizes the desire to subvert the identity of disability. When considering concepts of Othering, it follows to also consider the dynamic of the subject – object bifurcation to which bodies are subjected.

In “Dressing Corporate Subjectivities,” Kathryn Church, professor of disability studies, and her colleagues set out to understand the role of disabled bank employees as “active learners” in the corporate workplace environment.<sup>127</sup> What is of specific importance is Church’s account of fellow researcher Catherine Frazee, who uses a motorized wheelchair. Church explored Frazee’s identity as “visibly disabled” and how this restricts her subjectivity and yet in all aspects of Frazee’s life it is important to her that she claims her ‘crip’ identity.<sup>128</sup> When Church writes about Frazee’s clothes, quoting her, she draws attention to the work involved in getting the clothes to fit, which is never seen or made visible to another:

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>125</sup> Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 106.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Kathryn Church et al., "Dressing Corporate Subjectivities: Learning What to Wear to The Bank," In *Work, Subjectivity and Learning*, ed. Stephen Billett, Tara Fenwick, and Margaret Somerville (Vol. 6. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 70.

<sup>128</sup> Church et al., "Dressing Corporate Subjectivities," 75.

As usual, it had been “Styled for bodies longer and more symmetrical than mine...” But with a few snips here and there, cuts that pull apart, seams that are unseen, the suit was transformed to fit. “Behind every well-dressed cripple stands the persuasive power of scissors,” Catherine wrote. “Straight up the middle of the back, slicing through the weave and warp, what comes apart behind, comes together in front, buttons buttoned, shoulders intact” – and all the alterations hidden from view.<sup>129</sup>

Frazer’s account not only parallels those given by the women in Hansen’s study, but it is also emblematic of the role of one’s clothed appearance in combination with being identified as person with a physical disability. It seems that even though she is dressed appropriately for the occasion, with time and effort hidden from view, it is her identity as physically disabled that she mobilizes to make her own identity.

Susan Wendell, feminist and disability researcher, notes it is important for persons with disabilities to define themselves and not be defined by others who do not understand their experience.<sup>130</sup> Not only does this move away from allowing a diagnosis or ability dictate an identity, it also allows the individual to be seen as a member of society and not the Other or an object. Wendell argues that diagnoses and referring to someone by his or her diagnoses leaves out the uniqueness of each individual experience.<sup>131</sup> As Wendell understands the concept of ‘Other,’ two things occur. The first makes persons into objects of experience rather than subjects, or individuals that could be identified with. The second is how those who are othered are seen “primarily as symbolic of something else – usually, but not always something we reject and fear and project onto them.”<sup>132</sup> Being able to identify with, and removing the representation of something obscuring the reality of the subject is key to Wendell’s philosophy surrounding disability.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>130</sup> Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections On Disability* (London: Routledge, 1996), 32.

<sup>131</sup> Wendell, *The Rejected Body*.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 60.

Wendell offers a compassionate way of changing the way in which disability is perceived, showing that we should see each other as subjects and not objects. She writes, “encouraging everyone to acknowledge, accommodate, and identify with a wide range of physical conditions is ultimately the road to self acceptance as well as the road to increasing the opportunities of those who are disabled now.”<sup>133</sup> Wendell also makes an interesting assertion as to what the goal of dismantling disability should be: “not everyone who is not disabled now can play basketball or sing in a choir, but everyone who is not disabled now can participate in sports or games and make art, and that sort of general ability should be the goal of deconstructing disability.”<sup>134</sup> Not everyone who fits in the clothes available may want to buy them, but they have the opportunity to, which cannot be said for many persons with physical disabilities.

Exclusion is not the main form of oppression faced by persons with disabilities, and thinking of it as such is to be avoided “especially if we are to maintain a critical focus on how, and to what end, disability is constituted as it is within the contemporary minority world.”<sup>135</sup> One of the main issues in focusing on exclusion is missing the decoy of inclusion. Persons are excluded as a result of “inclusionary practices” that originate in our social structure, which is responsible for excluding to begin with.<sup>136</sup> Understanding this is critical for arguing individuals with mobility disabilities are left out, or excluded from mainstream fashion design. However, they are not *only* excluded, the clothes designed *for* them are too old or too medicalized or even out of their budget. So while at first glance it seems that there are limited options for persons with mobility disabilities, there are in fact stores that design for the physical needs of these

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>135</sup> Titchkosky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*, 149.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

individuals, but they may in fact do more Othering than including through their design techniques.

### THE POLITICS OF DESIGN

Even though there have been a series of studies conducted looking specifically at clothing designed for persons with physical disabilities (Thoren, 1996; Wingate, Kaiser and Freeman, 1986; Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate, 1985) that seem well intentioned and thought out, when taken into consideration with the perspectives and critiques of power structures offered by critical disability studies, the success and efficacy of these studies is disputable. Lamb argues that persons with disabilities should be considered as “expert consultants” in the design process.<sup>137</sup> None of the studies reviewed here, engaged this notion aside from mentioning it in one line in a conclusion – if at all. Not only would this remove any possible designs that are not what is needed or desired, but it would give the individuals that these clothes are being designed for, a say in what they want and need. The missing voice of the end user is evidence that the designers creating and developing clothes for persons with disabilities never consulted the wearer. To never ask the needs and wants of the market of any product goes against common logic, and one can assume would lead to the failure of the product. However, considering that the markets for clothing in this case are persons with disabilities, not seeking their opinions is establishing the designer as the expert on what makes a type of clothing functional, comfortable, and desirable from the perspective of someone with a physical disability. Consequently a politics of design, specifically who is being designed for and who is doing the designing, is present in this situation.

Marianne Thoren, consumer technology researcher, published a study conducted in Sweden regarding the design production systems for clothing for individuals with mobility

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<sup>137</sup> Lamb, “Disability and the Social Importance of Appearance,” 137.

disabilities. She notes that ready-made clothes are designed for stereotypical bodies and thus are not suitable for persons with physical disabilities.<sup>138</sup> In her analysis Thoren concluded successful businesses that create clothes for disabled individuals, used a mail-order system to reach a larger population. While this may seem like an excellent solution for a user to purchase suitable clothes, Thoren's participants shared that there is a stigma associated with purchasing from a special place, "Most of them [participants] do not want to buy special clothing for disabled people. They seem to be afraid of getting a label on them through their clothing."<sup>139</sup> Thoren's study calls for a production system focused on the end user. She cites ISO quality standards for end users of garments and notes clothing for disabled individuals does not follow them: "when available clothing is not suitable for disabled users, the quality is bad from their point of view."<sup>140</sup>

But it is not just suitability, Thoren also points out that there are issues with respect to being able to see what is available on the market: "the problem for disabled people is not the end product only. There is also the question of the ability to choose among what is available on the market and how the products are offered to disabled customers."<sup>141</sup> Not surprisingly, participants noted difficulty being able to view the selection of garments in stores, and trying on skirts, pants and coats while in store was difficult.<sup>142</sup> Of the persons Thoren interviewed the majority desired to "be able to choose among the clothes available on the market, just as any other citizen."<sup>143</sup> What Thoren's study fails to interrogate is that clothing need not be designed specifically for persons with physical disabilities and that it is perhaps the entire clothing production system, one she analyzed in her paper, that needs changing. Subsequently, Thoren neglects to point out that the stigma and access issues told by her participants could be addressed with changing the

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<sup>138</sup> Thoren, "Systems Approach to Clothing for Disabled Users," 389.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

product development system. Thoren does not explore if the ISO standards she cites could be applied to all clothing design and manufacture, creating clothing that is accessible for all bodies.

A different study conducted regarding clothing and disability, by textile researchers Stacy Wingate, Susan Kaiser, and Carla Freeman sought out the perceptions of special features in clothes. In this study the combination of form and function are examined from the perspectives of persons with disabilities, seeking to determine their opinions on functional dress through the following criteria: “(a) salience of functional features as perceptual stimuli, (b) complexity of multidimensionality or meanings assigned, and (c) personal characteristics that help to differentiate the symbolic orientations of persons with physical disabilities.”<sup>144</sup> The researchers note that judgments are made based on personal appearances and thus “this tendency is compounded by the wearing of eye-catching clothes by people with physical disabilities.”<sup>145</sup> However, whether the garments are more noticeable because they are bright orange and bedazzled for example or if it is because there is something noticeably different in the construction to make it easier for donning and offing, is not clarified. Thus one could conclude that people look more, when one stands out from the crowd, and this could be both positive and negative.

If it is the case that the clothing feature that allows the garment to be easier to don and doff is the noticeable element that the participants disliked, Wingate, Kaiser and Freeman never call for different design techniques to be used to better conceal these aspects – as desired by the potential wearers. Instead of being viewed as a problem, functional or comfort requirements should be viewed as typical requirements as they might be in costume design. The hypothesis was made by Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate that if the wearer of the garment feels that the alteration in the clothing is noticeable, then it will not be valued as individuals with disabilities

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<sup>144</sup> Stacy B. Wingate, Susan B. Kaiser, and Carla M. Freeman, “Salience of Disability Cues in Functional Clothing: A multidimensional Approach,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 4, no.2 (1986): 37.

<sup>145</sup> Wingate, Kaiser, and Freeman, “Salience of Disability Cues in Functional Clothing,” 38.

strive to communicate that their disability is not their master status, the alteration implying disability.<sup>146</sup> The findings showed that whether or not the individual judging the garment found it aesthetically pleasing or not was influenced by their own experience with disability: “socialization to disability is an important factor in the acceptance of certain clothing styles and that socializing experiences are likely to be unique to persons with particular characteristics.”<sup>147</sup> This is key to note for understanding why individuals with physical disabilities, who require clothes with alterations, or different fastenings, may perceive them as being stigmatized.

However, simply because one has had more or less experience with disability does not mean that his or her standards of what can be worn or what is desired in clothing should diminish. When the discussion of fastenings and alterations arises in this paper, Wingate, Kaiser and Freeman never question the role of the designer. The salience of the feature in the design is the responsibility of the designer, awarding him or her an incredible power over the appearance of the individual, not just by excluding from mainstream design and necessitating alterations, but how the inclusion is really exclusion. As a result of this study, it can be concluded that the clothes designed specifically for persons with physical disabilities are not clothes that these individuals want to wear which obliges a query into the role of the designer in the persistence of stereotypes surrounding the appearance and disability.

A subsequent study conducted by Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate sought the opinions on clothes for individuals with physical disabilities. The researchers interviewed university students with physical disabilities in small focus groups, in order to seek out “connotative meanings associated with functional feature in clothing designed for physically impaired people.”<sup>148</sup> The

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>148</sup> Carla M. Freeman, Susan B. Kaiser, and Stacy B. Wingate, “Perceptions of Functional Clothing By Persons with Physical Disabilities,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 4, no.1 (1985): 46.

researchers desired “the importance of novel stimuli in perceivers’ judgments” and the meanings associated with physical disabilities and any visual cues.<sup>149</sup> The authors explain that in the perception of others we tend to “simplify” perceptions by using labels and these labels influence our interactions.<sup>150</sup> They also note that physical disability is seen as a “novel stimulus” and that the wearing of different or special clothing increases this.<sup>151</sup> Yet again, the researchers never further critiqued ‘special’ clothing, and why the novel stimulus must be visible. Furthermore, the researchers do not call for designers to consider changing the way in which clothing with different qualities than typical constructions seen in mainstream fashion, are designed.

The researchers noted that the slides that had images from a special order catalogue were rated most negatively which aligns with Thoren’s conclusion.<sup>152</sup> There was concern voiced from the participants regarding how visible the ‘functional’ element of the garment was and how this could relate to a stigmatization of looking “sick.”<sup>153</sup> The participants changed their minds on the style of the garment when the functional aspect was explained, for example when there was a zipper in an unusual place it received a negative response.<sup>154</sup> The researchers did note that some responses to the images shown were context specific, dependent on who would see them and when the functional aspect was needed.<sup>155</sup> It certainly seems that these clothes, with the functional aspects invoking the medical view of disability, were designed to better suit the needs of the individual assisting in the care of the individual. Additionally, at no time do the authors note whether or not their participants wear clothes like the ones being shown. If it is the case that

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<sup>149</sup> Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate, “Perceptions of Functional Clothing,”46.

<sup>150</sup> Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate, “Perceptions of Functional Clothing,”46.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

only a few individuals who participated did in fact wear similar clothes, the majority not, this would be an important feature to analyze.

Hayman introduced the politics of design to disability in her dissertation, rethinking foundational concepts such as taking ‘problems’ to a designer to solve.<sup>156</sup> She notes that fashion being seen as a solution, for example if you look put together you will get a job, continues to place the problem of disability on the individual specifically with respect to their appearance.<sup>157</sup> In order to dislodge this hierarchy of design we need to move away from the ‘able-bodied’ understanding of what it means to be disabled – ultimately that a ‘standing’ designer cannot know what they do not know about the seated body.<sup>158</sup> From this perspective, Hayman articulates how political design is: a designer creating an object that will carry social meaning, and use value for another, puts the designer in a place of authority.

## CONCLUSION

As apparent in the *Modern Hospital Journal* article and fashion studies conducted as recently as 2014,<sup>159</sup> the medical sociology of disability still influences the way clothes are and are not designed for persons with physical disabilities, as the individual is seen as the problem not the design techniques or practices. This is primarily as a result of the institutionalization of persons with disabilities, specifically how in this removal from society, and subsequent position in the social structure, created a perception of lack of social contribution and led to an overall ignorance and denial of the needs and wants of persons with disabilities. It seems it was only with the deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities, that provisions, specifically with respect to clothing, became a concern, albeit a small one, addressed through small books on how

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<sup>156</sup> Hayman, “Dress & Disability,” 10.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>159</sup> Chang, Hodges, and Yurchisin, “Consumers With Disabilities.”

to alter clothes, tools and techniques for donning and doffing clothes. Even these guidebooks, the individual's body or lack of ability is seen as the problem.

This frame of thought continues into studies looking at persons with physical disabilities. Never are any solutions other than modifying clothes that already exist, designed for the standing body or disastrous and simply ugly creations sought, or current design practices questioned. Furthermore, the role of the designer and what his or her intentions are, are never questioned. It is only through critical disability studies with the understand that clothes should be designed for all bodies, that the views and opinions of persons with physical disabilities can be received and taken to not only represent their varying views but also show that the individual is not the problem – society's view of disability is.

As a result, this thesis research fills an overall gap in dress and fashion research looking at bodily difference, specifically physical disabilities and contributes to a growing number of works looking at physical disabilities and clothing practices. As is evident in this review, while there have been studies conducted looking at the relationship between clothes and disability, the majority use tones of the medical view of disability and perpetuate the view that the individual is the problem to be solved. Who clothes are designed for can be illustrated by drawing a comparison between the views of Kidd and Lamb. As Lamb noted, unfortunately many individuals have to 'make do' with clothing designed for the standing body. While studies conducted by Thoren, Kaiser, Wingate, and Freeman specifically looked at clothes designed for persons with physical disabilities, these studies fail to critique the exclusive nature of clothes for persons with disabilities. They also passively accept current design techniques, without exploring whether or not designers could be more creative in designing clothes for persons with physical disabilities.

As was noted by Hayman, physical disability is an area that has been ignored by fashion and dress scholarship. This thesis begins to explore the meaning of clothing in the day-to-day lives of individuals with mobility disabilities, their dressing practices, and what they really think about clothing, and its role in their lives. Adaptive clothing is a concept that comes to mind when thinking of individuals with physical disabilities and was noted in a few studies reviewed earlier, yet there is no clear understanding of what adaptive clothing is and how this coalesces with the purpose of clothing. For some clothing to be labeled adaptive clothing, there must be ‘nonadaptive’ clothing and here a break occurs with the division of what bodies can wear ready-to-wear clothes, and what bodies require adaptive clothing. Should not all clothing be adaptive as it functions as a second skin? And while certainly not to the same degree, the adaptive/nonadaptive classification of clothing, nonadaptive recognized by not being labeled adaptive, seems curiously similar to the able/disable divide. So while this thesis is looking at the relationship between individuals with mobility disabilities and their clothes, it is also necessary to see the larger ramifications of this discussion of clothing, or lack thereof, relates to how society sees persons with physical disabilities and who designers are really designing for.

This research interrogates the accessibility, equality, barriers, stereotypes and identities that were discussed in Lamb’s article. Within critical disability studies and feminist disability studies, “Left Out” will begin to analyze the role of expectations and meanings surrounding persons who use wheelchairs and how these are still largely influenced by the medical view of disability. Wendell’s comment on dismantling disability was telling in the sense that whether or not individuals care about their clothing, they should have the opportunity to purchase the clothing they desire. The onus should not be on the individual to ‘make do’ with the clothing available and learn techniques to adapt them as was outlined in the self-help books by

Goldsworthy and Cochrane & Kelly.<sup>160</sup> In order to further examine the relationship individuals with mobility disabilities have with their clothes, this thesis will look at the role of ‘right’, something unaddressed by sociologist Sophie Woodward,<sup>161</sup> through affect theory. It will also examine the role of time spent dressing as noted by Hansen, by arguing dressing and creating an appearance is a form of affective labour.

This thesis represents a view of clothing for individuals with physical disabilities from critical dress and disability studies that was started by Lamb in 2001, and continued by Hayman in 2008. Hayman calls for clothing and fashion studies to engage with disabilities and this is the intention of this research. Critical dress and disability studies is an area that is emerging and this thesis will certainly add to the field. If we are going to change the way persons with physical disabilities are framed and treated by society, we need to begin to change the way everyday needs are considered. The quotidian practice of getting dressed is largely understudied, as Hayman noted: “with an inherently body-centric field where two core elements – dress and body – are held in such close symbiosis, disability concepts do not routinely appear.”<sup>162</sup> This in conjunction with the need for research in the area of critical dress and disability studies makes this thesis not only necessary but also significant.

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<sup>160</sup> Goldsworthy, *Clothes for Disabled People*, and Cochrane and Kelly, *Clothing and Dressing*.

<sup>161</sup> Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (New York: Berg, 2007).

<sup>162</sup> Hayman, “Dress & Disability,” 242.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### INTRODUCTION

Symbolic Interaction (SI) focuses on the behaviour and social interaction between individuals and the meaning created through the behaviours and gestures performed in these interactions. With specific respect to the relationship between clothing and disability, SI explains the consequence of appearances in social interactions. How stereotypes and prejudices applied to persons with disabilities, based in appearance are completed as well as how one's appearance could be misinterpreted is elucidated through SI. Desiring to appear in a manner one finds suitable, but blocked either by the lack of options or pervasive stereotypes is the reality of many persons with physical disabilities. Unlike psychology and sociology, SI finds meaning "as arising in the process of interaction between people" and that this meaning is not fixed.<sup>163</sup> As a result of continuing interactions, meanings will be continually revised and used to guide an individual's response to another.<sup>164</sup> From this it is clear, that in the SI framework, experiences of an interaction are "private and belong to the individual himself – experiences commonly called subjective"<sup>165</sup> and thus the individual must have a self.

SI was specifically chosen for this research as it establishes the gravity of one's appearance in an interaction. Regardless of whether of not one's appearance was carefully contemplated or performed, an observer will draw inferences from this appearance that will inevitably be drawn on again in the future in a similar situation of beginning to form a stereotype.

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<sup>163</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 4.

Blumer argues that meaning is often lost in psychological and sociological explanations that are used to interpret behaviour. Blumer postulates ignoring meaning is "falsifying the behaviour under study" (Blumer, 3) and that factors do not produce behaviour even though they are often viewed this way by sociology and psychology frameworks. A further critique of sociology lies in that there is rarely recognition that human society is "composed of individuals who have selves" (Blumer, 83). In the eyes of sociology according to Blumer, individuals respond to the social system. Additionally Blumer points out that trying to connect "causative factors and structural results" misses the "acting units of a society and bypass the interpretative process by which such acting units build up their actions" (Blumer, 87). These acting units, and their actions as well as their interpretations are central to Symbolic Interactionism.

<sup>164</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 2.

What SI argues that is of particular importance to “Left Out” is that one’s sense of self is developed through interactions with others, not in isolation. For person with physical disabilities this notion of developing a sense of self by being conscious of the reactions of those with whom one is interacting is at times equivalent to watching an individual interact with a preconceived, negative notion of a person with a physical disability. However, before the nature of having a self is explored and what this entails, the basic tenants of SI need to be outlined.

#### TENANTS OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTION

The central concepts of SI include: people act on the meanings of objects in their world, people together are necessarily indicating and interpreting indications, social actions are done through the assessment of one’s situation and finally, “the complex interlinkages of acts that comprise organization, institutions, divisions of labour, and networks of interdependency are moving and not static affairs.”<sup>166</sup> Decisions are made in interactions based on meanings created from other interactions. Thus these meanings compound and evolve to influence future actions and responses. Blumer notes that we must see objects as individuals see them in order to understand their resulting action.<sup>167</sup> Individuals constantly alter their social interactions in response to things around them as, “social interaction is a formative process in its own right.”<sup>168</sup> Individuals are not just producing behavior based on class or status, they are responding to the environment and their interpretation of the interaction.

Working from the original texts of George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer lists the three premises of SI: people act toward things in a manner that indicates they have a meaning to them, the meaning of the thing occurs as a result of a social interaction, and meanings, through

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<sup>166</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 50.

<sup>167</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 50-51.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

interpretation are continually altered by the individual's engagement in interactions.<sup>169</sup> The interpreted meaning of an object or interaction is central to SI. It is through the way individuals act to one another that culture and the symbols in the culture are established. Blumer explains that the influence of a social organization is limited to the way in which people act in response to the social situation it has created, the symbols used in the interactions.<sup>170</sup> Blumer does not articulate how social organization and class are related, which would have been useful to this reading, but it seems that they must be related, if only tangentially. Blumer goes on to clarify that what we call the organization of human society is not to be classified with the interpretations that occur during interactions, "even though it affects that process, it does not embrace or cover the process."<sup>171</sup> Here Blumer is arguing that the social organization does not dictate all meanings and actions in interactions. This allows for interactions to be not only dynamic, but also awards individuals a form of authorship over their own actions. This approach can be applied to clothing and style. While one might argue there are fashion trends and rules, this does not mean that these cannot be manipulated and reshaped.

SI is based in the understanding that "human group life consists of the fitting to each other of the lives of action of the participants" and that this coordination through the interactions between the people and their resulting actions and interpretations gives indications as to how to respond and continue to communicate.<sup>172</sup> Out of these interactions "people form the objects that constitute their worlds" and people act towards these objects with the internalized meaning that they have for him or her.<sup>173</sup> Blumer explains that humans interact in the world with ideas of

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

‘selves’ and that from this sense of self one is able to evidence things to him or herself.<sup>174</sup> Human action is based on individual experiences, interpretations and meanings. From these small units of human interaction and individual meaning, a much larger and complex system is created, constituting “vast complexes of interdependent relations.”<sup>175</sup>

Through constructing one’s own social action, what is termed self-interaction by Blumer, the individual becomes aware of his or her wants, the social demands placed on the individual, goals, the possibilities of a situation, and from this he or she creates a plan of behavioural action.<sup>176</sup> This is important to consider with respect to the practice of getting dressed. The individual in his or her closet can consider what one wants to look like, what one feels is socially demanded of his or her appearance, consider the events of the day ahead, and the way they will dress accordingly. Through these choices an individual is creating a social action, through self-interaction, and this leads to intricate and interdependent social relations and meanings.<sup>177</sup>

When discussing the actions of individuals and how these are weighed in the mind it is important to consider the role of consciousness. Mead describes “rational intelligence” as human consciousness. It is in this consciousness that Mead believes the individual “puts himself in the attitude of the whole group to which he belongs.”<sup>178</sup> Here it is the case that the whole group is a part of a larger group and in this group of organized activity “the action of one calls for the action of all others.”<sup>179</sup> An organized activity could be any number of interactions, but what is specific to this research is judging something about another based on appearance. One’s own action or performance in appearing a certain way seemingly has larger ramifications for the way

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>178</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 334.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

in which the entire group will develop an attitude about the individual. The action of one calling for the action of others seems to relate to that of appearance, perhaps through the conduct in terms of the whole group.

One of the key elements of SI is that if one is looking to understand social actions, observation of these interactions is necessary. This will be covered in more depth in the methodology chapter, but it is important to consider while discussing what is at the core of SI, the research methods which are preferred. Blumer notes that to be able to “treat or analyze” a social action that the researcher must observe the construction of the situation: “to see the acting unit as confronted with an operating situation that it has to handle and vis-a-vis which it has to work out a line of action.”<sup>180</sup> The desire is to observe many situations, how they arise and how the actors involved handle them, or what social action the individual under observation takes. Blumer furthers that the researcher “must see the action from the position of whoever is forming the action.”<sup>181</sup> This is desired over other forms of research as when one recounts a situation of self-interaction in response to a situation; they may leave out specific information. In addition Symbolic Interaction seeks to see the situation unfold and what occurs in that moment, valuing observation these as key to understanding the entire interaction.

### GESTURES AND MEANING

Blumer explains that one will make a response to a gesture based on what that gesture means to the individual. The gesture holds meaning for both individuals: the individual gesturing, and the individual interpreting the gesture. Gestures are made to give an indication of actions that are about to be made or what is being communicated in the moment. If both the individuals

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<sup>180</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 56.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

share the same meaning, they understand each other.<sup>182</sup> Blumer describes Mead's "Triadic Nature of Meaning" as the following: meaning tells the person it is directed to what to do, tells what the person who is creating the meaning through the gesture is about to do, and it shows what is going to transpire between the two.<sup>183</sup> If there is any confusion in this triad, the communication as a result of the missed meaning, fails. To what degree it fails, or to what extent meaning can be salvaged, although the two individuals do not find the same meaning in a gesture, is not something that Blumer articulates. Certainly if one thinks of the day-to-day experience, on many occasions the meaning may not be identical, but by taking into account the setting, previous communication and perhaps past experiences, relatively accurate communication can be completed. It also seems impossible for two individuals, functioning on their own respective experience, to have identical definitions of the same gesture. Similarly, the situation may also arise where a gesture is made not to communicate meaning and yet is interpreted by another as having a meaning that was not intended.

This can be related to dress and how it can be considered as a gesture and the misunderstandings that can occur in interpreting one's dress. If clothing is in fact a gesture, an interesting issue arises with respect to whether or not the outfit was intended as a form of meaning, and if clothing appearance gives indications about actions. Clothing gestures, as they could be called, are not definitive, they follow what Blumer cites from Mead as a situation when the meaning is not shared: "interaction is impeded."<sup>184</sup> This notion pertains to an observer being perceptive of a functional aspect of clothing, such as zipper down the side seam of pants for ease in donning and doffing. The observer will value the functional aspect, as it will help them gather

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

an indication about the person he or she is regarding, which will likely lead to a stereotype about the individual as a person with a disability. In turn, this will cause the wearer to devalue the garment. Freeman, Kaiser and Wingate note that SI frameworks allow the meaning of these details and how they are interpreted by each of the individuals to have an impact on the interaction: “the nature of functional, special clothing features’ possible impact upon social relations as viewed by physically disabled persons.”<sup>185</sup>

When the wheelchair is considered as part of the appearance of an individual with a mobility disability and one brings his or her own assumptions of persons with physical disabilities to this situation, the interaction can also be impeded. At the same time, what clothing in tandem with a wheelchair means, may be more difficult to decipher or may have an entirely different meaning without the wheelchair as part of the appearance. The individual may not be trying to communicate something about the self to another with his or her appearance; the individual could simply be wearing the clothes because they are functional or comfortable and yet they are used to indicate something about the self. Goffman’s writing as will be explored later, further explores the concept of performance as has been touched on here.

Explaining what he calls joint action and society, Blumer states the “essence of society lies in an ongoing process of action – not in a posited structure of relations.”<sup>186</sup> He argues the structural conception of human society assumes that society is an established organization including social structure, social systems, status position, social role and the like.<sup>187</sup> Ultimately that human society is constructed on individual’s social positions and his or her patterns of behaviour. It is the perspective of SI that only with action is meaning created, thus only with the actions of the individual can social status be created. Society is not a fixed structure; it is a result

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<sup>185</sup> Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate, “Perceptions of Functional Clothing,” 47.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

of the many actions of individuals. Blumer calls these joint actions, which are done to complete the purpose or desire of individuals, not the system.<sup>188</sup> From Mead's perspective, social control is in fact self-control, social change is "indigenous process in human group life" not something based in structure, and social disorganization is not the breakdown of a structure but the "inability to mobilize action."<sup>189</sup>

#### BLUMER'S ROOT IMAGES

For Blumer the basic ideas of SI are called "root images" and these images shape how society and conduct in interactions are viewed. Blumer's root images on human society are centered on the actions of individuals shaping society and "social position, status, role, authority, and prestige refers to relationships derived from how people act toward each other."<sup>190</sup> For Blumer this is where society begins and ends: people have to engage and act towards one another for society to exist.<sup>191</sup> That the formation of society lies in the basic interactions we have with one another is key for research specifically looking at clothed bodies and how one chooses to dress, but also how one feels about his or her dress as clothing is a social object. Blumer's root image of social interaction is based around persons in a group acting with respect to one another. While they are part of a group, they will act towards each other as individuals, either in relation or in response.<sup>192</sup> This again is an important consideration as those individuals acting toward or in response to one another are wearing clothes. And while the clothes may not be central to the action, they are present and may have a non-verbal influence on the interaction.

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

While action creates society, it is based in the scale of the individual and his or her experience. Mead explains “we want to be able to distinguish what belongs to our own experience from that which can be stated, as we say in scientific terms.”<sup>193</sup> It is in this subjectivity that Mead explores how there are individual nuances to the reactions to processes: “we recognize that there are all sorts of differences among individuals. We have to make this distinction, so we have to setup a certain parallelism between things which are there and have a uniform value for everybody, and things which vary with certain individuals.”<sup>194</sup> For Mead this brings about the field of consciousness and a field of physical things, which are not conscious. Conscious or not, consideration of what holds universal value needs to be given. A handshake as a greeting or agreement serves as an example, however it is a cultural practice, what about larger concepts such as how we act towards certain groups? As a society we assume clothing on the body has a universal value, and yet this is not always the case. Value is largely based in experience, as “what is accessible only to that individual, what takes place only in the field of his own inner life, must be stated in its relationship to the situation in which it takes place.”<sup>195</sup> Thus what one understands the meaning of an act or interaction, as will be based in what he or she has experienced before it is subjective. The experience here is what the individual knows to be true about an interaction and all others related to situation must have their experience take into account as well.

What takes place physically and psychologically is what Mead calls parallelistic psychology.<sup>196</sup> Mead explains psychology deals with “the experience of the individual in its

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<sup>193</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 30.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 33.

relation to the conditions under which the experience goes on”, not consciousness.<sup>197</sup> It is in behaviouristic psychology “where the approach to experience is made through conduct.”<sup>198</sup> Both of these senses of experience are important for considering actions and what influences them.

#### ACTING WITH REFERENCE TO OBJECTS

Blumer defines objects within three classes: physical objects such as a chair, social objects such as a police officer, and abstract objects such as a moral principle.<sup>199</sup> The meaning of objects is based on how they are used and introduced by the individuals the subject interacts with.<sup>200</sup> Blumer explains that for Mead, “objects are human constructs and not self-existing entities with intrinsic natures.”<sup>201</sup> Thus the nature of the object and what it means is created by the individual in the way they act towards it or “orient themselves.”<sup>202</sup> If this is related back to clothing for the purposes of this writing, it explains why people understand different items of clothing to not only mean different things, but to serve different purposes. Furthermore this provides a valuable way of considering why a certain piece of clothing is a favourite. As by being a favourite, the garment is assigned a specific meaning by the individual.

Blumer is adamant that objects, in all three categories, are “social creations – as being formed in and arising out of the process of definition and interpretation as this process takes place in the interaction of people.”<sup>203</sup> It is through this interaction of people that meanings are disseminated. The meanings different clothing items hold come from social interactions. Not only pieces with specific personal meaning like the ‘favourite piece’, but also what we think of

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>199</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 10.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

garments: what was experienced or occurred to develop meaning. This meaning will evolve through more or other social interactions. Respectively, there are two approaches to considering clothing. It can be seen as an object allotted meaning as a result of the wearer's interactions, but they also have a meaning for those with which the wearer is interacting. What is fascinating about Symbolic Interaction's theory on the development of meaning and value of objects socially is how this creation of meaning and value is continued onto the self.

While Blumer cautions against individual accounts of object meanings, as they are overly subjective, they are how we make decisions about how to interact with others in verbal or non-verbal ways. Blumer notes "people are prepared or set to act toward object on the basis of the meaning of the objects for them" and thus they act towards something based off of its personal meaning.<sup>204</sup> So while he cautions taking these individual accounts, it is clear that the individual account is quite relevant to the way in which one acts towards something.

Mead argues that beyond consciousness, one readies the self for what it is about to do as it approaches an object or thing in the central nervous system. He uses the example of a horse and how if one is a rider, he or she will approach the horse differently than a farrier.<sup>205</sup> From this consequently we "can sensitize ourselves to certain types of stimuli and we can build up a sort of action we are going to take."<sup>206</sup> Here action can be a mental or physical response to something that has been encountered before or is being encountered for the first time. How do you respond to someone who sticks his or her hand out? You stick your opposite hand out, clasp hands, and shake hands. You are aware of the action to take in response to the stimuli. This is an excellent example of an action between two people that comes to stand as a cultural practice. This

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>205</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 11.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 26.

however can also be applied to the creation of stereotypes. For example how one perceives of and what meanings they associate with individuals in wheelchairs. Goffman's discussion of how individuals unacquainted with each other gather evidence about each other from behaviour and appearance is important to consider. They "apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him."<sup>207</sup> What we take from past experiences, are subjective and situation specific and yet these are applied to others solely based on mannerisms and guise.

### SELF AS OBJECT

One of the significant claims of the Symbolic Interactionist framework is the explanation and theorization surrounding referring to the self as an object. Mead explains "this characteristic is represented in the word 'self,' which is reflexive and indicates that which can be subject and object."<sup>208</sup> Blumer further elaborates Mead's articulation of self as object to the understanding that we are objects to ourselves and in becoming an object to the self "this gives him the means of interacting with himself – addressing himself, responding to the address, and addressing himself anew."<sup>209</sup> Only in a social environment when one considers the attitudes of another toward his or herself, does one become an object.<sup>210</sup> Blumer articulates Mead's concept of 'role-taking' as the social interaction in which other people reflect an individual back onto him or herself. To see oneself as an object, one must perceive the self the way others do. This also allows for one to interact with his or her own self.<sup>211</sup> It is the communication through "significant symbols," which is critical according to Mead, for making oneself an object. This

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<sup>207</sup> Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self to Others," In *Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology*, ed. by Jerome G. Manis and Bernard N. Meltzer, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978), 171.

<sup>208</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 136.

<sup>209</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 62.

<sup>210</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 138.

<sup>211</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 12-13.

communication is part of one's behaviour and speaks to the self. Mead articulates this as the instance in which one is addressing another, but at the same time "the response of his own becomes part of his conduct, where he not only hears himself as truly as the other person replies to him, that we have behavior in which the individuals become objects to themselves."<sup>212</sup> It is important to note that Mead sees the self "as a process and not a structure."<sup>213</sup> The structure misses the reflexive value that one has with the self as object. The self is inherently reflexive, thus having a self, means that one is being reflexive.

Mead notes the response we evoke in others will also be evoked in ourselves and will have an influence on the way the interaction unfolds.<sup>214</sup> This is what Mead calls rationality, and shows the continuance of the meaning of the action, but also involves the self-reflection that is necessary in stating 'self'. Here it is important to consider the difference between consciousness and self-consciousness. Mead explains that "consciousness answering to certain experiences such as that of pain or pleasure, self-consciousness referring to a recognition or appearance of a self as object."<sup>215</sup> In order to refer to the self as an object this involves being critical of the self or in being self-reflexive. For Mead 'I' and 'me' are two different ways of referring to the self that are influenced by social relations and can allow for different selves.<sup>216</sup> Mead explains 'me' represents "that group of attitudes which stands for others in the community, especially that organized group of responses."<sup>217</sup> He furthers, when these responses are called out in the individual so that he or she can reply, both the "other" and the "I" that make up the self appear.

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<sup>212</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 138-139.

<sup>213</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 62.

<sup>214</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 149.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

The difference between I and me arises “in what we call the recognition of others and the recognition of ourselves in others.”<sup>218</sup>

Self-reflection and considering the self as seen by others is a concept fleshed out by Charles Cooley, in his theory the looking-glass self. The looking-glass is most easily considered as a mirror. Cooley explains that when we view ourselves in the glass we are intrigued because what we see *is* ourselves: “our face, figure and dress.”<sup>219</sup> We will be content or not with the appearance assuming it satisfies, or not, what we think it should look like or be. This satisfaction, Cooley explains, comes from the perception of what we think might occur in someone else’s mind and their thoughts on our appearance: “in [our] imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on and are variously affected by it.”<sup>220</sup> Through the looking-glass we are imagining ourselves through the eyes of another, and this is a key point of consideration when getting dressed. Not only because our bodies are social and involved in social interactions but as the clothes we wear can communicate a great deal about us and we also consider our appearance from the perspective of others.

Cooley goes on to examine the concept of a self-idea. This is comprised of three principle elements including “the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling such as pride or mortification.”<sup>221</sup> Cooley explains that it is not the actual appearance but the “sentiment” or “imagined effect” it will cause in another that is pivotal.<sup>222</sup> Not only is one going through the

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Charles H. Cooley, "Looking-Glass Self," In *Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology*, ed. Jerome G. Manis and Bernard N. Meltzer, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978), 169.

<sup>220</sup> Cooley, "Looking-Glass Self," 169.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

process of self-reflection or as Mead would say, having a self, but one is also considering what one thinks another might think or the conclusions they might draw from one's appearance, and this is the most important part.<sup>223</sup>

#### SELF-REFLECTION AND SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Self-consciousness is what is necessary to refer to the self as object. Mead states: "self-consciousness involves the individual's becoming an object to himself by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within an organized setting of social relationships" and in order to have a self, one must be an object to him or herself.<sup>224</sup> One cannot be an object to the self unless there is a social interaction from which he or she can interpret the responses of others to his or herself. Without a social interaction and becoming an object to the self, there cannot be a self. The opportunity to be perceptive of others responses to oneself, and attach value or draw meaning from those responses is necessary for the creation of the self. It is through becoming an object by the reflection of interactions onto the self in an attempt to ascertain what one's actions mean, as indicated through the response of the individuals being interacted with, that the self is created. Recognizing that one's verbal and non-verbal modes of communication have meaning to those one interacts with is essential to the interaction. It is only through these interactions that the self is created and the individual can refer to himself or herself as an object.

Mead elaborates on self-reflection to explain that what one thinks about his or herself is a result of social interaction, but has further implications. This "leads to complexities and complications of society which go almost beyond our power to trace, but originally it is nothing

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<sup>223</sup> While the looking-glass self is a useful framework for this area of research as it focuses on one's appearance, Mead is critical of how Cooley locates the self. Mead argues that finding the self on the "reflexive affective experiences," as Cooley does, "does not account for the origin of the self, or of the self-feeling which is supposed to characterize such experiences." The attitudes of other individuals according to Mead, do not cause the individual to reflect on him or herself. One must have a self first, before the judgments or attitudes of others can be taken into consideration. While this is a logical argument, that the self needs to exist before external judgment can be recognized, it does not prevent the concept of the looking-glass self from being explored especially as it is largely concerned with appearance and identity, something central to this area of research.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 225.

but the taking over of the attitude of the other.”<sup>225</sup> This further explains how society is comprised of the actions of the individual, on the most basic level: self-reflection. Mead gives the example of a fashion trend and how when one initially sees it he or she may not like it, but after repeatedly seeing this fashion in store windows and imagining him or herself in these clothes, a form of treating the self as other, he or she begins to like this fashion.<sup>226</sup> Mead states that this change in opinion has taken place without the individual being aware of it. He then relates how this causes a change in society:

“there is, then, a process by means of which the individual in interaction with others inevitably becomes like others in doing the same thing, without that process appearing in what we term consciousness ...perhaps he says that he does not care to dress in a certain fashion, but prefers to be different; then he is taking the attitude of others toward himself into his own conduct.”<sup>227</sup>

Specifically relating to practices of dress, whether or not one is choosing to dress alike or different from the groups he or she interacts with and how these decisions evolve in the reflection of others on the self is a concept that will appear again in the analysis chapter.

In putting oneself in the role of the other, Mead states, “he is able to come back on himself and so direct his own process of communication.”<sup>228</sup> Through taking on the role of the other, Mead explains, is a form of cooperative activity in which the individual’s control “over his own response” is shown.<sup>229</sup> While the role that ‘taking on the other’ plays in the establishment of the self and is key to the SI method, it is necessary to consider what occurs when one is being self-reflexive of his or her own process of communication. In this research specifically, it is essential to contemplate how in taking on the role of the other, as a person with a physical disability, shapes one’s actions. Clothing can be used to camouflage disability, but it

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<sup>225</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 191.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

can also be used to rupture preconceptions about persons with physical disabilities and thus significant ‘crip’ meaning can be communicated through dress.

While one may be alone getting dressed, consideration of one’s appearance as seen by others occurs. If it were not for social interactions, perhaps significantly different considerations would be given in the practice of getting dressed. Mead states: “all selves are constituted by or in terms of the social process, and are individual reflections of it.”<sup>230</sup> This puts the individual within the larger context of society, which the individual is not only responsible for creating but is also influenced by. Because one is influenced by the self as a result of social interactions does not mean that one cannot have his or her “own peculiar individuality, its own unique pattern,” however.<sup>231</sup> While one may belong to a larger social group and be influenced by the interactions within it, this does not prevent individuality or uniqueness.

At the same time Mead explains how social control as found in self-criticism “exerts itself so intimately and extensively over individual behaviour and conduct.”<sup>232</sup> This allows the individual and his or her actions “with reference to the organized social process of experience and behaviour in which he is implicated” to merge.<sup>233</sup> So while one is an individual in the larger social group, the group provides a frame of reference. The individual is not only taking into consideration the attitudes of his or her “integrated social relations” to the others in the group but the group as a whole. This provides a different way of considering one’s relationship to a group that one may not have chosen to be a part of – specifically physical disability. At the same time however, specific to this research, the wheelchair as part of the appearance one may revoke group membership outside of being ‘a person with a physical disability.’ As well, the

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

consideration of oneself from the perspective of others may have a large impact on the way the individual with a physical disability behaves and conducts him or herself. He or she may choose to try and thwart the tropes of disability with his or her manner of dress or realize that no matter how they dress, they will always be seen as ‘wheelchair’ first.

Mead explains that through the same process by which we become aware of the self, we also become aware, or conscious of other individuals. In being conscious of the other individuals, one realizes their importance in one’s own self-development as well as the “development of the organized society or social group to which he belongs.”<sup>234</sup> The concept of social group is interesting with respect to disability, specifically wheelchair users. Not only how persons with mobility disabilities are viewed by ableist society, but also how they view themselves within the group, as well as how they feel they are perceived as a group. Mead explains that it is through taking on the role “of the other that he is able to come back on himself and so direct his own process of communication.”<sup>235</sup> What transpires when taking on the role of the other, especially when the able/disabled dichotomy is so entrenched in society? In taking on the role of the other it seems we are able to both positively and negatively shape behavior towards, and feelings of the self.

The process of communication is done through action. Blumer writes action is devised based on the desires and the objectives of the individual, as well as the interpretation of the previous action: “his conduct is formed and guided through such a process of indication and interpretation.”<sup>236</sup> Conduct here can apply to the way that one appears in public. The way one dresses can be formed by indications and interpretations previously analyzed and these go onto

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>236</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 15-16.

influence the way one dresses as a result of his or her experience. This leads to what Blumer describes as “getting inside of the defining process of the actor in order to understand his action.”<sup>237</sup> Initially this requires knowing whether or not one can really understand another’s defining process, but in a similar token, is it possible to fully understand an action, specifically the action of getting dressed and the self-defining process that occurs there. From here we return to the notion that we rely on what we have previously seen to understand what is now being insinuated.

Mead postulates that in realizing the attitude of the group, individuals predispose themselves to act in a certain way and this is how the self is created: “the self thus arises in the development of the behaviour of the social form that is capable of taking the attitude of others.”<sup>238</sup> This may be why appearance is important to social interactions, as it is a result of the imagined responses of others in the same social group or activity. How this relates to responses to obvious physical disability is important to consider. At the same time the individual is recognizing and responding to the environment, encapsulating the social behaviours of the environment.<sup>239</sup> Thus in the interaction the individual is taking many factors into consideration: he or she is not only considering the social environment, the social group, the other members of that group, the self as seen through the perspective of the others, and also continuing his or her own goals, desires, wants and needs.

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>238</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 335.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 336.

## SOCIETY AS SYMBOLIC INTERACTION

Blumer defines symbolic interaction as “the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings.”<sup>240</sup> Thus individuals give meaning to each other’s actions, and are not just simply responding or reacting to them. What is interesting to consider here, is the role that clothing may play in this interaction. The self as object, as Mead initially theorized, allows for the individual to “be the object of his own actions” and thus act the way he would to others to him or herself.<sup>241</sup> It is this ability to operate with respect to the self, that Mead regards “as the central mechanism” through which the individual confronts and behaves to his or her surroundings. In a sense this is like dealing with the self to deal with the world. Considering clothing in this preparation of the self one can think of how individuals ‘dress for success’, to promote certain qualities, or to show that while one may be a person with a physical disability, this does not mean he or she cannot be interested in appearance.

Self-indication is dynamic communicative process in which the individual “notes things, assess them, gives them a meaning, and decides to act on the basis of the meaning.”<sup>242</sup> The process of self-indication is important as it is here that the individual is able to note and decipher an expression, being aware of the social demands, his or her own feelings such as hunger and so on. It is in self-indication that meaning is generated. What Mead does not explain, through Blumer, is to what extent self-indication is conscious or unconscious in the individual. Self-indication is taking place in the social interaction and cannot be accounted for by factors that exist prior to the action.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 78-79.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

GOFFMAN'S PRESENTATION OF THE SELF

In Erving Goffman's *Presentation of the Self*, he describes what has been articulated by Mead and Blumer, but through concepts of presentation, performance, expression given off, characters, performers, and appearances. Like Blumer and Mead, Goffman describes the actions that are "expressions given off" as actions that the receiver, what Goffman would call an audience, will use to make judgments about the individual giving them off.<sup>244</sup> Goffman discusses the character of the individual that can be informed by his or her presentation, more than what is necessarily the intention of the presentation, and this is different than the approach taken by Mead and Blumer. Goffman calls individuals actors and notes that we are able to take their gestures as indicative of their meanings, with the expectation that "the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed this way."<sup>245</sup> Here the assumption is that information about one's character can be gathered from the action or expression, beyond the intended meaning of his or her actions or expressions. Because the actor is aware of this observation by others and the potential inspection of character, he or she may try to project a constant image.<sup>246</sup> Goffman defines "interaction" as the way in which individuals influence each other's actions when they are physically near to each other. What Goffman calls "an interaction" includes all of the interactions that occur between individuals on an occasion, and notes that the term "encounter" would also work. Performance to Goffman is the entirety of an activity completed by an individual which influences, in any way, the other participants. Those who observe are an audience, and individuals involved are co-participants.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 2.

<sup>245</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 2.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Like Mead and Blumer, Goffman follows categories of communication, specifically “the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*.”<sup>248</sup> This difference is located in verbal symbols, and any number of actions that can be considered symbolic of the actor. The more contextual in nature, Goffman notes the more difficult it is to discern whether the communication is authentic or contrived.<sup>249</sup> For research looking at the way individuals dress, what is both intentionally and unintentionally communicated or interpreted through clothing is of importance. From the perspective of SI, whether or not there was an intended meaning, one’s appearance will undoubtedly be given one.

This leads into what Goffman refers to as the information game: “a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation and rediscovery.”<sup>250</sup> The actor creates and alters his or her performance as a result of the responses from the audience. The observers in turn, are either unsuspecting or note this manipulation.<sup>251</sup> Goffman explains that his text deals with the “techniques that persons employ to sustain such impressions and with some of the common contingencies associated with the employment of these techniques.”<sup>252</sup> While it may seem as though Goffman is treating every action and interaction an individual completes as something methodically thought out and even directed, he is articulating the way in which individuals act to one another to not only communicate. He is also referring to communication about the self that the other individual will be perceptive of in the performance and interpret subsequently.

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 15.

Goffman's theory and writings on the interaction of individuals are explored through what he terms performances. Similar to the looking-glass self, a performance is the reverse perspective to "looking at the individual's own belief in the impression of reality that he attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself."<sup>253</sup> There are two extremes that can occur in a performance, either that the observer or audience becomes lost in the act or find it insincere.<sup>254</sup> Goffman explains that when the individual is in direct contact with others there are only a few events that will indicate how the others should respond astutely, and in fact the true or real attitudes that are necessary for this astute perception are often not revealed or are revealed indirectly.<sup>255</sup> On the personal front Goffman describes how characteristics that are visually observable, such as race, age, gender, and bodily comportment, make up part of the performance, and while some of this will change over time, others will not.<sup>256</sup> Important to this thesis is the difference between appearance and manner. Goffman states appearance refers to determinants that allow for the social status of the performer to be determined, and while we expect the manner and appearance of the performer to parallel each other they can be contradictory.<sup>257</sup> The combination of the setting, routine, performer, audience, appearance, and manner create the social front for Goffman. While these may not all align or confirm each other, one can be deceiving of another.<sup>258</sup>

In order for the actions of the individual to become compelling or important to others, *in* an interaction he or she must impart the intended meaning.<sup>259</sup> Goffman notes that there are many

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>255</sup> Goffman, "The Presentation of Self," 171.

<sup>256</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 24.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 30.

discrepancies between appearance and reality, and not only will this effect the interactions and the performance, but deception can be employed.<sup>260</sup> This is relevant to this body of research as the way one appears, specifically with respect to clothing and the wheelchair as a physical part of the appearance, and the resultant interaction could be largely misled. Not misled as Goffman articulates can be done through impersonation, or contrived and honest performances,<sup>261</sup> but because the observer or audience uses stereotypes, based on previous experience, specifically with respect to physical disabilities.

#### SYMBOLIC INTERACTION UNDERSTANDING THE BODY

In his SI writings on the body, sociologist Ken Plummer explains a series of ways to acquire knowledge of different aspects of the body. Plummer's perspective is important as this thesis is interested in bodies in clothes. One manner of comprehending the body is to: "examine the multiplicities of symbols, meanings, stories and perspectives ... *multiple meanings of bodies and their stories* formed around and through them."<sup>262</sup> Through understanding the multiplicities, the different ways individuals view clothing as symbols of themselves, what viewpoints they have on clothing, the clothes they wear especially, and how they feel they can or cannot create a sense of self through them can be explored. The body can also be examined through asking questions about the "self and significant others," as one is never truly alone and people interact together.<sup>263</sup> Especially with respect to dressing, individuals can wear clothes to illicit a response from others, and what role others play in their clothing decisions exemplify the capacity of those who surround the individual on his or her actions and body. Considering "social life as emergent and processual," as "the body is not a thing as much as a constantly changing and adapting

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 59 and 71.

<sup>262</sup> Ken Plummer, "My Multiple Sick Bodies," In *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, ed. Brian S. Turner, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 77.

<sup>263</sup> Ken Plummer, "My Multiple Sick Bodies," 77.

process” is another way of seeking to understand facets of the body.”<sup>264</sup> This thesis is arguing that not only is a sense of self created through clothes, but that these efforts are often impeded by bodily difference – something mainstream fashion design ignores. Creating an identity relates to changes in the sense of self over time, and even on a day-to-day basis, considering one’s activities and acquaintances.

The body can also be understood from a SI approach according to Plummer through human knowledge, which is “grounded in social life itself” and is thus never impartial.<sup>265</sup> This thesis seeks out the perspective and knowledge of persons with mobility disabilities with the understanding that their knowledge, especially about clothing and what they like to wear, is developed through their social interactions. The final way of capturing aspects of the body is through “experience of actual bodies,” their pragmatic development of ideas and social life in context.<sup>266</sup> The lived experience of individuals is where their stories and understandings of clothing from their varying social circles originate.

## CONCLUSION

Through the framework of SI this thesis explores dress and disability and the interactions that influence the daily choice of what to wear as well as one’s conception of the self. Meanings and associations are developed through interactions between individuals. However, what is formed out of using the SI framework, coming from a critical disability perspective, is how meanings found in interactions and expectations coalesce. More specifically, the meaning of clothing and appearance and what we would expect of different appearances based on previous experiences. Here a contention arises, especially when considering the appearance of wheelchair

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

and the expectations or stereotypes surrounding it and how these relate to clothing. As will be explored in later chapters, how the communication of meaning can fail when meanings are not shared and how this specifically relates to perceptions of clothing from the perspective of persons who use wheelchairs, will be explored in the analysis chapter. Additionally, it seems that there are two ways of thinking of clothing through SI, the first being clothes as objects and how as objects they are awarded meaning as such from the perspective of the wearers. The second treats the clothes as part of the interaction, a non-verbal gesture from which the other person can attempt to locate meaning. How these two roles of clothing in an interaction interrelate from the perspective of persons with mobility disabilities will also be examined.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### RATIONALE

The research interest for this thesis began with the recognition that persons with mobility disabilities are largely left out of mainstream fashion design considerations, choices in clothes designed specifically for the seated body, and clothing scholarship. As previously discussed, SI favours an observation or ethnographic approach to primary research. Although observing the individuals that were interviewed for this research would have proved illuminating and instructive, the practice of getting dressed is a private and intimate one. In actuality, making the act or series of actions of getting dressed available to a researcher not only removes any form of privacy from the individual, but may also significantly alter the actions of the individual. Being able to go on a shopping trip with some of the individuals I interviewed, similar to the methods used by Hansen<sup>267</sup> and Clarke and Miller<sup>268</sup> to gain an understanding of their point of view, or even speaking with those who do design clothes for persons with physical disabilities, was beyond the scope of the research undertaken for this thesis.

While sociologists Howard Becker and Blanche Geer articulate excellent points with respect to the value of observing a social group, especially one that the researcher is not part of, there are reasons why observing someone getting dressed out of respect and how that may make an individual feel vulnerable, is not suitable or appropriate. From an ethics standpoint, as well as the level of this research including time, resources, and depth, observation was unnecessary to gain the perspective that was being sought. Observation is argued as critical when the researcher is not a part of the group being studied as “we often do not understand that we do not understand

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<sup>267</sup> Hansen, Nancy E. “Passing Through Other People’s Spaces: Disabled Women, Geography and Work.” PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2002. <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3245/>

<sup>268</sup> Clarke, Alison, and Daniel Miller. "Fashion and Anxiety." *Fashion Theory* 6, no. 2 (2002): 191-214.

and are thus likely errors in interpreting what is said to us,” from the SI perspective.<sup>269</sup> Blumer points out researchers do not have first-hand accounts of the social groups they are studying and are likely to “fashion a picture of that sphere in terms of pre-established images.”<sup>270</sup> Therefore the preferred methodological position of SI is “direct examination of the empirical social world,” including observation and analysis, raising abstract problems, gathering data through examination and locating relationships in this data.<sup>271</sup>

Becker and Geer contend that there are shortcomings in the interview method in comparison with observation. For example interviews can be problematic as what is being recounted has not been directly observed by the researcher, and thus is a subjective account. They specifically note when what is said by an interviewee is extrapolated onto circumstances the individual did not describe; the account the interviewee gave is not being accurately depicted.<sup>272</sup> Additionally Becker and Geer explain that there are many opportunities for assumptions to be made by the interviewer about the interviewee. The interviewee can correct these mistakes, but the subtleties of meaning will be missed, as there will be assumptions in semantics.<sup>273</sup> In the interview process, Becker and Geer argue that there is no opportunity for these errors to be corrected as the word or phrase will only be used once, leaving no chance for amendment.<sup>274</sup> In participant observation style research methods, the opportunity exists for concepts to be revisited with the individual being observed.<sup>275</sup> Being able to experience the context of the interaction also allows the non-verbal gestures to be witnessed as well as being able to see the interaction in its entirety.

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<sup>269</sup> Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison," In *Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology*, ed. Jerome G. Manis and Bernard N. Meltzer, 76-82. 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1978), 77.

<sup>270</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 36.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>272</sup> Becker and Geer, "Participant Observation," 77.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, Becker and Geer fault the interview process for the reasons that the interviewee may not tell the interviewer what they need to know. While the interviewer may be directing very specific questions, the interviewee could choose not to divulge the information, or not want to be impolite or insensitive, and may simply not be able to tell the interviewer what he or she wants to know. Becker and Geer explain “many events occur in the life of a social group and the experience of an individual so regularly and uninterruptedly or so quietly and unnoticed that people are hardly aware of them, and do not think to comment on them to an interviewer.”<sup>276</sup> Beck and Geer contend that through participant observation that the observer could view these quotidian practices that were not initially mentioned.

In Thomas’s *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, she addresses a similar criticism of conducting interviews: one could argue the interviewee is giving the answers they believe the researcher wants to hear. Thomas writes however, “we all construct our stories and truths in the process of communicating them to others and ourselves, and that everybody makes continuous use of social discourses or public narratives in ‘telling’ and ‘interpreting.’”<sup>277</sup> This is an important side of telling one’s story to another that needs to be considered. It is possible that many of the questions asked to interviewees may never have been asked or considered by the interviewee before. As a result his or her stories and truths will unfold in the interview. In asking unconventional or unexpected questions the interviewee might speak candidly about their day-to-day experiences and desires with respect to their clothes. Beck and Geer would criticize the unfolding of a story from the interviewee’s perspective, however, by claiming that the interviewee may not be able to accurately describe what is going on around him or her.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>277</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 163.

<sup>278</sup> Becker and Geer, “Participant Observation,” 82.

While Becker and Geer note that the observer would be able to give the perspective necessary for sound research, this seems to shift the perspective of whose story is being told. While observation may provide a “rich experiential context,”<sup>279</sup> whose accurate depiction of the series of events and interpretation is being recorded, observer or observed? The interviewee recounting or telling an experience from their perspective and what they witnessed is part of storytelling.<sup>280</sup> The interviewee’s perspective is important as it shows what he or she understood as a result of the interaction. This again contradicts Becker and Geer’s statement about the researcher not knowing what they do not know, especially when the researcher is not part of the social group they are studying. However what the individual experiences in that moment is the objective, not the researcher’s ‘objective’ perspective of the social group they are studying. This research specifically seeks out the individual’s experience with clothing on a day-to-day basis, from his or her perspective in order to understand not only what clothing and appearance mean to an individual with a physical disability, but also appreciate the view of appearance expectations and prejudices that the individual experiences.

Even though Becker and Geer make a strong argument from the SI perspective as to why participant observation is more accurate than interviews in their opinion, they assume that the researcher is unbiased and open to changing his or her views. As no one is truly unbiased and reception to new understandings can vary, these reasons alone do not make a sound argument against interviews. In both interview and observation methods miscommunications can occur, what Becker and Geer fail to note is that the researcher’s perspective is not always accurate or better than seeing the situation for oneself. Becker and Geer seem to value objectivity over experience and thus feel that interviews are inadequate. However, in a research question that

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 163.

values an individual's experience as told through his or her own words, interviews done with direct and articulate questions can fill the research goal. Realistically, looking at the daily practice of getting dressed, rarely is a verbal commentary given, and furthermore rarely is the focus persons with physical disabilities. Thus, as Hansen writes "I draw upon my interviewees to make visible what is commonly not visible because disabled women are 'not visible', and this process of 'making visible' demands the intensive and reflexive use of qualitative methods."<sup>281</sup> While observation is qualitative, it would not do justice to the nuances and intricacies of getting dressed from the perspective of a person with a mobility disability.

In her research Hansen was concerned with how to best respect the individuals in her study without 'enfreaking' them or subjecting them to tactics and methods used in positivist studies.<sup>282</sup> One of the ways in which she countered previous positivist approaches to persons with disabilities was to share the information that she gathered with her interviewees.<sup>283</sup> Wingate, Kaiser, and Freeman developed hypotheses for what they believed the results of their study would show. While quantitative research methods were used in their research and thus arguably a more definitive answer could be given to whether or not the hypothesis was accurate, this seems to invoke the scientific method, linking it to positivism. Hansen's dissertation did not form a hypothesis as she felt this would link her work to positivism, something she wanted her research to avoid. For this thesis the notion of being left out was the only hypothesis, and the further complexities of being 'left out', with respect to clothing, were stories and opinions told by the interviewees. Not only is this critical, as the researcher does not belong to the community of wheelchair users, and as Becker and Geer stated, the researcher cannot know what they do not

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<sup>281</sup> Hansen, "Passing Through Other People's Spaces," 59.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-62.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

know, it is only appropriate that the interviewees share their experiences with the researcher, allowing for the researcher to develop her understanding of the group.

Intimate contact with the individuals interviewed, such as observation of their dressing practices, was not in the scope or respectful of the individual's privacy in this research. While Woodward is the first researcher to engage in an observation of selecting clothing and getting dressed, ethnologist Ingun Grimstad Klepp and communication researcher Mari Bjerck note that this study would not have been possible if the participants' had been "middle-aged husbands and wives."<sup>284</sup> Thus Woodward's sample is limited to those who were willing to allow her into their bedrooms and wardrobes, arguably only getting a certain perspective on clothing and dressing habits. Klepp and Bjerck also point out that getting dressed is a private practice in Western society: "she [Woodward] pushed frontier of what is closed to observation in our culture."<sup>285</sup> It is also important to consider how the wardrobe, being a small space where one does not usually host a guest, does not readily allow for observation without a change in practice. If the individual is used to being in his or her wardrobe alone, a space where no one else can physically fit, and now has to leave the wardrobe while considering an outfit to discuss with the researcher, the practice of getting dressed has changed.

Instead a semi-structured interview protocol was used in the interviews to allow for the interviewees to speak as personally as they felt comfortable. Blumer, Becker and Geer noted the importance of having opportunities for the researchers' images and conceptions of the research to evolve. The answers provided in the interviews not only reshaped the understandings I entered this project with, but also made me more conscious of the ones I see around me. While symbolic

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<sup>284</sup> Ingun G. Klepp and Mari Bjerck, "A Methodological Approach to the Materiality of Clothing: Wardrobe Studies," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 17, no. 4 (2014): 379.

<sup>285</sup> Klepp and Bjerck, "A Methodological Approach," 379.

interaction as a framework calls for first hand experience, my interview protocol was exploratory and as is evidenced in the transcripts, there were consistent questions seeking clarification with respect to terms being used by the individuals, such as “what does comfort mean to you?” If as in Wingate, Kaiser and Freeman’s 1986 conclusion, there is a need for a method that can take into account that the requirements of persons with physical disabilities with respect to clothes are subjective, semi-structured interviews allow the individual to speak to his or her own experiences and subjectivities.

While observation certainly has its merits, what is central to SI is that the theoretical orientation or perspective of the research is constantly revised and adapted as the research continues,<sup>286</sup> and my own perspective, not only with respect to the sense of being ‘left out’, but also what this research produced, expanded into speaking to the larger notion of how persons who use wheelchairs feel they are viewed by society and questioning the priorities of clothing design. In addition it is critical to note that only two of the studies that were analyzed in order to conduct this research used observation as a methodology.<sup>287</sup> The majority of these studies did a combination of an interview and a survey. While the researchers did not state their reasons for not completing an observation, it is safe to assume that in this context observation would not allow the researcher any further insight without crossing a private boundary with the individual.

Conducting research with quantitative methods, specifically using only a questionnaire was ruled out for the lack of specific examples that could be given by the individual. In Wingate, Kaiser and Freeman’s study that used quantitative methods, the authors commented on their results: “judging by the unusually large number of personal notes provided by the students, it

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<sup>286</sup> Becker and Geer, “Participant Observation,” 82.

<sup>287</sup> Wingate, Kaiser, & Freeman, 1985; Freeman, Kaiser, & Wingate, 1986; Thoren, 1996; Guy & Banim, 2000; Cosbey, 2001; Kidd, 2006; Frith & Gleeson, 2013; Chang, Hodges, & Yurchsin, 2014 all used a variety of survey, questionnaire and interview methods. Woodward 2007 and Clarke and Miller 2002 observed their participants getting dressed and shopping respectively.

seemed that there was a strong interest in having someone address the problem of special clothing, even if, and especially because, the needs of persons with physical disabilities are so personalized and specific.”<sup>288</sup> While the questionnaires distributed to the participants seemed to be thorough in allowing for the participants to articulate on a scale how they felt about each garment or what their own clothing selection practices were, it almost seems that their methods were inconsistent with their results and their research participants. If as they say in their conclusion that the requirements of persons with physical disabilities with respect to clothes are subjective, going forward a method should be used to allow for these subjectivities. As the individual experiences and perspectives on clothing are the focus of this thesis, choosing a method that allowed for these was imperative.

In reflection on the goals of this thesis, arguing that the daily clothing choices of persons with mobility disabilities is influenced by the view that disability is a problem to be solved, the research and analysis completed does not pretend to have any social or political agenda and is merely just the beginning of an area that is under-researched. Similar to Hansen’s research, the voices that are conveyed in this research, speak not only to personal experiences of the individuals interviewed, but when taken together begin to comment on the challenges of getting dressed when there is little clothing available or affordable for persons with mobility disabilities. It is also crucial to note that this study does not compare its results with those from studies where the participants do not identify as disabled. This thesis is not looking to understand the differences in dressing practices between these two groups, as ‘able-bodied’ dressing and ‘disabled body’ dressing cannot be defined as mutually exclusive groups. The focus of this research is on understanding the daily process of choosing what to wear for persons with

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<sup>288</sup> Wingate, Kaiser, and Freeman, “Salience of Disability Cues in Functional Clothing,” 47.

mobility disabilities and realizing other situations and decisions that function in tandem with this daily practice.

While one of the requirements to be interviewed for this thesis research was the use of the wheelchair, at no point was the nature of the disability sought out or listed as a requirement. In the study conducted by Thoren, she specifically categorized her participants based on their clothing requirements as follows, “people with divergent body-forms, who do not fit into clothes now available on the market ... [persons who] need comfortable clothing and a special fit below the waist, where as members of the third group have the same demands combined with a need of special functions for dressing and undressing.”<sup>289</sup> While this in and of itself is not problematic, Thoren’s chart entitled “disproportion in the figure” is.<sup>290</sup> The y-axis entails normal, tall, short, heavy, crooked, hunch back, saddle back, using aids, and different disproportions and the x-axis the frequency of each. As a result of her choice to compare the figures of her participants to a concept of normal seems to defeat her goal of designing clothes for the end user. It should not matter how the figure is ‘disproportioned’, as this leads to a ‘design for the majority’ framework. In this research, if the individual discussed the nature of his or her disability, it was a personal choice and was not necessitated by the interviewer. Part of the reason behind not seeking the medical diagnosis was largely that it had no relevance to this study as the focus was on the individuals’ relationship with their clothes and the daily practice of getting dressed. While it is possible that variance in disability among the interviewees makes it difficult to create a larger overarching conclusion, that is not the focus of this research, but arguably would be the case if a specific medical diagnoses were used as the standard for participation.

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<sup>289</sup> Thoren, “Systems Approach to Clothing for Disabled Users,” 392.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

There is a paradox that seems to arise in methodologies surrounding individuals with physical disabilities and how best to understand their needs. While from a critical disabilities standpoint, the desire to not label individuals with the given medical diagnosis and the nature of the physical ‘ability/disability’ is paramount, at the same time what is common in the conclusions of many of these studies is the need to concentrate on specific needs in order to develop a conclusion or even comment on what could be done to better serve the needs and wants of persons with physical disabilities.<sup>291</sup> The medical diagnoses seem to be a quick and inaccurate way of categorizing, and yet there is variance within each diagnosis that needs to be recognized. The studies that allowed individuals to participate with a wide range of physical disabilities offered results that the authors themselves noted needed further analysis and definition.

For example Freeman, Kaiser and Wingate noted in their conclusion with respect to the area requiring further exploration: “individual characteristics that result in divergent perceptions of functional clothing need to be studied, so that the needs of people with different disabilities and socializing experiences can be identified.”<sup>292</sup> The study conducted by Chang, Hodges and Yurchisin, parallels the methods followed in this thesis, semi-structured interviews lasting one to two hours, the female participants were individuals with physical and or psychological disabilities. Yet in the conclusion of their study they remark “future research is needed that specifies types of clothing behaviors relative to different kinds of disabilities and consideration of how these behaviors might relate to age.”<sup>293</sup> For those that sought to categorize the participants based on figure and ability, specifically Thoren, this poses problems with respect to

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<sup>291</sup> This includes: Thoren, 1996; Freeman, Kaiser and Wingate, 1985; Wingate, Kaiser, and Freeman, 1986; Chang, Hodges, and Yurchisin, 2014.

<sup>292</sup> Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate, “Perceptions of Functional Clothing,” 52.

<sup>293</sup> Chang, Hodges, and Yurchisin, “Consumers With Disabilities,” 45.

reducing the participant to his or her ability and disability, and also implies that there is in fact a normal body shape.

Thus this research attempts to navigate a balance between identifying individuals based on their diagnosed physical disability, and yet allowing the use of a wheelchair to represent what might be different needs and wants in clothing. This thesis does identify those who use wheelchairs as a group that is left out, but in articulating left out, each of the individuals narrated their own experience and to what degree they felt they were in fact left out. For this thesis, the use of a wheelchair and age of majority were the only requirements to participate. And while this does not ask for the medical diagnosis, arguably not a sound categorization to begin with as there is inevitably variance within a medical category, using a wheelchair is a category if viewed as a piece of equipment. By not relying on the medical diagnoses, the attention is taken away from the medical view, to see those with physical disabilities as subject not objects. In addition, but not focusing on the medical diagnosis, the nuances of needs and wants from the seated perspective are visible instead. It is important to note that regardless, there will be variance in needs and wants, and thus focusing on the diagnosis functions as a false category. In the review of literature completed for studies similar to this thesis, it is only the dissertation by Hansen that does not take the medical view of disability. While, Hansen's work falls more into the social understanding of disability, it has certainly been of great use in developing the research methods and perspective for this thesis that locates itself in critical disability studies.

#### DEVELOPING THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The primary research for this thesis was comprised of eight semi-structured research interviews with individuals with mobility disabilities.<sup>294</sup> There were only two requirements for

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<sup>294</sup> This study was approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee of Research Ethics at York University in August of 2014. Certificate ID STU 2014 - 112

participation: using a wheelchair and being over the age of 18. The sample represents four men and four women, four quickie chairs, and four power chairs. The interviews were conducted between October 18 and December 9, 2014. Seven of the participants were from the Greater Toronto Area and one is originally from Kingston, but is currently studying in Ottawa. The ages of the individuals interviewed ranged from 18 to 53. While senior or elderly perspectives are not represented, this sample gives a depiction of individuals who are not usually considered with respect to functional clothing as they are not admitted to hospitals or care facilities. The occupations of the individuals interviewed ranged from students, Ontario government positions, to living on the Ontario Disability Support Pension (ODSP).<sup>295</sup> The sample size was based on feasibility for a master's thesis, and is comparable to similar exploratory studies.<sup>296</sup>

A random purposive sample was followed as the individuals sought to participate were individuals who use wheelchairs, a group ignored in fashion literature, but certainly not the only one. The contributors were found through sending the call for participants to the Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies and Physical, Sensory and Medical Disability Services at York University, the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University, and the Master of Design in Inclusive Design at OCAD University. Additionally, after an interview, a contributor chose to list the call for participants on his organization's website and email listserv.

The semi-structured interviews began with a pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix A). This questionnaire was done in order to gather basic information from the individuals including name, their age, gender, and where they live. Further information was requested with

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<sup>295</sup> The interviewees were not asked to disclose their occupation, but it inevitably came up in the interviews.

<sup>296</sup> Clarke, Alison, and Daniel Miller. "Fashion and Anxiety." *Fashion Theory* 6, no. 2 (2002): 191-214 and Chang, Hyo Jung, Nancy Hodges, and Jennifer Yurchisin. "Consumers With Disabilities: A Qualitative Exploration of Clothing Selection and Use Among Female College Students." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 32 no.1 (2014): 34-48.

respect to access to shopping centers, altering clothing, purchasing specialty clothing, custom alterations and whether or not they felt that stores offered the styles or pieces of clothing they wanted or needed. From gathering this information before the interview, I was not only able to categorize and analyze interviews based on gender and age, but also was able to have a better sense of some of the follow up questions I would want to ask the individual. Having a very brief introduction to the interviewee's clothing purchase, shopping and alteration practices, also bred a comfortable rapport in the interview, allowing myself to develop insider knowledge of the clothing habits before the interview.<sup>297</sup>

A trial interview was conducted in August 2014, as an assignment for the directed course *Clothing, Body and Disability* supervised by Dr. Anne MacLennan. In this interview I was able to test the interview protocol, gauge what the responses to different questions would be, which questions should be redirected, and also learn of topics not addressed in my protocol that might be of use. From the experiences, realities, and stories the interviewee shared I was better equipped to engage in deeper interviews for my research with my new found perspective.

There was variety within the sample of eight individual interviews, but at the same time there were similarities.<sup>298</sup> The nature of the disabilities as identified by the individuals, also varied and yet similarities in needs and wants, was shared between them. Both men and women were interviewed not only because this study is exploratory, but also to begin to remove the gendered assumption that only women have feelings about their clothes. And while the design

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<sup>297</sup> The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed by myself, using Dragon Dictate speech recognition software. The interviews lasted from an hour to two and a half, and were largely dependent on the individual's answers and where the interview went.

<sup>298</sup> Chang, Hodges, and Yurchisin's 2014 study had eight participants and also followed a semi-structured interview format. As this sample size is feasible for a Master's thesis, and the semi-structured interview methodology was conducted for this research, I chose to parallel my study with Chang, Hodges and Yurchisin's to allow for a comparison in results.

elements or styles desired may differ between the two, creating a sense of self through clothing is a non-gendered practice.

The three sections of the analysis chapter comprise the analysis of the interviews and accounts given by the contributors. These sections do not encompass all the experiences shared by the contributors in the interviews; instead they aggregate similar and differing accounts on topics that were common to all the interviews. It should be noted that one of the drawbacks of conducting interviews and then using the transcripts and interview notes as the material from which the overarching themes for the analysis will be drawn, is that not every contributor will be referenced or cited equally. This however, does not lessen any of the interviewees' participation and storytelling as it is with all of the interviews that the analysis could be written. In an attempt to best capture the opinions and views of the contributors to this research, they are quoted often, in an attempt to convey the comment as accurately as possible and also to avoid what Becker and Geer described as the extrapolation of accounts onto topics or circumstances that were not told by the interviewee.

The first section of the analysis focuses on pants as a garment not only frequently discussed but one that was emblematic of the issues in finding clothing, considerations of comfort and function. The second section, examines the unobvious question of for whom clothes are designed. In the majority of the interviews a discussion occurred surrounding what bodies, specifically what position, standing versus seated, are serviced with current clothing design practices. The third and final section brings together the wide ranging comments on clothing and the wheelchair and what meaning they can combine to create in an appearance from the perspective of the contributors.

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B) was followed for this research and was developed by reviewing similar studies and also considering how best to seek out responses to questions surrounding a very private act. The interview protocol was established in conjunction with many of the questions or themes that relevant studies examined and what the goals of this thesis are. The first section of questions in the interview protocol explores the individual's daily practice of getting dressed, what external factors influence this, choosing what to wear, frequently worn garments, fashion trends, and his or her favourite season for which to dress.<sup>299</sup> The second section looked at what role the individual felt clothing played in communicating things about identity and what the roles in his or her life played in the garments worn, whether or not he or she tried to create a sense of individuality with clothing, and showing different sides of his or her personality.<sup>300</sup> A revealing question was asked toward the end of section two with respect to whether the interviewee has ever tried or tries to interpret or draw meaning from other individuals' appearances. This was asked in order to gauge the interviewee's feelings about clothing on other people. As will be discussed in the interview analysis section, this question proved very illuminating as to what the interviewees felt about clothes as a tool for communication, but also what they mean as a cloth that covers the body.

As fit and design of clothing are undoubtedly important to individuals who spend the day sitting without much opportunity to move in the chair, or without the assistance of a Personal Support Worker (PSW) or other individual, questions surrounding fit and the design of their clothes were asked in the third section. These included what specific design or construction

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<sup>299</sup> These questions were influenced by those in Frith and Gleeson's 2013 study. Frith, Hannah, and Kate Gleeson. "Dressing the Body: The Role of Clothing in Sustaining Body Pride and Managing Body Distress." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 5 (2008): 249-64. DOI: 10.1080/14780880701752950.

<sup>300</sup> These questions were developed as a result of the following studies: Guy, Alison and Maureen Banim. "Personal Collections: Women's Clothing use and Identity." *Journal of Gender Studies* 9 no.3 (2000): 313-327, and Frith, Hannah, and Kate Gleeson. "Dressing the Body: The Role of Clothing in Sustaining Body Pride and Managing Body Distress." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 5 (2008): 249-64. DOI: 10.1080/14780880701752950.

details were sought out in clothing, whether or not they own custom made pieces and why, what is comfortable to the individual and under what circumstances is comfort sacrificed.<sup>301</sup> From this the interview usually moved to a discussion surrounding how the interviewee's clothes make them feel and whether or not clothes are owned that are truly emblematic of his or her identity.<sup>302</sup> In order to have clothes to put on, these clothes must be purchased and thus shopping for clothing, how this is completed, whether or not the individual felt that he or she was an untapped or untargeted market, and the financial aspect of shopping were sought out in the fourth section.<sup>303</sup>

Finally, inspired by the question in the protocol from the study by Chang, Hodgins and Yurchisin 2014 the interviewee was asked to bring his or her favourite garment or accessory. Questions were asked regarding the piece including how he or she came to own it, any specific memories associated with it and why it is the favourite. Similar studies and articles have also completed similar activities,<sup>304</sup> but in this case the section on the favourite piece was created as a way to begin to understand what characteristics might make the piece of clothing considered a favourite for the individuals interviewed. This section also worked to elucidate the emotional relationship the individual had with the piece and how characteristics of the piece were thought to be emblematic of the self or what the piece meant to the individual. This section of the

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<sup>301</sup> This series of questions were informed by the following studies: Thoren, Marianne. "Systems Approach to Clothing for Disabled Users: Why Is It Difficult for Disabled Users to Find Suitable Clothing." *Applied Ergonomics* 27, no.6 (1996): 389-396, Wingate, Stacy B., Kaiser, Susan. B. and Freeman, Carla. M. "Salience of Disability Cues in Functional Clothing: A multidimensional Approach." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 4, no.2 (1986): 37-47, Goldsworthy, Maureen. *Clothes for Disabled People*. London: Batsford, 1981, and Cochrane, G. M. & Kelly, C.J. (1989). *Clothing and dressing* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford: Mary Marlborough Lodge, Nuffield Orthopedic Centre.

<sup>302</sup> This is an area of research covered in: Cosbey, Sarah. "Clothing Interest, Clothing Satisfaction, and Self-Perceptions of Sociability, Emotional Stability, and Dominance." *Social Behavior and Personality* 29 no.2 (2001): 145-152.

<sup>303</sup> The questions in this section of the interview protocol were influenced by Thoren, Marianne. "Systems Approach to Clothing for Disabled Users: Why Is It Difficult for Disabled Users to Find Suitable Clothing." *Applied Ergonomics* 27, no.6 (1996): 389-396.

<sup>304</sup> Weber, Sandra and Claudia Mitchell, eds. *Not Just Any Dress: Narratives of Memory, Body, and Identity*. New York: Counterpoints, 2004, and Guy, Alison and Maureen Banim. "Personal Collections: Women's Clothing use and Identity." *Journal of Gender Studies* 9 no.3 (2000): 313-327.

interview also functioned as an opportunity for the interviewee to speak and tell the story of the piece and any other relevant information that may not have arisen in the interview earlier.

In the interview protocol one of the first questions asked, on general terms, what the practice of getting dressed for the individual entails. No contributor specifically described how or where he or she got dressed other than a few details or requirements. The lack of detailed description highlights how personal and intimate the practice of getting dressed is, the body getting into clothes implies a naked vulnerability. It is this vulnerability that this research desires to avoid and thus semi-structured interviews were chosen over observation.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE AFFECT OF GETTING DRESSED

### INTRODUCTION

There is no specific language for the process of getting dressed that denotes the process of selecting clothes and the like. Aside from donning, doffing, and slimming we are limited to using words that typically describe other activities such as ‘getting’ milk, ‘putting’ the dishes away, ‘sliding’ into third base, or simply ‘right’. This poses a certain amount of difficulty for the discussion that will take place looking at the daily practice of getting dressed and the role of affect in it. Fashion historian Susan Vincent notes on a personal level while one can feel uncomfortable when he or she is wearing the wrong thing, “on a societal level, judgments about what might constitute the right stuff and the wrong stuff, and why, are manifested only very rarely.”<sup>305</sup> As a result considerations regarding what to wear when getting dressed are largely unaddressed.

It seems there is little consideration given by Western culture to the specific process of getting dressed and this is reflected in the lack of adequate language. When one is dressing, questions about how these particular garments arrived in the closet, what exactly we like about them, and why they are so ‘right’ for the day that we choose to wear them, are not usually considered.<sup>306</sup> Woodward has attempted to acknowledge and explain why individuals choose the clothes they do. She argues that by looking at what women choose to wear in comparison to what they reject, the reasons for selecting clothes can be located.<sup>307</sup> This logic, however, glosses over any number of reasons why an individual could choose not to wear something one day and then select it a day later. Furthermore it does not allow for a garment that has not been worn in a

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<sup>305</sup> Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body From Renaissance to Today* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2009), 160.

<sup>306</sup> *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with Their Clothes* looks at the personal relationships women have with their clothes and the interactions they have with them.

<sup>307</sup> Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*, 30.

month or longer to be reintegrated into the cycle of clothes worn on a regular basis. She also claims the role of ‘what’ goes with ‘what’ in clothing selection, is a result of beauty ideals in combination with aesthetics.<sup>308</sup> While this may be true in some cases, it is also entirely possible that choices of tops and bottoms are based on what is on top of the pile or next in line in the closet. Her view on selecting outfits is shallow and very style focused, not considering the role of function or practicality in these decisions. In order to better address the wardrobe moment, affect theory is applied, as it allows for factors beyond emotion to be incorporated into the decision of what to wear.

We can certainly see how as a society we view the body as dressed for work, or not for example. This is reflected in the fear of being caught in one’s pajamas by the mailman or dropping kids off at school in sweats and not getting out of the car. As P1 explained: “my closet is full of things that I will wear when I am at home and no one can see me, and they’re comfortable, but if I have to answer the door hmm...” (P1).<sup>309</sup> We do not give attention to the specific process of donning clothes other than that it happens and it can be considered stressful when you are already ten minutes late and do not know what to wear. This process is valued but not rewarded by capitalism, although the act of dressing is an example of a consumption practice that also contributes to identity construction. As judgments about an individual can be formed based of appearance, and since everyone engages in the practice of getting dressed, whether or not they are conscious of their decisions, in this wardrobe moment, we are affected by our clothes.

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>309</sup> The following notation, (P1), or any letter-number pair in brackets refers to a quote made by a specific contributor to this study. In following the research ethics for this study, the names of the contributors were converted to a letter-number alias. They include: P1, H5, T2, N7, J8, F9, K6 and X4.

Ali Guy, Eileen Green and Maura Banim coin the term “wardrobe moment” as the series of questions asked everyday regarding appropriateness for where one is going, what one is doing, and how one feels. They note moods may alter one’s choice but that this does not become apparent until the wardrobe moment occurs.<sup>310</sup> However the focus here is not solely on questions of what one is thinking, it is on what is occurring physiologically before the thought becomes conscious: affect. Here the argument will be made that there is a preconscious knowing of the appropriateness of clothes that happens in the wardrobe moment. Affect theorists Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth’s explanation of affect: “*other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension,”<sup>311</sup> allows for this analysis. This preconscious knowing may direct that one garment is superior or more suitable to other garments in the wardrobe, resulting in it being donned and perhaps consideration being given to why it is so ‘right’.<sup>312</sup>

The space where clothes are stored as well as where they are chosen from will be referred to as the wardrobe. It may be a series of drawers or different closets, but it is ultimately the place where one is surrounded by the potential clothing options and the decision on what to wear is made. The first section of this chapter will explore the role of affect in the wardrobe moment. What role affect plays in the decisions and influences on what to wear will be considered alongside the view of clothes in the wardrobe as what Sarah Ahmed describes as the “bodily

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<sup>310</sup> Maura Banim, Eileen Green, and Ali Guy, “Introduction.” In *Through The Wardrobe: Women’s Relationships with Their Clothes*, eds. Ali Guy, Eileen Green and Maura Banim.(Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001), 1-20.

<sup>311</sup> Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, Introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>312</sup> As much as there was a large discussion of ‘knowing’ what to wear or to ‘know’ when something looks suitable, Woodward never really interrogates this concept or feeling of ‘knowing’ in *Why Women Wear What They Wear*. In conditions of regularly worn clothing where her participant ‘knew’ the pieces of clothing would look suitable together, it seems they did not have to consciously consider it. This concept of ‘knowing’ seems critical to understanding why women wear what they wear, and yet Woodward does not query it. Something that is also missing from this discussion of why one wears something is why one wears what he or she wears to the grocery store or out to run an errand. The detailed examples in the book mainly surround getting dressed for a special event.

horizon.”<sup>313</sup> Furthermore, affect will be contrasted with getting dressed as a habitual practice, to emphasize the role of this preconscious, physiological response to the way one dresses. In the second section of this chapter, getting dressed will be considered as a form of affective labour, like other forms of affective labour it is not recognized by the capitalist system. This is important to note as it may relate to why there is a lack of language to describe practices of getting dressed, as it is not directly valued and thus not seen as a priority in a capitalist society. In interpreting getting dressed as a form of affective labour the ramifications of the way one dresses will be realized primarily through the frameworks of American literary theorist and political philosopher Michael Hardt and Marxist theorist and political philosopher Antonio Negri.

In the third section, the role of affect in the wardrobe moment as well as getting dressed as a form of affective labour will be applied to different bodies, specifically relevant accounts told in the interviews for this research. When one struggles to find clothes that fit and he or she wants to wear, dissidence occurs between clothes serving a functional purpose and a reflection of one’s identity. This contention is relevant not only because it may play a role in the visceral response one has to his or her clothes, but also to the view of getting dressed as a form of labour. Considering the practice of getting dressed as a form of labour is important as the initial consumption of goods, such as the practice of shopping, does not allow for a discussion of what occurs after the purchase transaction. Anthropologist Daniel Miller describes this as “considering clothing from the point of view of actually what it means to wear particular clothes.”<sup>314</sup> Labour is completed to earn the financial capacity to purchase a piece of clothing, but what occurs after the purchase and how the piece of clothing may become emblematic of the

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<sup>313</sup> Sarah Ahmed, ‘Happy Objects,’ in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 32-33.

<sup>314</sup> Daniel Miller, “Consumption,” In *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tiley *et al.* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 349.

self is important factor in understanding the relationship between clothing and affect. Furthermore, while the act of purchasing a garment may construct an identity, the future of how the garment will be worn by the individual needs to be considered with respect to its capacity in creating the identity.

### AFFECT THEORY

Affect theory as interpreted in this thesis is the preconscious, physiological arising within the self.<sup>315</sup> It is the draw of reasons and emotions by the power to act and power to be affected.<sup>316</sup> Seigworth and Gregg describe affect as arising “in the midst of *inbetween-ness*: the capacities to act and be acted upon.”<sup>317</sup> Sociologist Deborah Gambs and social theorist Brian Massumi describe this ‘inbetween’, as a third state of the body “prior to the distinction between activities and passivity.”<sup>318</sup> Massumi’s description of an arrow in flight parallels this third state. Massumi explains with the use of an arrow “what defines the body is not the movement itself, only its beginning and endpoints. Movement is entirely subordinate to the positions it connects.”<sup>319</sup> This implies the only times the arrow is accounted for is when the arrow leaves the bow and when it hits its target. This consideration of endpoints stems from the position that a body “corresponded to”<sup>320</sup> which ultimately prevents movement in between the beginning and endpoints from being recognized. This movement between positions is affect, occasionally

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<sup>315</sup> A side note on uses and theories of affect: Sylvan Tomkins’s theorizing on affect as well as his followers are avoided in this instance as Tomkins divides affects into categories similar to emotions (Shame and Its Sister’s, 1995), which is contrary to the way affect is being used in this paper. This is not to say that affect cannot become conscious as an emotion as the two are certainly linked, but for this understanding and use of affect, an affect is not directly linked to emotion.

<sup>316</sup> Michael Hardt, foreword to *The Affective Turn*, eds. Patricia T. Clough (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), x.

<sup>317</sup> Seigworth and Gregg, Introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, 1.

<sup>318</sup> Deborah Gambs, ‘Myocellular Transduction,’ in *The Affective Turn*, ed. Patricia T. Clough, (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>319</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>320</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 2.

referred to as transition.<sup>321</sup> This concept of transition as related to affect and the in-between will be revisited with respect to how it relates to the wardrobe moment and the in-between of states of dress and undress.

Affect is considered a capacity to act and be affected by something. Affect straddles both of these capacities between the mind and the body.<sup>322</sup> Philosopher Baruch Spinoza postulates that the mind acts with adequate ideas and passions rely on inadequate ideas.<sup>323</sup> To be adequate the action is part of the “agent’s nature,” which is to pursue its own being.<sup>324</sup> Different beings can be affected in varying ways by the same object and can also be affected by the same object in a variety of ways at different times.<sup>325</sup> Feminist theorist Sarah Ahmed’s use of affect reflects this theorization and also speaks to the relationship between affect and objects. Ahmed’s explanation of this relationship will be further articulated when considering the role of affect in the wardrobe.

Spinoza states endeavours to pursue the self are acted upon, unless one is affected by something external. Desire is very closely related to his definition of appetite, “to talk of a desire is to talk of an appetite of which we are conscious.”<sup>326</sup> This is a very useful explanation of affect as it assists in clarifying the questions surrounding the wardrobe moment that will be analyzed. Appetite is the same whether or not one is conscious of it.<sup>327</sup> Desiring to dress a certain way as a form of self-preservation through self-actualization will be linked to what Spinoza describes as preservation of the self. As well, affect as appetite allows for the exploration of dressing a

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>322</sup> Hardt, foreword to *The Affective Turn*, xi.

<sup>323</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. G.H.R Parkinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 169.

<sup>324</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 170.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 213.

specific way as following one's nature, but also as an endeavour of the self. In the discussion of affect's role in the wardrobe moment, appetite will be applied to the preconscious sense of knowing what is 'right' to wear.

#### AFFECT AND GETTING DRESSED

Selecting clothes can be a preconscious form of creating the self through garments and accessories, which already exist, physically near the self. The clothes in the wardrobe have been chosen for any number of reasons by the individual to become part of the wardrobe that is selected from on a daily basis. While for a large social event there may be a very conscious consideration given to what one is wearing, including degrees of formality, appropriateness, making an impression, and what clothes the individual owns that would be suitable. This differs from the quotidian practice of getting dressed. Dressing for work, for example, is a routine process where little conscious consideration may be given. This chapter argues the daily practice of getting dressed is influenced by the affective response to the clothes in one's wardrobe, and while there may be conscious consideration given to the last look in the mirror, why these clothes are selected is not always a conscious decision.

What causes different levels of awareness or consciousness when getting dressed, such as why on certain occasions the selection of clothing may be more methodical than others, is an aspect important to consider as the level of consciousness may indicate something of the situation or interaction for which the individual is preparing. The selection may be based in a routine of what has always been worn, but specifically why these clothes are selected may be a result of an unarticulated appreciation for the way the clothes look on the body, what they symbolize to the self and what they may symbolize to others, that draws the wearer to them. It is

the “not that, not that, not that, maybe, okay this will work” to which is being referred, either as a mental checklist or a literal donning and doffing of clothes.

What is meant by “this will work?” Or as N7 described “it’s about looking decent, and I’ll look in the mirror and think ‘yeah I think this works’” (N7). It is in this moment or realization, that affect plays a role in a way of preconscious knowing; the visceral response that makes it clear a certain garment should or should not be worn. While this is a discussion of clothing it is not focusing on the physical response to it being warm or cool, physically comfortable or uncomfortable, but in the sense that clothes have the ability to create a visceral response. This visceral response is the role of affect in the wardrobe. However, there is not only the reaction in the self with respect to something in the piece; an affect can also be created in another individual. This specifically will be more explored in greater detail in the section on getting dressed as affective labour.

What is being discussed here is not the deliberation of colour coordination or the choice of what to wear to a company party; here we are looking at getting dressed as a habitual practice.<sup>328</sup> The things we choose to wear, how they come into our wardrobes and the way we wear them, these are unique to the individual. The selection process of getting dressed can be completed through habitual motions, whether the typical morning routine or simply just picking something to wear. However, because the selection may be based in habit, this does not mean it is unintentional.<sup>329</sup> The notion that this top goes with these bottoms, is done so naturally, it is a preconscious movement towards an object, here a piece of clothing: “It is usually the first shirt in the closet, because I wear a shirt and dress pants for work” (N7) or “I just grab whatever is

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<sup>328</sup> This discussion of the habitual practice of getting dressed could relate to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* especially as manners of dress are arguably related to concepts of class. (Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Judgment of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (USA: Routledge, 1984, originally published 1979).

<sup>329</sup> Ruth Leys, ‘The Turn to Affect: A Critique’. *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 455.

next on the pile, (laughter) or whatever I happen to feel like putting on” (X4). It is important to note however, that habit is not necessary for affect simply because one can have a visceral response to something he or she has not previously encountered, such as a new top or dress when shopping.

The preconscious, physiological response that draws one to a garment could be towards a new item of clothing. This is relatable to Spinoza’s thoughts on appetite. The choice of a specific top to match a bottom may be a result of an “appetite” and results in a desire, a conscious appetite. The choice of a specific top to match a bottom could be a result of an endeavour of the mind and body. While the initial ‘match’ of a top and bottom may start as an appetite, as preconscious, it becomes a desire when one becomes conscious of the match. The ‘right’ feeling of an outfit or garment does not change whether it is preconscious or conscious. Affect is described by Hardt as making the connection “between the mind’s power to think and the body’s power to act, and the power to act and the power to be affected.”<sup>330</sup> This relates to the series of choices, and thought processes, conscious or preconscious, that occur in the wardrobe moment. The mind is perhaps considering the functionality, appropriateness, and the reflection of the self, while the eyes move along the clothes on the rack in the closet and viscerally respond to each one’s suitability. This preconscious response is guiding before the conscious donning of what will be worn.

A movement toward and away from objects as a result of affect is a concept Ahmed explores in *Happy Objects*. Ahmed considers happiness as an occurrence where one is affected by an object, with intentions, and an opinion on this object.<sup>331</sup> While in the argument here<sup>332</sup>, the

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<sup>330</sup> Hardt, foreword to *The Affective Turn*, xi.

<sup>331</sup> Ahmed, *Happy Objects*, 29.

<sup>332</sup> While in the other chapters of this thesis emotions are considered, this current exploration is considering what occurs before emotion.

emotion created by the object is not of concern, the relationship we have with our clothes, the way our clothes affect us by creating a preconscious physiological response, is very similar to the way Ahmed discusses ‘happy objects.’ The affect that arises as a result of being affected by a piece of clothing, although the connection with the object may not be realized until later, is what directs us towards or away from certain things.

Ahmed notes that happy objects, ones that are desired for their promise of happiness, function as social goods.<sup>333</sup> Although the purpose here is not to explore what emotions may arise from different objects and what promises they may or may not seem to possess, there is no doubt that clothes are social goods. Fashion and textiles professor, Jennifer Craik writes: “clothing the body is a technique of every social body through which the physical body is actualized in its habituses.”<sup>334</sup> Similarly English literature professor John Harvey notes clothes “can give you away: they can give away your income, a vulgarity, a failure of cool.”<sup>335</sup> Not only do clothes appear indicative of one’s character and status, they are also a reflection of the culture: political and socioeconomic realities are apparent in the way individuals dress and take care of themselves, and thus they are closely related.<sup>336</sup> Affect plays a role in the decision making process that is a cultural reflection on one’s body and lifestyle as one navigates the question of what to wear.

According to Woodward there are constraints that prevent women, in her study, from wearing whatever they want and being whatever they want. These include: the moment when deciding what to wear and having to commit to only one ‘look’, clothing in the sense of what else it matches and the meanings it carries, and that clothing carries potential meanings that

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 223.

<sup>335</sup> John Harvey, *Clothes* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 43.

<sup>336</sup> Cavallaro and Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame*, 15.

others might affix to it which were not intended.<sup>337</sup> Instead of being constraints, these should be considered the realities of clothing and specifically the reality that, in Western culture, we do assign meanings to clothing and appearances and these meanings will be used to interpret something about the individual. These so called constraints are constraints that everyone faces when getting dressed, and therefore they cannot be called constraints and should be considered the realities of wearing clothes.

Ahmed continues her examination of affect with respect to objects by stating, “affect is what sticks, or what sustains, preserves the connection between ideas, and objects.”<sup>338</sup> We have a connection to our clothes as objects, which speaks to our values and ideas. This may be completed through an unconscious attraction to the piece of clothing as is currently being explored. While they are not always accurate, clothes serve a role in making impressions, as pop culture researcher Claudia Mitchell explains, “how we dress can be read as an expression or even an extension of multiple aspects of our identities, or as a way to narrate aspects of the self.”<sup>339</sup> These clothes have entered our closets because we put them there, perhaps because they serve a functional purpose, or they are a beloved gift. Nonetheless the collection of clothes states something about our identity, our roles, relationships, and our tastes. By choosing as a result of an affective response we are not only communicating something about the self, part of the decision to communicate was made by the role of affect in the wardrobe.

Furthermore, we cannot forget that wearing clothes is experiential. How our body moves in the world is certainly influenced by the clothes we wear, and the attraction to them, influences the wardrobe moment. Ahmed writes: “I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the

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<sup>337</sup> Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*, 81-82.

<sup>338</sup> Ahmed, *Happy Objects*, 29.

<sup>339</sup> Claudia Mitchell, “Fashion for the Soul,” in *Not Just Any Dress*, ed. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 261.

unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency how we are touched by what we are near.”<sup>340</sup> The concept of nearness, when considered in relation to the wardrobe moment, articulates nearness physically, but also of the self: the visceral response and subsequent attraction to something signifies one’s tastes. By wearing clothes, the way they fit our bodies and how we subsequently move in them demands our awareness of them and our relationship with them, here explicitly considered with respect to how clothes fit.<sup>341</sup> Affect exists in relation to all the other movements and conscious thoughts that are occurring at once, and cannot be isolated from them. The instinctive movement toward or away from, in the wardrobe moment, Ahmed would argue shapes what is near us in comparison to what is not: nearness implying our likes. Clothes are gathered around us, whether they are on our bodies or around us when we get dressed. What we adorn our bodies with is guided with a preconscious affect, and this affect may play a role in our likes and dislikes because of what ends up on what Ahmed calls our “bodily horizon.”<sup>342</sup>

#### ITEMS ON THE BODILY HORIZON

Ahmed describes this sense of bodily horizon as the area near us that is filled with objects or things that are satisfying; the bodily horizon becomes a “horizon of likes.”<sup>343</sup> Considering clothes one would assume that if they are on the body, then one must like them, but this is certainly not always the case. However, the bodily horizon considered as a canvas, where our likes are displayed and dislikes only indicated by their absence, is an interesting perspective on the clothes that exist in the wardrobe. The body can be considered as a ‘clean slate’ onto

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<sup>340</sup> Ahmed, *Happy Objects*, 30.

<sup>341</sup> Mitchell, *Not Just Any Dress*, 262.

<sup>342</sup> Ahmed, *Happy Objects*, 32.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

which anything can be imprinted and while this could speak to tattoos or piercings, clothes are a way of creating the identity of the body as a continuation of it.<sup>344</sup>

Ahmed notes we approach and distance ourselves from objects in correspondence to how we are affected by them.<sup>345</sup> If we return to the wardrobe moment, when one is getting dressed, going through the different motions, choices, and the like, affect exists in the habitual choice and styling of clothing. Considering how Spinoza described being affected by an object, and that one may be affected by the same object differently at any given time, this articulates or allows for the exploration of how sometimes a shirt is ‘just right’ and how other times it simply ‘does not work.’ This also describes certain styling practices; for example rolling cuffs. As an action, which begins as a decision in the mind and evolved toward a movement of the body, it is a habit located between activity and passivity. Why does one roll his or her cuffs? Because it may simply seem ‘right’; this is the role of affect in the wardrobe, and yet the way one is affected by a rolled cuff, even a month from now, may be different.

#### GETTING DRESSED: AFFECTIVE LABOUR

Returning to the knowledge that society makes judgments based on what one is wearing, in this section getting dressed as a form of affective labour will be argued and explored. As clothes are used as a way to discern something about character, values, and manner of an individual, and donning clothes is a requirement of appearing in public, an individual must get dressed in order for these judgments to be made. As noted through SI, one’s dressed appearance plays a role in social interactions. Thus getting dressed is a form of preparatory work from which conclusions about character are determined. These assumptions may potentially have larger ramifications in one’s social and personal life. For example, F9 explained “it’s hard to find

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<sup>344</sup> Lars Svendsen, *Fashion a Philosophy*, trans by John Irons (London: Reaktion Books: 2006), 76-77.

<sup>345</sup> Ahmed, *Happy Objects*, 32.

something I can roll with that's trendy, that I can fit into, that doesn't like you know, I don't know on the days that I would want to wear something more revealing I always don't because I don't want, I don't want that or those situations" (F9). F9 chooses to not wear the clothes she desires to at times, as she is conscious of what others she interacts with might interpret from her appearance and the type of attention given as a result.<sup>346</sup> What is unique to affective labour, in all its forms according to Hardt is how, "the body and the mind are simultaneously engaged, and that similarly reason and passion, intelligence and feeling are employed together."<sup>347</sup> A personal support worker (PSW) assisting an individual in getting dressed is easily considered affective labour and with further discussion, getting dressed itself will also be viewed as a form of affective labour. In different ways, reason, passion, intelligence, and feeling can be located in the practice of getting dressed. Whether it is drawing upon past experiences, practicalities, a passion for one's personal style, the tactile response or emotion evoked by a piece, these considerations allow for getting dressed to be considered affective labour.

Here affective labour will be considered as a category under immaterial labour, where these affects are produced, such as the relationships and interactions with other people that create and manipulate affects.<sup>348</sup> Affective labour creates, according to Hardt, "social networks, forms of community and biopower."<sup>349</sup> Clothing can denote a community based on appearance and even a larger sense of belonging. It can also display social capital, and in following trends or dressing in a particular way, such as wearing a uniform, wearing clothes can be seen as a form of biopower. All of these affects of clothing require daily interactions between people, but can also be felt by simply donning the garment. And while dressing a certain way may play a role in

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<sup>346</sup> As had just been discussed in the interview, F9 was explaining how she did not want to be stared at for wearing revealing clothing, thus the wrong type of attention is the objectification of her body.

<sup>347</sup> Hardt, foreword to *The Affective Turn*, xi.

<sup>348</sup> Hardt, "Affective Labour," 94.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

getting a job, or give a sense of belonging to a group, the labour put into this appearance is invisible – something noted in Hansen’s research. Only those that have an intimate relationship with the individual may be aware of the lengths he or she goes to, to follow the current trends or appear as a professional everyday. Appearances based in clothing choices are often taken for granted and rarely remarked upon, let alone rewarded.

Affective labour creates meaning from which value is derived. Sex work researcher, Melissa Ditmore, defines affective labour as “work that aims to evoke specific behaviours or sentiments in others as well as oneself, rather than it being merely about the production of a consumable good.”<sup>350</sup> To label the practice of getting dressed a form of affective labour, it must be established that the individual derives value from one’s appearance, either directly, or by those who interact with this individual. For example:

Just finding attendants who get it is really the...because I can't don and doff myself anyway I kind of have this conversation with you know my attendants of, like most of them I've had since I made the switch so they are used to it... but you just, they get it and they get that I want to, that I want to, you know put a lot of effort into my own appearance and I'm lucky in that I'll say to that of my three attendants are very much that same way, they like to put a lot of effort into their own appearance and so they, they understand when I do and are willing to spend those extra three, four, five minutes to make sure everything is good and I'm not sitting on any seams and you know the sweater's not pulled to one side kind of thing. (J8)

Labour here does not result in a consumable product, or really even the outfit or appearance; it is what occurs as a result of this mode. Value can be found on the individual level, dressing for one’s own satisfaction, or on the level of interactions with others, such as professional relationships. In order to explore value generated as a result of one’s dressed appearance; Spinoza’s concepts of *affectus* and *affectio* will be utilized.

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<sup>350</sup> Melissa Ditmore, “In Calcutta, sex workers organize,” In *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia. T. Clough and Jean. O. Halley, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 171.

Spinoza describes affectus as emotion and emotion for Spinoza is “an increase or diminution of the power either of the body or of the mind.”<sup>351</sup> Affectus here is employed to describe the power of the mind and body, as evidenced through the dressed body. Individuals select their clothes for any number of reasons, but what is important is the clothes are selected in a way that creates meaning or value for the individual. This occurs through aesthetic pleasure as described by social sciences researcher Nigel Thrift, as “an *affective* force that is active, intelligible, and has genuine efficacy; it is both moved and moving.”<sup>352</sup> This not only describes the affective response to one’s own clothes, but also articulates how through a practice seemingly practical, can be largely influenced by sentiments of taste and attractiveness. This was exemplified by X4 who described herself as a “plain Jane”, primarily choosing clothes for function, and yet she had specific qualities she was looking for in clothing but also in her own appearance. It is also possible that one could derive value from feeling comfortable in clothes or fitting in or identifying with a social group. Through forms of dress belonging can be visually established. An easy example of this sense of belonging is the wearing of sports team jerseys or other team paraphernalia. Value can also be located in having a pair of pants that fit “just right.”

Affectio encompasses how one’s body is affected or influenced by the actions of another body.<sup>353</sup> In this response we have the role that clothing plays in interactions. While clothing or appearance may not be as actively involved in relationships as speaking and physical gestures, one’s appearance certainly has an influence on the nature of the interaction and the meaning awarded to it. Appearance is involved in the non-verbal communication between individuals and through relationships and interactions meaning is created. One may consider the process of

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<sup>351</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 60.

<sup>352</sup> Nigel Thrift, “Understanding the material practices of glamour.” In *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 291-308. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 292.

<sup>353</sup> Megan Watkins, ‘Desiring, recognition, accumulating affect’. In *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 269-285. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 269.

dressing for professional roles that are established through appearance. J8 described his own experiences in public speaking with respect to his own appearance.

In doing this speaking thing, also because of my organization, ORGANIZATION NAME, I do a lot of speaking engagements to the sex positive community. And often the sex positive community, like to look good. And so you need to kind of fit in with the whole hipster you know ‘looking good’ kind of vibe (J8).

Another example of dressing to evoke an emotional response was articulated by K6’s description of her style:

The funky, the somewhat unique style, because it's to shake, to jar people out of their preconceptions about who I am. And make, once you jar people out of that preconception, about the poor little pitiful cripple who is just sitting ... and doing that, once you shake people out, you have a chance to bring them in to see you for you (K6).

These examples of clothing and dressing as a conscious way of looking professional or communicating aspects about the self are a form of value creation in the interaction between individuals whether in a professional setting or not.

The work completed to dress the body, with great contemplation or not, is culturally specific and largely invisible. Yet value is found in what the appearance helps to establish. Similarly if one thinks of the celebrity who hires a stylist to control a dressed appearance, the stylist completes the affective labour, and the celebrity through the stylist, vies for the attention of the media. Appearing on ‘best’ or ‘worst’ dressed lists is a way of manipulating affects in viewers and commentators that is key to immaterial labour belonging to culture industries.<sup>354</sup> Being dressed is an immaterial good. Whether or not it is on the scale of celebrity or getting dressed on a day-to-day basis, value is created in the subsequent interactions that are influenced by one’s appearance.

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<sup>354</sup> Hardt, “Affective Labour,” 95.

As value is indeed found in appearances, consideration needs to be given to the implications this has for a practice that is completed every morning in the wardrobe moment and may require assistance. Establishing getting dressed and the resulting appearance as something that value can be located in, either the aesthetic appeal or in the interactions the individual has with others, seems to contradict the amount of time spent on it. Although judgments are made based on appearance, the prevalent view promoted by popular culture is that little effort or consideration should be put into what one wears.<sup>355</sup> If we recognize getting dressed as an important action, something that speaks to our physical bodies and our relationship with them as well as our social interactions it seems that more consideration, time and even language should be given to it. It is clear that getting dressed is a form of labour and as the product is immaterial, it is affective labour.

Getting dressed, the resulting appearance, and the role it contributes in creating meaning in our relationships and interactions qualify it as a form of affective labour. Sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato explains that immaterial labour is a combination of two types of ideas: informational content, and cultural content. For the argument of getting dressed as a form of affective labour, it is important to focus on the cultural aspect, as the former refers to an information economy. Lazzarato notes that activities that are based on information and culture are not usually defined as labour: “kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.”<sup>356</sup> This reflects part of the process that occurs when getting dressed. The kinds of activities

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<sup>355</sup> For examples of hastening the morning routine see: Timothy Gower, ‘Steal His Routine.’ *Prevention*, September 2005. <<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/212751538?pq-origsite=summon>>, Danielle Pergaent, ‘How to Speed Up Your Morning Routine’. *Allure*, June 2013. <<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/1411849688?pq-origsite=summon>>, Rebecca Davis, ‘Saving time on your morning routine.’ *Redbook*, September 2005. <<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/222204653?pq-origsite=summon>>

<sup>356</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” in *Radical Through in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paul Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), 142.

involved in representing cultural standards including fashion and tastes, are established by what is consumed, as well as the labour involved including the cultural capital of what to buy, shopping itself, washing clothes, ironing, and taking items to the dry cleaner. These practices are represented on the body through wearing clothes and the socioeconomic status they can imply. From this presentation of the self one can find value or others can find value through the meaning of the interaction.

In physically caring for another, affects are produced and yet they are immaterial which makes their value difficult to measure within the current capitalist system.<sup>357</sup> Capitalism does not show individual care as valued or vital this, including the assistance required to get dressed. It is the personal satisfaction, social relationship or attention that is a result of the manner of dress that is valued. While the time it takes to get dressed could provide a measure of value by which getting dressed is incorporated into the economy, the value created by the appearance of the individual, to others or the self, is immeasurable. Perhaps through the “social networks, form of community and biopower”<sup>358</sup> an appearance produces, labour could be valued as it is only *on* the body that such labour appears.

Hardt describes affective labour through which collective subjectivities are produced, and “ultimately produce society itself.”<sup>359</sup> Can collective subjectivities be found in the labour of getting dressed? Are there instances where knowledge that is not verified individually is used in the practice of getting dressed? This may include the general rules of dressing such as black socks with black pants, as opposed to blue socks, and yet there are many instances where this knowledge is transgressed resulting in a potential trend. The nuances of getting dressed, and how

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<sup>357</sup> Hardt, ‘Affective Labour’, 96.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 89.

the practice itself lacks a language with semantics descriptive of it, exposes the lack of value placed on getting dressed as seen through its inability to be valued by the economy. While the initial purchase of a piece of clothing is easily traced, how and when the garment is worn is not as easily identified. As judgments of character are made based on one's appearance, especially when Goffman considers one's appearance as a presentation of the self, the active wearing of the garment contributes to this judgment and interactions. By not having a specific way of expressing the act of getting dressed in addition to its absence from the political economy, the discussion of getting dressed remains a relegated area of study often deemed frivolous. This is certainly an area of research that requires further exploration.

#### GETTING DRESSED AND DISABILITY

If value is derived from the way that one appears, not only from self-reflection, but also in the attention received by others, what happens when one cannot wear what one would like to wear? For example: "if it is comfortable and if it feels right, because I can only wear certain things and if it's not comfortable and it doesn't feel right then, I completely stay away from it – certain items" (T2). Outside of wearing a uniform for work, what does it mean if the individual *could* wear different clothes that he or she would dress differently if he or she had access? Affect is a capacity to act, a potential that straddles both mind and body. The preconscious, visceral response that plays a role in getting dressed, through choices made by an unconscious habit, a going through the motions and yet, this comes up against the reality of the body. What if everyday is a negotiation of what fits and what is comfortable? The choice of what to wear inevitably comes down to what is in the closet and for some individuals what is in their closet is a reflection of functionality and availability, not their personal aesthetic.

With the awareness that through appearance impressions are created, the affective labour completed to get dressed may not give the desired attention or value. Such as the value one may find in his or her own style of dress and appearance or the perceived value as a result of interactions with others. The clothes, time or energy available impedes the labour of getting dressed as was discussed by a few contributors (F9, K6, T2, and H5). The role of affect in the wardrobe as a preconscious response and the affective labour individuals complete to get dressed are tangled in the realities of their bodies and the clothes available that fit these bodies. Anthropologist Mary Douglas explains through her concept of social and physical bodies that each has an enabling and constraining relationship with each other, “there is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other.”<sup>360</sup> Entwistle sums up Douglas’s two bodies explaining that they “constitute the totality of our individual experience of embodiment – the physical body (the biological, individual body) and the social body (the body demanded by our culture).”<sup>361</sup> Our individual, physical bodies are for a lifetime, unless altered by cosmetic surgery, dieting or fitness binges, and there is little to do if one’s body does not correspond with the current ideal.

From this negotiation of finding clothes that fit and are functional, we enter into the discussion of how clothes as identifiers can be misleading for anyone, but specifically those with different bodies or physical disabilities. It seems here clothes, while they are desired for their comfort and functional qualities, such as a person with a mobility disability finding sweat pants or track pants the most comfortable bottom for them to wear, indicate an identity or stereotype that is misleading or that wearing ‘comfy’ pants is not socially appropriate. What role does affect play here? Is there both a movement towards and away from the pants in the wardrobe moment?

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<sup>360</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (2nd ed.). (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003) 72.

<sup>361</sup> Joanne Entwistle, “The Dressed Body,” In *Real bodies: A Sociological Introduction*, edited by Mary Evans and Ellie Lee, 133-150. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK; New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002),138.

The contention of not wanting to give the impression of a slob as a result of dressing in comfortable clothes, but the practicality of the garment trumping one's decision may be in the wardrobe moment, but reality of the lack of options and the necessity of both comfort and function supersede. Or what decisions are influenced by the amount of time available with a personal support worker or attendant – not what the individual is drawn to, but what other factors 'necessitate'.

Is it possible that the physical realities of wearing a garment are part of the affect experienced with it? Affect may play a role in the visceral response to a skirt that may be attractive, but is avoided because one 'knows' that sitting in it for more than a few hours will be uncomfortable, an example given by F9 about pencil skirts. One may consider a pair of pants that slide low in the back and which are therefore difficult to wear in a wheelchair, or a button-down shirt whose small buttons present difficulty for hands with limited mobility to fasten as was explained by H5. Unfortunately the scope of some of these questions goes beyond the purpose of this chapter but it is important to note how the affective labour of getting dressed as well as the physiological response to clothing can be hindered. Additionally, the lack of language to describe the daily practice of getting dressed may also influence the lack of attention given to those with different bodies and their relationship with their clothes.

#### CONCLUSION

Affect exists in the wardrobe moment as a preconscious visceral response that draws one to or away from a piece of clothing. Affect swirls with the conscious questions of appropriateness, what is on the to-do list for the day, perhaps even one's mood, time available, and assists in the decision of what to wear. Even when the choice is not being consciously considered, affect plays a role in the habitual selection of what to wear. Affect guides the choice

in a preconscious way and provides a more satisfactory mode through which to examine the forces that influence one's appearance, than the concepts proposed by Woodward. This visceral physiological response and a movement towards a garment indicate that it is right for the occasion. Affect describes the feeling that something is right or will not work: the intuitive response to the outfit in the wardrobe moment. For example, "If I have something in my head, what I want to look like that day, I know what it is, and when I see it, then it's right. If I don't see it, then don't show me other things" (N7).

The selection from the clothes in the wardrobe that we arguably like because we have brought them into the space, come to say something about us. From Ahmed we can see how the garments we choose to adorn our bodies with can be a reflection of one's likes, and are used by society to make judgments surrounding what one might be like. Whether or not this impression is accurate is a different matter. However, there is awareness that what one wears as a result of one's own affective response will be appraised by others, and this is where clothing and getting dressed becomes a form of affective labour.

The affective labour of getting dressed speaks to the derivation of value from dressed appearance on the personal level or the group level. Getting dressed, without a specific role in mind is an invisible form of labour as we expect people to be clothed. While one's professional role may impact the way one dresses as noted with the examples from the interviews with J8 and K6, these efforts are valued yet not directly awarded by the capitalist society. As well, meaning can be drawn from one's own appearance, whether it is based in aesthetic appeal or the sense of belonging it awards. For these reasons getting dressed belongs to the category of affective labour.

As was noted in the introduction, there is a lack of language not only to describe getting dressed, but also the different practices, series of decisions or criterion that are worked through

in the wardrobe moment. The in-between of ‘getting dressed’, as has been explored, is far more nuanced and is a result of conscious or preconscious thoughts that are not accounted for with the phrase ‘getting dressed’. Thus there is a need for terms and phrases that more accurately describe not only the role of affect in the wardrobe moment, but the feelings, thoughts, questions and moods that influence what one wears. By having specific words through which the process of getting dressed can be more accurately articulated would allow for attention to be drawn to individuals excluded by fashion design.

Returning to the transition of becoming that Massumi outlines with the arrow, our language only refers to the beginning and endpoints. It does not give attention to what occurs in the transition, from undressed to dressed. There are even less with respect to the reason that clothes are chosen. ‘It was the right thing’, right in comparison to wrong in an area that is murky to begin with. Did the physiological response make it ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ or was it one’s mood? More attention needs to be given to the intricacies of the wardrobe moment with respect to affect, but also the perspectives of different bodies in this moment as there are many groups left out of mainstream fashion design.

## CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

The following sections explore the contributors' perspectives on clothing, appearance, and design. As a result of the interviews, it was found that many of the individuals 'make do' with clothing available on the mainstream fashion market that was not designed for the seated body. This was made clear through the discussion in almost every interview surrounding pants, a garment that from the views of the contributors to this study, can be considered the epitome of 'making do.' 'Making do' describes the reality that clothes are not designed for the seated figure and that clothes must be sought out that are good enough or adequately serve their needs. Pants serve as an example of the fact that very little clothing is designed and accessible to persons with mobility disabilities, but also conjures questions of what bodies are prioritized in clothing design. It will be shown in the analysis that bodies with physical disabilities are not a priority in general, as a result of the medical view of disability, and that the needs and wants of individuals with physical disabilities are not considered in clothing design – even in the small collection of clothes that are designed for individuals with physical disabilities. The final section of analysis argues that as a consequence of the influence of the medical view of disability on the perspective of society, stereotypes of physical disability are perpetuated through an appearance beyond the control of the individual due to the lack of clothing available and the wheelchair as a symbol of physical disability.

## ANALYSIS SECTION ONE: FANCY-PANTS

### Introduction

In this section, the interview analysis will focus on pants. In the interviews conducted pants, and whether or not they are even worn, was a garment that arose frequently in discussions of finding clothes, fit and comfort. Beyond what can be considered practical concerns, pants also function as a means by which the day-to-day dressing practices of the contributors to this study can be expressed, as they are inherently involved in using the washroom and the physical act of sitting. Furthermore, the discussion of pants frequently led to the discussion of changes in the body, such as atrophied limbs, and the appearance of the lower half. This section seeks to bring together the variety of opinions and preferred methods of dressing the lower half offered by the contributors: their needs, wants and even goals. At the same time, it will begin to establish a foundation for the discussion of how clothing needs to be designed for *all* bodies.

*N7: I can't believe this conversation is about my pants...*

*Interviewer: What do you mean? This is part of my interview protocol. (laughs). You can go home and tell your wife... This will be your dinner conversation.*

*N7: it will (laughs).*

*Interviewer: 'she asked me so many questions about my pants – you wouldn't believe it!!'*

### To Wear or Not to Wear

While all of the contributors spoke of pants, not all of them choose to wear them. One contributor, F9, does not wear pants because they are simply not comfortable. While she may wear shorts underneath a skirt or dress in case of a planned wardrobe change, pants are not worn.

This was a practice that began in childhood and F9 has continued to only wear skirts and dresses throughout her adult life. Another contributor, K6, did not wear jeans for a significant period of time as a result of complications with fibromyalgia: “I used to wear jeans a lot and then I have fibromyalgia and jeans were too tight and the materials too stiff” (K6). After finding a pair of jeans that were more suitable, K6 began wearing jeans again. The low-rise style of jeans has prevented H5 from owning jeans. He frankly stated: “So when I sit down they go low, and then I don’t want my butt exposed to everyone, and it is uncomfortable” (H5). Another concern with respect to comfort and pants was voiced by N7 admitting that if he had worn jeans to the interview: “I would be dying to get home and take them off” (N7). From these brief remarks on pants, the different views and opinions on the garment are demonstrated. No two contributors had the exact same view on pants. While opinions were often shared in one area, they differed in others.

### The Waistband

Pants of some description, including jeans, track pants, sweat pants, yoga pants, dress pants, and “rockin’ blue chinos,” were discussed by the contributors to varying degrees of satisfaction. While a few did not mention much about the comfort of pants, there were certainly concerns of getting and keeping shirts tucked in. H5 and his assistant have named their practice of trying to get shirts to stay tucked into pants, especially in the back, a “deep tuck”. Others expressed concerns about comfort in jeans, specifically comfort surrounding the waistband. Many expressed how pants with an elasticized waistband are preferred: this design detail being most commonly found in track and sweatpants.<sup>362</sup> Not only are pants with elastic or stretchy waists easy to don and doff; they do not have zippers. As was explicitly described by two

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<sup>362</sup> While track and sweat pants have an elastic in the waistband, yoga pants commonly have a waistband that is stretchy, functioning similar to an elasticized waistband.

contributors, zippers can be hard to do up with limited mobility in the hands. Zippers can also make pants harder to pull on and off as the zipper length may be restrictive and may also be uncomfortable: “I have bought several pants that I thought ‘ah damn,’ where the zipper was a short zipper, so it just doesn’t come up high enough on the stomach... so it just makes it feel really uncomfortable” (N7).

While the elasticized waistband is convenient and advantageous in many situations, including using the washroom and sitting for extended periods of time, with the knowledge that the lower abdomen expands when seated in comparison to standing, wearing pants with an elastic waist is not always desirable or socially appropriate. While F9 chooses not to wear pants, she spoke of how an elasticized waist in a skirt was certainly preferred and frankly necessary. N7 explained how he specifically sought out a pair of pants with stretchy waist that did not look like a typical pair of track or sweat pants, “it just makes it easier to move around, you know getting in and out of the bathroom”. As he honestly put it: “I don’t want to wear track pants all the time...” (N7) and yet he admitted that he sacrifices comfort in pants that do not have a stretchy waist. P1 who described her desire for clothes that allow her to move more freely, articulated that while she likes her arms and legs free to move,

but not look like I am just wearing track pants, which apparently, because I talked to a lot of folks in chairs, especially those that have made the transition from being in a chair. You know? There is a heavy sort of ‘they don’t want to look that way.’ (P1)

“That way” for P1 describes the trope of slob applied to persons with physical disabilities who wear sweat pants. This notion evolves out of the perspective that persons with physical disabilities are not engaging in athletic activity and thus have no reason to wear this apparel other than being comfortable. Wingate, Kaiser and Freeman’s study found that males and females with disabilities view athletic style clothing differently. They concluded “females in

wheelchairs were more likely than males to be receptive to such styles as jogging suits.”<sup>363</sup> This was found to relate to gender ideals, and ultimately that males did not feel they should be wearing athletic clothing as they associated them with physical stamina and a strong physique, while women found them to be stylish.<sup>364</sup> This arguably plays into the stigma of the grey sweat suit and the assumption that a person with a physical disability in a sweat suit is a slob. If the sweat suit is not being worn for athletic activity, then wearing it implies one desires to be ‘comfortable’ or does not want to put in the effort to get dressed ‘properly’, which does not fit into the practices of the ideal body and what it wears.

The reality however, is that sweat pants or track pants are very practical. H5 described having difficulty in deciding what bottoms to wear when going out to a bar with friends for very practical reasons: “like if I go out I am going to have to go to the bathroom because I am drinking alcohol, but I don’t want to wear sweatpants, so it’s like ‘frig what do I wear?’” (H5). A few of the contributors spoke about how difficult it is to use a washroom outside of their home. With varying degrees of accessibility, using the washroom at a bar is further complicated by the clothes one is wearing and whether or not they can easily be maneuvered in. From these accounts of wearing pants and skirts the implications of wearing an elasticized waist are evident. Although very useful in donning and doffing and for comfort, there is a reproach for wearing pants with this design feature. Thus H5, P1, and N7 all negotiate the advantages, comfort and drawbacks, and social appropriateness of wearing pants with an elasticized waist.

Being able to easily don and doff pants, including jeans, when getting dressed was a concern of many of the contributors. T2 specifically explained that while getting dressed on the floor, “when you’re sitting on the floor and you’re trying to put pants on, not by standing, when

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<sup>363</sup>Wingate, Kaiser, and Freeman, “Salience of Disability Cues in Functional Clothing,” 45.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

you're sliding it on, it has to slide across the floor easily" (T2). It is for these reasons that he avoids jeans with different coatings or buttons on the back pockets as they make donning more difficult. K6 described how she wears pants slightly larger than she imagines she would if standing, primarily for comfort, but also because it's "easier for other people when they're helping you pull up your pants" (K6). Both H5 and N7 also mentioned their own concerns of being able to efficiently use the washroom with respect to pants and difficulties faced in getting them on and off.

These experiences showcase the contention of being comfortable, and wearing what is perceived as socially acceptable. K6 recounted that she "always tried to dress nicely, I never showed up at school in track pants" (K6), indirectly implying that going to school in track pants would have been unacceptable. P1 proclaimed at one point in the interview: "so what I'm wearing Lululemons [pants] and a suit? Or whatever..." (P1). Wearing a yoga, or stretchy style pant, as a regular or day-to-day pant is something N7 also does. His yoga-style, stretchy pants were admittedly deceiving as they could not be easily identified as an athletic style pant, and simply looked like N7 is wearing black dress pants. When asked what he thought he was communicating by wearing these pants, N7 replied: "I think it's what I am not trying to communicate with them" (N7). N7 went on to explain that these pants allow "me to be comfortable, because today if you want to wear something comfortable, it's not socially appropriate to be out in public because it's either tight jeans or whatnot, where track pants, as you said you're not supposed to do that out of the house" (N7). N7 highlights the disunity in the purpose of pants as exemplified by many of the accounts of other contributors: the pants seemingly most comfortable and functional are the ones that are noted by the contributors as being distasteful or socially unacceptable.

### Finding Pants

It is predictable, when taking into consideration the comfort of wearing pants with an elasticized waist and not wanting to appear to be ‘too comfortable’, that finding pants to fulfill these needs would be difficult. Many of the contributors spoke of frustrations when trying to find and purchase pants. As was previously noted, K6 had not worn jeans in a long period of time as she found the cut and the fabric blends used uncomfortable. It was not until she found a pair of boyfriend jeans,<sup>365</sup> brought to the interview as her favourite piece, that she began wearing jeans again. Another contributor, X4, noted that she owns a few pairs of the same jeans. Like other contributors, she purchased a few of the same garment when she found one that she finds suitable. The reverse is also a reality, N7 noted an occasion where he purchased a pair of jeans in a store for an event the same evening, to get home and try them on and realize the jeans did not fit and were uncomfortable.

Both P1 and H5 noted the difficulty of having pants custom made or having pants altered. H5 discussed the amount of work to get pants that fit well including getting dressed and undressed at the seamstress, described as a difficult process, and the cost of the alteration. He stated: “It’s just like it sucks that I have to go out and do all this stuff just to buy a pair of pants...anyone can just go out and buy pants” (H5). N7 alters pants he is willing to invest in, making the leg slimmer as he often finds pant legs are too wide. And as can be expected when having to make adjustments to clothing, P1 spoke of difficulties communicating with the seamstress to make what she was looking for and how this experience was frustrating and also expensive. Equally expensive is consistently wearing out your jeans as was expressed by T2.

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<sup>365</sup> Boyfriend jeans are a style of jean, worn by females, that is designed to fit and look as if they are wearing their boyfriend’s jeans. The leg tends to be straight and slightly baggy, and the material has often been distressed.

The participants in Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate's study expressed similar concerns.<sup>366</sup> There were also indications made by the participants that they "prefer the idea of altering normative attire over the concept of special clothing, although they recognized the technical difficulties involved."<sup>367</sup>

Since he frequently holds his hand on his leg to prevent irritation in his knee, T2 normally wears a hole in his jeans in approximately six months. As a result of having to purchase jeans regularly, T2 buys a cheaper brand, with less choice in fit and a lower quality material than the more expensive brands he would like to purchase. All of these comments speak to the variety of difficulties that have been experienced by the contributors in trying to find pants that are suitable to their needs and wants. In these situations it seems that compromises are made or the individuals continue to search for the pants that fit.

#### Cut and Style of Pants

A fascinating difference appeared in the analysis of the interviews specifically looking at pants, was the divergent needs in where the waistband rests on the abdomen, low or high, and the cut of the leg of the pants, some baggy some slim. As previously mentioned H5 avoids low cut pants, because they are too low in the back when sitting. P1 has a similar frustration, even when pants are a "regular height." She also expressed that low-rise jeans were not comfortable because of where they sit on her spine, an area that is quite sensitive. N7 noted that he found low-rise pants uncomfortable, as the waistband sits under the gut. At the same time, K6 prefers low rise because for her, the higher they are, the more "pouchy" stuff there is around the abdomen. Regarding the cut of the pant leg, the contributors who noted they have 'skinnier' legs preferred the slim cut pant, and yet H5 identified that in his experience, pants with a slim leg are

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<sup>366</sup> Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate, "Perceptions of Functional Clothing," 50.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

often low-rise. N7 alters pants to slim the leg, as he does not want them to appear baggy, and for J8 having worn clothes approximately eight sizes too large for a significant period of time as a result of trying to quickly dress spastic limbs; he now also prefers a slim fit. However, T2 seeks out jeans and pants with a larger leg so he can alter his knee braces, by pulling up the leg of the pant over the knee, without having to remove his pants first. This is a design quality that T2 specifically seeks out when shopping for pants. As the specificities noted here show, no two needs are the same. Each individual is looking for different features in the waist and leg of pants and it is imaginable that if more questions in the interviews had been addressed to the cut and design of pants that further variances would have arisen. This is because no two bodies are alike and yet with the way clothes are currently designed from pattern blocks, they are assumed to be the same.

#### Changes in the Body and Wearing Pants

What the contributors choose to wear with respect to pants is also influenced by changes in their bodies.<sup>368</sup> K6 did not wear jeans for an extended period of time after developing fibromyalgia, which made the cut and materials of jeans that she had either previously worn or tried on, too uncomfortable. P1 used to wear jeans, but as one of her legs has begun to atrophy, she no longer likes the way jeans look on her body. P1 expressed how she would find it very useful if pants could have an unobvious strip of stretchy material in the side seam, assisting in a better fit and comfort. H5 described how after the accident in which he was paralyzed, his perspective of wearing clothes changed, “Like before I would just wear sweatpants and a sweater and not give a shit at all... and like before then I would wear it like whatever, like not care, but now that I'm in a wheelchair I feel that I have to like dress nice.” While H5's

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<sup>368</sup> Considering the evolution in wearing clothes as a result of changes in the body was never addressed in any of the studies or articles reviewed for this thesis.

perspective leads to concepts that will be explored in a different section, for H5 “dress nice” includes wearing “nice” pants – not sweatpants. It is important to consider when discussing clothing more than what is currently being worn by the individual. As evidenced in the statements given by the three contributors, what they find suitable to wear now might not always have been the case. The reasons for the change are important to note as over time all bodies change, inevitably affecting what is worn.

### The Purpose of Wearing Pants

Aside from the practical reasons of wearing pants, as T2 curtly put it we wear clothing to cover up, there are other purposes in wearing pants. J8 described his favourite pants, his “sky blue rockin’ chinos”, as a way to stand out from his all black, power wheelchair. As already articulated, H5 started to wear ‘nice’ pants to create a different appearance, and N7 wears pants to be comfortable and at the same time, not look like he is wearing track pants. K6, when asked what she was trying to communicate with her boyfriend jeans, replied: “I think...who I am, that I’m kind of relaxed. It’s hard to put into words what jeans communicate. I think relaxed...a little bit of a rebel, which they still have that connotation of after all these years, which I love” (K6). It is through these examples that pants can be seen beyond their function as cloth stitched together with various seams, as something that needs to be comfortable, practical and functional, but also allow for an expression of the self. Pants are not often considered as a way of expressing one’s self or being utilized to be seen beyond the wheelchair. These perspectives on a seemingly simple garment, allow for pants to be seen as a more complex, multifaceted cultural object.

### Conclusion

The focus on pants in this section has sought to illuminate that there is not one singular design or one style that is suitable for all contributors in this study. Aside from the elasticized

waist, pants here exemplify that unlike what has been the focus in design research for persons with mobility disabilities, there is not one style or one design that works for everyone. Thoren's research noted how manufacturers find it unprofitable to design for many disabilities turn to focus on designing for one, implying that persons with a specific disability would all have the same clothing needs.<sup>369</sup> Freeman, Kaiser and Wingate's study called for research focusing on the individual and his or her reaction and perception of functional clothing, as previous research has not included such personal accounts.<sup>370</sup> While the intricacies of what design style or pattern is suitable for different individuals has been described here, the point is not to recommend which styles are best, but to comment that the design of clothing needs to be for many different bodies, their different sizes, shapes and needs. This is an argument that will be further explored in the following section of the analysis.

Whether the current trend or style season's cut is wearable and functional for individuals is rarely considered. In the style and cut changes from season to season, or over seasons, some are left out because the waist of the jeans is too high or too low, for example. Through the accounts of the contributors, it can be seen that something as basic as pants, is really not basic at all: a style preferred by a few, is disliked by a few others, and even this may change over time. By focusing on pants, we can begin to break the garment down into its basic roles: why do we wear pants? What do they do? What do they need to do? H5 wants to own jeans, as he commented: "everyone wears them and I used to wear them ... because they match everything" (H5). But he does not wear them because of the common low-rise fit through the waist. Here the ease and simplicity of a closet staple, a pair of jeans, is not easy or simple. And so if they are not a staple for some, for whom are they a staple?

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<sup>369</sup> Thoren, "Systems Approach to Clothing for Disabled Users," 389.

<sup>370</sup> Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate, "Perceptions of Functional Clothing," 52.

It is misguided to believe those sitting in a wheelchair have the same and similar needs and wants in clothing function, let alone style – something not discussed in the accounts above. Hayman noted in her dissertation that there have been a few studies that have identified individuals by disability, and not allowed for differing experiences and knowledge. With this perspective in mind, the accounts of the contributors for this research works backwards. While individuals in wheelchairs may be an easily identified group, the examples given in the interviews show that this ‘group’ has many perspectives, attitudes, and design needs. From these opinions and understandings of clothes, the next section addresses who clothes are designed for from the vantage point of the contributors to this research.

## ANALYSIS SECTION TWO: NICE CLOTHES, BUT FOR WHAT BODY?

### Introduction

Perspectives on clothing design as offered in the interviews will be discussed in this section. As will be explored, many comments were made regarding what body clothes are designed for, and why there seems to be a lack of stylish and comfortable clothing options for the seated position. These comments surfaced in response to questions from the interview protocol, specifically on personal style, what was being communicated about the self through clothing, whether or not the contributor dresses for style or function, and if he or she felt himself or herself to be an untapped market. At the same time, many of the responses that are quoted in this section were as a result of follow up questions to an answer given by the contributor. This section also touches on a theme that was prevalent in the responses from the contributors that they 'make do' with clothing that is available in stores, perhaps buying many of the same garment when he or she finds something suitable. A great example of this is H5's favourite piece, a button up cardigan, which he owns in all five colours that were available. Many of the comments made by contributors were reflections on how clothes are designed for the standing body, and thus will never look quite the same on the seated one. As a result of considering the function, comfort, and purpose of clothes, the following question arose: whom are clothes designed for? While this study is only analyzing the perspective of the wheelchair user, if approximately eight hours of the average person's day is spent sitting, it is critical to ask why more clothes are not designed for this figure.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Adrian Bauman, Barbara E. Ainsworth, James F. Sallis, Maria Hagstromer, Cora L. Craig, Fiona C. Bull, Michael Pratt, Kamallesh Venugopal, Josephine Chau, Michael Sjostrom and the IPS Group. "The Descriptive Epidemiology of Sitting." *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 41, no. 2 (2011): 228-35. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2011.05.003; Matthews, Charles E., Kong Y. Chen, Patty S. Freedson, Maciej S. Buchowski, Bettina M. Beech, Russell R. Pate, and Richard P. Troiano. "Amount of Time Spent in Sedentary Behaviours in the United States, 2003-2004." *National Institute of Health* 167, no. 7 (April 1, 2008): 875-81. doi:10.1093/aje/kwm390.

It is also important to note that many of these responses also include the contributors' reflections on the standing body. Not all contributors commented in this area, but largely those who felt they had a difficult time finding clothes or had even given more thought to design – specifically concepts of universal design did. In addition, a few contributors remarked if they could wear different things they would. This further opens the question of for whom clothes are designed. It also relates to one's identity, and how this is communicated through appearance and the tactics used, when clothes are not often suitable.

*...and they're not really made to fit anybody, ... but it's even amplified... when you don't fit the basic 'whatever', right? (P1)*

#### Who Are Clothes Designed For?

One of the contributors to this research, X4, brought to the interview a series of technical drawings of clothing and accessories that she has had her own trial and error experiences in purchasing (See Appendix C). These technical drawings are primarily concerned with function and also focused on being easy to don and doff. X4 mentioned that she had contacted retailers that had created clothing close to what she was looking for with suggestions on how to make the piece better. While these suggestions are specific to her individual interests and clothing needs, they offer an interesting perspective of clothes that should seemingly be functional. The technical drawings include fleece leg warmers, a two-piece compression body suit, wheelchair backpack, and a full-coverage swimsuit. X4 commented with respect to her designs:

I think even if you are able-bodied there are certain things that would still be hard to do. Like okay I said the compression stuff, you know like even if you are able bodied I can't see you having an easy time getting on a compression, whether it is thigh highs or compression bodysuit or whatever. Or let's say even the short sleeve swimsuit that I have. Even if you're able bodied I can't see that being easy. So it's like okay why haven't they (laughs) done this? It's like ahh! (X4)

The question “why haven’t they done this” relates to making garments designed with details to make them, especially compression ones, easier to get on and off. While this is a practical concern, in comparison to others that might be more focused on communicating identity, or having a personal style, it poses a puzzling situation: why are clothes not designed to be easier to don and doff? An answer to this question may lie in a comment made by another contributor. H5 noted with respect to designers: “I guess they just don't take the time to think about, or just they don't even, it doesn't even process in their minds that someone in a wheelchair would be using their clothing. That's got to be it” (H5). While there is no way of really knowing whom designers ‘think’ will be using their clothes, in comparison to who does, this is an interesting proposition that also acknowledges opinions of J8 and T2. J8 feels that as a size double or triple extra small that he is an untapped market, and T2 wishes that overall clothes fit him differently. Each of these contributors made these remarks for their own reasons and it is difficult to know exactly, for example in what way T2 would like clothes to fit him, but these statements indicate that currently these individuals are not satisfied with what is currently available to them with respect to clothing. This is a theme that was further articulated by F9.

### Creating Personal Style

Throughout the interview with F9, she discussed how she tried to create a sense of her own personal style, while explaining that she feels her clothing choices are too limited to have a distinct style.<sup>372</sup> As a result F9 negotiates her sense of style and appearance through accessories such as scarves and jewelry, and pulling main trend colours into these as well as her staple, long

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<sup>372</sup> It should be noted that as a result of the first interview in response to the question: “do you think you have a personal style?”, the interviewer often rephrased the question to whether or not the individual felt he or she had a style that if changed, would be noticed by others. This was in response to the contributors feeling that they had to have a ‘name’ for their personal style or follow a certain style, hipster, goth, prep, and so on. It is a result of this rephrasing that the word distinct is often used in the interview transcript as it implies it is noticeable enough that if it were suddenly changed, others would note it.

sleeve t-shirts. F9 explained: “I tend to think about the things I would wear if I could wear them and translate that into an accessory that's easier for me to wear that still shows that I, like what my character is” (F9). Not only a creative mode of dressing with what is functional and suitable for her, it speaks to F9’s shared truth that there are not many clothes on the market that fulfill her needs or that she finds suitable. This point is furthered by F9’s comment: “I think I have a style that I am okay with. If I looked differently or if there were other clothes that would fit differently, then I know my style would be different” (F9). F9 stated that she dresses more for function than style, although she tries to make her appearance stylish, she noted that many of the clothes that are stylish are not things that she would feel comfortable in all day: “I'd rather be okay; I don't want to be like pulling and squishing in, making sure” (F9). In this comment F9 is expressing how she does not want to spend time during the day adjusting or fixing her clothes. F9’s conscientious preference to wear clothes that are more practical and comfortable, instead of wearing clothes that she finds more fashionable, is similar to a comment made by N7.

### Style and Comfort

As a result of a discussion surrounding whether or not he felt that he is an unconsidered or untapped market for fashion, N7 remarked: “I can’t see why you would not make clothes comfortable ... stylish, comfortable clothes, right?” (N7). While practical and comfortable may be influenced by different subjectivities, they do certainly function on the same level. Generally clothes that are comfortable are more practical, and clothes that are more practical also tend to be comfortable. These comments brush over what seems to be a contention between style or fashion and comfort or practical qualities. From the view of the contributors quoted here, having qualities of style, comfort and practicality all exist in one garment does not seem to occur often. Yet at the same time, this does not mean that fashion is an uncompromising mode of design,

unable to be comfortable or practical, and the reverse is also true. Clothes that are practical and comfortable are not necessarily unfashionable, but from the perspective of those interviewed for this study, they usually are. As a result, much like F9's creative way of making a personal style with different accessories is an example of 'making do' in order to try and have a stylish appearance, and yet wear clothes that are comfortable and practical.

#### Making Do With Clothes Designed for the Standing Body

A theme that further explores the concept of 'making do' and for who clothes are designed for is considering how clothes are designed for the standing body. This was introduced by a few contributors commenting on a number of different facets of clothing design and style, but it also relates back to the question of for who clothes are designed, especially considering that the average person spends half of his or her waking day seated. In her 2001 article Lamb notes that many persons with disabilities "must do the best they can to locate and acquire desired garments in a marketplace structured for non-disabled users," this includes the act of shopping itself.<sup>373</sup> H5 very directly stated about shopping: "I go in [to a store] and I look at the mannequins and think 'ah I wish I could look like that' but I can't wear those things so I kind of just pick what I want" (H5). This remark, "I can't wear those things," was further illuminated by comments H5 made about standing individuals appearances. For example, "It's like I see people and it is like 'you dress so nice', it's like 'I wish I could be wearing what you're wearing'" or, "like 'oh we have the same shorts but they look so much better on you'" (H5). Here H5 is comparing himself to an individual who is standing and inadvertently commenting that he does not like the way clothes look on his seated figure. In referring to clothes in the store and their appearance on the standing body in comparison to the seated one, H5 stated, "because it doesn't look the same when you're sitting."

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<sup>373</sup> Lamb, "Disability and the Social Importance of Appearance," 137.

Two contributors shared a similar method of appreciating clothes that one knows he or she could not wear, but would if standing. Both F9 and K6 spoke of dressing up or having their respective sisters' try on clothes they could not wear. F9 told of her experiences dressing up her younger sister: "there's a lot of clothes that I would love to wear, but it helps that I have a younger sister and I make her try on ... she's like 'I am not going to buy that, I'm not going to wear that' and I say 'I don't care just try it on!' (inaudible) 'you don't have to buy it, just take it off'" (F9). And while K6 noted that she has dressed up her sister for fun sometimes, she is also weary of focusing on things she cannot do or what she refers to as the "what ifs..." What seems to be exemplified by these actions is the desire to wear clothes that will never look the same, as H5 put it, on the seated body, and yet the contributors to this study still have a desire to imagine or fantasize. H5 made a perceptive comment about the design of clothing for the seated body, "it's a different position. I feel like if someone, if a designer was like 'oh I am designing this to be comfortable sitting in all day' clothing would look different... the length of clothing, the bulkiness of clothing" (H5). And while H5 did not go so far to say that the style of clothing would be different, it is conceivable that clothes designed with the seated body as the main goal or figure, what is considered fashionable or stylish might be quite different.

### Style and Trends

From H5's remark, the discussion moves to another facet of fashion and style, specifically trends, and who can look good wearing them. Only a few contributors to this research followed trends, others were dressing primarily for what they felt looked good on them and what was functional. K6 had very pertinent comments in this area, speaking about what figure more fashion forward clothes are designed for and what body this benefits:

I think that too much is designed for the wrong body, you know? It's just like, it would be great if there was acknowledgement that not everybody looks great

in that, like yes I would love to wear certain things ... I know that you can see this is what they design for: the tall, skinny, square shouldered people. And then clothes look great on that frame because it's a coat hanger essentially, but for the rest of us not so much. And then for people with disabilities not at all (K6).

K6 went on to discuss how limiting she feels fashion trends are due to their cyclical nature and began to discuss the politics of design. She commented, "Instead of going for, 'this is fashionable this year' and okay half the population can't use it at all, another quarter looks terrible in it – so flexibility. And whether that's flexibility in design, in design of buildings or its flexibility in design of clothes" (K6). K6's comment was not limited to persons with disabilities relating, "not everybody looks good in the same thing" (K6). As a result of these comments in combination with the experiences and views of the other contributors, it seems that clothes are not designed for everyone to wear. In fashion design textbooks the body that is considered ideal for clothing is typically described as "generally speaking, clothing hangs and drapes well from straight, broad shoulders. Long legs dramatize the shortness of a skirt or can carry a greater expanse of fabric in a long dress. Poses are emphasized by long limbs."<sup>374</sup> At the same time Pullin notes that design for disability has been focused on function and avoiding attention, whereas fashion is innately focused on being in the spotlight.<sup>375</sup> And while about half of the contributors to this research were not interested in following trends, clothes are fundamentally about covering the body and protecting it from the elements and surfaces. If this fundamental aspect of clothing is paralleled with the comments made by many of the contributors as explained above, it seems that clothes are not being designed with many different end users in mind, with many different, nuanced and subjective needs.

### Universal Access

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<sup>374</sup> Sue Jenkyn Jones, *Fashion Design*, 3rd ed. (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011), 102.

<sup>375</sup> Pullin, *Design Meets Disability*, 15.

What is intriguing about universal access, a concept usually thought of as applying to buildings or public transit, can also relate to clothing. K6 discussed concepts of universal access with respect to clothing design, which further interrogates what body is prioritized through clothing design. K6 explained, “If you use the principles of universal access, most people can use it. Universal access is different than accessible. Universal access has more to do with everybody using ... and at the same time it’s accessible” (K6). Everyone uses clothes, but whether or not they can wear them the way they want to is a different matter. Clothes have a purpose in society in addition to protecting the body from the elements: it communicates something about the self. When clothes are not available or universally accessible, it may be rather difficult to wear and thus communicate what the individual might want to. F9 made a revealing comment with respect to this concept:

I think larger size women are not supposed to be pretty and trendy [the view of designers] no one wants to look at their bodies because they are fat and ugly and clothes are just a matter of clothes, not fashion... feel like that because like you go into stores and the clothes there are so ugly, at least here in Canada, like in the States there's a lot more options for plus size people... but here I feel like everything is so pastel and so drab looking...like it makes you hate yourself for sure, but not me like I am very quick to bounce back from that. But wow these people really want me to look like shit. Well fuck them I'm not going to look like shit. Like it's definitely harder to find clothes (F9)

The impression F9 has on the view of designers, and also the design of clothing, and how it might make an individual unable appear the way he or she wants, is very telling. She notes that she might start to hate herself, but she does not get caught up in feeling that she is not supposed to be attractive or trendy. In a sense she is almost an activist for her own appearance. This correlates with comments made in Thoren’s research, “the dominating wish among disabled people, who are able to mingle in society, is the wish to be able to choose among the clothes

available on the market, just as any other citizen.”<sup>376</sup> There is also another situation that arises when the clothes that an individual might want to wear are not accessible, specifically with respect to dress codes. K6 told a story about turning down an invitation to a black tie gala event because she did not feel she had anything that was appropriate to wear. She remarked: “I actually don’t know how to achieve a black tie look sitting down” (K6). While both of these accounts are influenced by different subjectivities and experiences, they speak to this notion of what bodies are prioritized through design and even who is served by our codes and stereotypes of clothing.

There are many expectations and assumptions tied to appearance, and how inaccessibility of clothing combines with these stereotypes is a reality for the contributors to this study. Both F9 and K6 noted that when a disabled body conforms to norms, that there seems to be less difficulty in finding clothes that an individual would like to wear, and that it is easier to dress well. It seems that clothes are designed for a very specific, standing body, and as this figure is not everyone’s, clothes are not accessible for everyone. In this case accessibility covers comfort and practicality, as well as style and having a personal style. From the stories and experiences shared by the contributors to this study an interrogation of the bodies prioritized through clothing design, with end goals of making clothes universally acceptable, was consistently noted by the contributors. This notion of priorities leads to the hierarchy of the social strata influenced by the medical view of disability, as well as the dis/abled dichotomy. Comfort in clothing is a priority that also needs addressing. As K6 vented at one point in the interview: “why are there all these comfy pants that people go into when they get home? Because it’s too tight during the day!!”

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<sup>376</sup> Thoren, “Systems Approach to Clothing for Disabled Users,” 393.

(K6). If this is in fact the case, then it is more than an issue of who is being designed for, but also what the goals of design are, specifically how clothes are being fitted to the body.

### Questioning Fit

When considering who is being designed for fit, specifically how clothes fit is a fundamental concept. How and what bodies clothes are supposed to fit, are questions that concurrently arose. The comments and reflections given by the contributors to this research spoke about the difficulty of finding clothes that fit, and they want to wear. A good fit may include comfort, an additional quality indicated by the contributors. According to a few of the contributors, clothes are designed to fit a more normative, standing body than their own. As implied with K6's comment referring to people who go home to wear more comfortable clothing, perhaps not all regularly worn clothing is comfortable even for the standing body. However this question is beyond the scope of this research.

Fit is often discussed in fashion design literature, but what defines "fit" is not. For example, Kidd notes in her study that it is the purpose of all designers and tailors to make clothes fit well regardless of the shape of the figure, arguing "No matter how wonderful a design is, if the garment does not fit the individual well, the garment and the fitter and the designer have failed in a major objective."<sup>377</sup> This latter point is critical to design in general but requires a definition of fit. Kidd does not clarify if her concept of fit means clothes follow the lines of the body closely, as is popular in Western design, or if the clothes mask the shape and contours of the body. In stark contrast to Kidd's argument is *Why it Does Not Have to Fit: Modern Fashion Explained* by author and fashion lecturer Marnie Fogg. Fogg, discussing fit looking at modern fashion explains "throughout the evolution of fashion, designers have played with the notion of

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<sup>377</sup> Kidd, "A Case Study," 170.

distortion and directly confronted the idea of fit and its relation to the form of the body.”<sup>378</sup> While Fogg does not offer a definition of her use of the word fit either, she seems to associate it with clothes that closely hug the form of the body. The modern fashion designs showcased in Fogg’s book are there to show that “there are no limits to the creative imagination in clothing the human form.”<sup>379</sup> While in Fogg’s sense of fit, the clothes are not ‘ill-fitting’ on the body, it seems that they tend to mask the shape of it. Between these two opinions on fit and design surrounding the human form, the contention of the purpose of clothes arises: are they utilitarian goods or creative explorations? This does not have to be an ultimatum, and yet not defining what is meant by fit leaves this discussion open to interpretation. The seemingly most important interpretation is how the individuals, who will wear the clothes, want them to fit, something mentioned by neither Kidd nor Fogg, but certainly top of mind for many of the contributors to this study.

Clothing serves a dual purpose, both functional in protecting the body and creating a self-image through appearance, but it seems that it does not always do both from the perspective of the contributors to this study. H5 told a story of sitting on his genitals for an entire three hour lecture before he could go back to his residence room to alter the way the pants were constricting him. He was wearing slim-fit pants, instead of an athletic style pant, to look nice for a presentation later in the afternoon as his attendant only comes in the morning. His discomfort is evidence that clothes are not always both functional and able to create the appearance desired from the perspective of those who contributed to this study.<sup>380</sup> F9 told a story of when she was younger and wore a halter top to her then boyfriend’s house to only have it nearly come undone

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<sup>378</sup> Marnie Fogg, *Why It Does Not Have to Fit: Modern Fashion Explained* (New York: Prestel, 2014), 9.

<sup>379</sup> Fogg, *Why It Does Not Have to Fit*, 9.

<sup>380</sup> This event occurred the day before the interview with H5, which made the reality that this could happen regularly, substantive.

while on public transportation. Thankfully she happened to see someone she knew on the subway, who was able to refasten the back closure, as F9 was unable to reach the hook behind her. In both cases, the clothes being worn were intended to create an appearance, a sense of self, and yet were not necessarily the most functional and frankly left both H5 and F9 uncomfortable.

A position that is very important to consider however, is that the clothes worn in the accounts above, were likely not designed considering H5 and F9. The designers and manufacturers of the pants H5 was wearing are not likely considering that it will take H5 a significant period of time to undo a belt, and even though he has had the fly of the pants converted to Velcro, adjusting these pants will still be difficult. It is also possible that if the design and manufacture teams of the top that F9 was wearing were considering the reality that someone might not be easily able to reach and fix the clasp of the shirt in the back; they would have used a different, more secure fastener. This point is important to make, as it is not a situation of a design specifically for individuals using wheelchairs, without taking their needs and wants into consideration as has been addressed. In an attempt to ‘make do’ with what is most readily available, it seems that some of the contributors are entangled in a situation of wearing clothes they like, that are perhaps not best suited to their needs. N7 commented, “The number one thing a person will hate in a wheelchair is a coat. So the trick to finding a coat, it’s got to be light and it’s got to be warm” (N7). Since the coat is not designed for someone in a wheelchair, it really is a trick to find something that meets these criteria, that was designed for the standing body, but is functional for the sitting one.

### Conclusion

The perspectives of clothing design from the contributors in this study at times tended to focus on the reality that clothes are designed for the standing body. This poses a number of

complications. As was discussed, the duality of clothing seems to become a situation allowing little to no equivocation. Either function and comfort are primary or style is. And while for some individuals in the study function and comfort were not as large of a concern as for others, this highlights the very subjective an individual needs that are to be filled by a piece of clothing. A number of contributors chose to avoid clothing that would not have the same effect or look seated as it did standing. In a similar vein, some strategically sought out clothing that looked the same in the seated position, as it would while standing. There is a negotiation occurring in order to look the way one wants to, or at least try, and to find clothing that is suitable. While on average most people sit for a good portion of the day, it is fair to say that it is when they are standing that they desire to create an appearance. At the same time, perhaps taking into consideration the seated body when designing, could change clothing design to be more comfortable for everyone, perhaps even universally accessible.

### ANALYSIS SECTION THREE: CLOTHING, APPEARANCE AND THE WHEELCHAIR

*You know I think people have assumptions about who I am. And I think everything I do on some level is about educating them that it is not the way they think... It's almost – it is a very subtle lecture of I am not who you think I am. And I think clothes is part of that, how I present myself as a part of that (K6)*

#### Introduction

This section of the analysis examines the self-reflexive views of clothing worn by the contributors to this thesis. These perspectives include the assumptions that the contributors feel are made about them based on their appearance as individuals with physical disabilities, as well as concepts of self-respect. This section also includes accounts of how clothes are used as a tool to rupture stereotypes of persons with physical disabilities. The majority of the contributors also commented on the role of the wheelchair in one's appearance, and how it can be an accessory or an identity will be explored. Furthermore, the damage to clothing caused by the wheelchair will be examined, and what effect this has on clothing worn by the individual will be noted. The contributors' feelings and views on clothing with respect to how they feel about themselves and what clothing can communicate will be considered. Finally, getting dressed when needing assistance will be reviewed, alongside the influence this has on the final appearance of the individual.

#### Expectations of Appearance From the Perspective of Persons with Mobility Disabilities

A few contributors in the interview spoke of an awareness of how persons who use wheelchairs or with a physical disability are perceived and what role their appearance plays in this identity. Some mentioned the assumptions they feel are made about them as a result of their appearance with respect to competency, income, ability, and sociability. F9 spoke about going

through the interview process for adoption with her husband, and how she became increasingly attentive to her appearance, not wanting to be overly coordinated, but not look drab either. She commented,

But in that situation it's really important for me to look as, not able-bodied, but as like as normal as possible... because I know there is a stereotype of people with disabilities who like are very limited in their fashion they don't really make [an effort], they're just kind of drab and plain and that kind of stuff. And I don't want to be that person, so I wanted to show that I was like hippy and trendy and like, but still motherly. So that, those meetings were pretty hard (F9)

In this situation, F9 felt her appearance played a significant role in the potential outcome of the home visits with the adoption agency. Her concern to look good but not too good, as well as making herself perhaps not look like the stereotype of a person with a physical disability, who does not make an effort to their appearance, is representative of a negotiation that is made when deciding what to wear.

J8 went through a significant transition after graduating university. He had previously only worn clothes that were eight sizes too large in order to make it easier to get dressed as a result of his spastic limbs. It was after coming out of what he referred to as a “pretty significant depression” that he began to think more positively about himself, and this included his clothed appearance. In a reflection on his appearance and what he felt it communicated, J8 stated: “I think that in terms of when you're wearing something that is eight sizes too big you do look, you know people, I find, do make assumptions about either who you are, or your income level or your cognitive level and I was feeling that” (J8). J8 went on to comment, “I know that I look better now than I did then. You look at photos of me back then and I'm like ‘oh dear Lord what was I wearing? I look like a potato sack’” (J8). J8 also noted that before his switch to dressing more fashionably he never used to look at himself in the mirror, and doing so was a big change.

Thus not only did his appearance at this time have potential implications on what others thought of him or what he thought they thought of him, it had affected the way he thought about himself, a form of self-reflection that will be further explored in this section.

K6 offered a potential explanation as to why there may be stereotypes of individuals with physical disabilities not caring about their appearance or not ‘trying’. She explained “There is that presumption that people with disabilities are sick, sick people don’t dress well” (K6). This comment strongly parallels the reality that when persons with disabilities were institutionalized there was no choice in what to wear and certainly no individuality, as supported by Hayman’s research (2008). At the same time there also exists the perspective from one person with a physical disability to another regarding appearance. N7 openly stated that he finds it difficult when he sees individuals with disabilities seeming to not care about their appearance:

When I see other folks with disabilities dressing in a way that [shows] they have a disability, I struggle with that. Because I, like ‘is it really a requirement because of their disability, or are they just being lazy?’ Like it drives me crazy when I see people not wearing shoes. And I have one friend who doesn’t wear shoes and his argument is: ‘I don’t need shoes why would I wear them?’ ... it makes it look odd and I think it attracts more attention to him (N7)

N7’s comment holds a number of different views on appearance. Some might argue that he wants persons with disabilities to blend in with everyone else, or that they need to try and look not disabled. And at the same time, N7’s point could also be interpreted as an argument for caring for the self, such as putting time and effort into one’s own appearance and also recognizing how an appearance can be interpreted as ‘lazy’. J8 would certainly agree with this as a result of his own style evolution and yet there are many outside factors that play a role in what one wears.

The embodied experience of wearing clothes is a social occurrence. As philosopher Gail explains “the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already

mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies.”<sup>381</sup> As we can see our social interactions make up significant parts of our lived experience and this is why it is important to understand how we go about creating an identity or sense of self through the garments we present ourselves in. However the clothes worn may not always present the intended identity. The way we understand bodies, Weiss argues, is largely done through our conceptions of our own body image.<sup>382</sup> By simply wearing clothes, the way they envelop the body, allowing and constricting its movements to “call us back to our bodies and forces us to acknowledge and deal with them.”<sup>383</sup>

While what one wears is subject to factors including income, the nature of the disability, his or her own views on appearance, and even the role of the personal support worker (PSW) the reality is not everyone can wear the clothes he or she wants. When this point was made to K6 while discussing judging individuals based on their appearance, she responded by stating: “but I think that says a lot too. That if you dress for comfort and then there’s nice comfort and then there’s slob comfort, right? And I have done both, and I do both on a daily basis” (K6). This comment acknowledges that there is no clear definition of a slob or a comfortable appearance. K6 cares about her appearance and yet she admits to dressing in “nice comfort” and “slob comfort,” although she makes a point of getting dressed in “nice comfort” even though she works from home.

What is being discussed by K6 is a sense of laziness with respect to one’s appearance, something also commented on by N7. He remarked “being in a chair doesn’t allow you to just be lazy and let yourself go, so there is a pity factor right? And they think they can get away with it

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<sup>381</sup> Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 5.

<sup>382</sup> Weiss, *Body Images*, 167.

<sup>383</sup> Mitchell, “Fashion for the Soul,” 262.

and people will pity them and who cares?” (N7). This is a contentious point to make; however when considered in tandem with K6’s view on nice comfort versus slob comfort, it makes the case for recognizing the role of appearance on the self. N7 is pointing out the notion of, ‘if I do not matter to myself, who do I matter to?’ Although one’s appearance does not always indicate the amount of personal concern he or she may have for the self, N7 and other contributors articulated there is a relationship between the two. Not in the sense that one must fix his or herself of whatever “problem” they have been diagnosed with, as would be the case with the medical view of disability, but in the sense that there is in one’s appearance, a way of showing that one cares about themselves and recognizing it may impact the way he or she feels about his or herself.

#### Rupturing Stereotypes with Clothes

At the same time, going beyond caring for oneself to take the time or request “nice comfort” instead of “slob comfort” from a PSW, is the use of clothing and appearance to rupture the stereotypes of persons with physical disabilities. As was discussed in a number of the interviews, clothing and appearance were often used by the contributors to try and move beyond being seen as ‘a person with a disability.’ H5 plainly stated he takes time to create his appearance, “because I feel like if I look put together in a wheelchair people will be more apt to talk to me” (H5). He articulated that he felt if he looked like his peers that they might be able to relate better to him. Having experienced his first year of university twice as a result of the accident that requires him to use a wheelchair, he has a very adept perspective and understanding on the role clothes can play in social interactions. H5 went on to say that he dresses nicely, “I guess to attract people as well, like people in wheelchairs aren’t like socially desirable, like for me as bad as that sounds...that I don’t have a mental disability” (H5). The perspective here is

harsh but comments on how H5 believes society sees persons with physical disabilities as having mental disabilities as well.

This view was not unique to H5. When asked what she feels she is trying to communicate when getting dressed, P1 responded:

Really human, but you know all that comes with that: feminine, put together, and I guess the more educated I get or attempt to get, you know, because there's a perception that if the legs don't work then mind doesn't either, right? But just dressing the part is not enough. (P1)

From this comment, looking “put together” communicates to the observer that there is more than meets the eye. For some of the contributors in this study, getting dressed acknowledges a deeper contention with respect to how they are viewed by society. Establishing that one does not have a mental disability is a large request of an outfit and yet it is a serious comment on how society sees or perceives individuals who use wheelchairs. Dolmage explains this phenomenon where physical disability is linked with a mental disability as “disability drift.”<sup>384</sup> K6 spoke of her goal in getting dressed openly: “I present myself in a certain way to draw you out, and then you can see me and maybe you will see a little bit of who I am instead of this idea you have of somebody in a wheelchair” (K6). It is this “idea you have of somebody in a wheelchair” that is critical. As will be noted in the following section on the role of the wheelchair as an object and part of the individual’s appearance, contributors expressed the view that they do not often feel that they are seen beyond the chair. It is the stereotype that relies on misinformation, assumptions, and ignorance, as all stereotypes do, that makes a goal of getting dressed being seen as not having a mental disability.

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<sup>384</sup> Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*, 36.

K6 noted that this stereotype played a role in her own style evolution. She commented that this change away from dressing in ‘slob comfort’ made her feel better about herself, much like what P1 commented, but also,

If I go outside, yes there is the competency, or that you know that there is a brain in here too and again to...It’s about jarring people out of that preconception because...there are times when I’m out somewhere professionally and I know people are seeing me as ‘I’m the token cripple’ on the board or committee or whatever. (K6)

This reflection in combination with those made by P1 and H5, indicate while appearance can communicate and alter stereotypes about income level, education level, and cultural capital, there is a larger stereotype at stake: the presumption that individuals with physical disabilities are not valuable members or contributors to society. This view is certainly not held by all, but the frequency such comments arose or were implied in the interviews conducted for this research made it clear this is a prevalent stereotype.

This leads to concepts of ‘the stare’, as was articulated by both P1 and K6. “The stare” here refers to the experience of others noticeably gawking or watching a contributor to this study.<sup>385</sup> K6, as noted above, tries to rupture individuals’ presumptions about who she is through her appearance. As she puts it: “I think it has something to do with my disability, because you are going to notice me anyway, they’re going to stare at me anyway. So they’re going to have certain expectations about me...and I like messing with people’s perceptions” (K6). P1 remarked when asked to further explain “the stare”:

But I’ve been stared at my whole life and I think people have a bit of a ... they don’t know how to deal with the fact that I’m attractive in the chair... standing in line wherever: the washroom, the bank machine, the grocery store. People will say out loud to my face: ‘it’s such a shame that you’re in a chair and you’re so attractive.’ (P1)

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<sup>385</sup> According to Millet, “staring is deliberate and sometime unsanctioned” in comparison to gazing or looking. (Millet, 2004, para4)

P1 commented that she tries to see the statements like the one above as people's way of trying to connect, and yet when the view is that your reality of using a wheelchair is "such a shame", it reinforces to a degree that a life in a wheelchair cannot be fulfilling.<sup>386</sup> Trying to subvert this view, through clothing is substantial meaning to communicate through dress. Whether or not it is successfully articulated is not addressed here, but what is important to note is that there is a form of disability activism occurring in the daily practice of choosing what to wear.

### How the Wheelchair Rolls into One's Appearance

Necessarily part of the appearance of the contributors to this research is the wheelchair. How it is viewed as part of the appearance varied from individual to individual, but it was inevitably a part of the 'look' in combination with clothing. It is important to remember that the analysis made in this section also includes the stereotypes of individuals with physical disabilities. This was well articulated by J8.

I remember my father in law saying to WIFE'S NAME, when she first started dating me 'it's really good that you can look past the wheelchair.' And she said, 'I don't look past it, I look right at it and I love it.' But that's a really interesting thing right? I want, as I said I want to wear bright colours because I want to stand out from my chair. I don't want to look like a floating head. And I think fashion plays a really big part in that, for sure. (J8)

This comment outlines the different tensions surrounding the wheelchair as a social object. While J8 wants to stand out from his wheelchair through his clothing and for his clothing to be emblematic of his personality, his wife sees the wheelchair, understands the stereotypes, and yet appreciates it as part of who J8 is. J8 however, noted that he is often frustrated with different aspects of the wheelchair with respect to his attempts to create a stylish appearance. "This tray is the most ugly ass fashion accessories (sic) I can possibly think of. And it makes it so no one

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<sup>386</sup> This was a theme in *Reading and Writing Disability Differently* by Tanya Titchkosky. Specifically how disability "is made into a condition which, *of course*, causes suffering. Suffering is enacted and made to appear independent of social organization of physical, mental and sensorial differences as they exist within the symbolic order and appear always in relation to the interpretations and actions of others" (2007, p58).

looks below my waist anyways” (J8). To circumvent the cropped appearance that the tray on his wheelchair creates, J8 likes to wear very bright coloured pants, which he noted works well with current fashion trends.

J8 also reflected on the lack of options with respect to the chair. J8 uses a power chair, and went to great lengths to change the colour of the faceplate on his chair. He explained that the government funding for wheelchairs only covers the standard black faceplate for the base of the chair. According to J8 it is approximately three hundred dollars to purchase a different colour. J8 sought out a green plate, which his wheelchair technician was able to find, in order to match his wedding colours. J8 remarked, “the chair is definitely a fashion accessory... and can be a really cool one... so, that's a really interesting fashion issue is the idea that the chair, they will only allow black... as opposed to letting me express with a color” (J8). Being able to choose the colour of the faceplate is certainly something valued by J8, and as it is on the wheelchair, part of his appearance, being able to choose the colour is important. No matter where J8 goes, his chair will be part of his appearance.

A contention arises in one's appearance in tandem with the wheelchair, with whether or not the individual is seen beyond the chair, or if the chair itself is all that is recognized. Opinions on this differed between the contributors. Some felt that through their clothing they could be seen beyond the chair and others felt that the chair would always be seen first. It is important to note that seeing the chair first is inevitable, but seeing the person in the chair is what is significant. H5 stated he wants his clothes to be noticed before the chair. This is undoubtedly influenced by H5's desire to be seen as social. This notion is furthered by H5's comment about the individuals he sees in wheelchairs:

The majority of the time people in wheelchairs on the streets don't dress that nice, and I feel like I kind of have to compensate, because I don't want to be

like, it sounds awful but I don't want people to stereotype that, like everybody in a wheelchair dresses sloppy. (H5)

While H5 is making a concerted effort to stand out from his chair and not be stereotyped, T2 feels that his own efforts to do so are ineffectual. He frankly stated "It doesn't matter what I wear, it doesn't matter how I wear it; I will always be the person with the disability wearing that shirt... those pants or that jacket" (T2). Both of these contributors are making valuable comments on how they feel persons with physical disabilities are seen by society. Although they have different ways of dealing with these views, they share the belief that the general public sees individuals with physical disabilities only for their disability. T2 commented, "if people were going to meet me they don't look really, nobody really looks at the clothes, they look at the chair first" (T2). Even if the chair is the first thing someone notices, whether or not he or she sees beyond the chair is what is of concern.

T2 conjectured that even if he was wearing something that would stand out in a day-to-day situation, the only thing that would be noticed was his chair. And as a result of his awareness of how striking his wheelchair is in his appearance, this has influenced the way he dresses.

...So it really, it really affected how you dress, like nobody pays attention to how I dress, because they only see one thing. So it's kind of made me a little bit more relaxed to what I wear. Because most people are very conscious of what they're wearing always has to look just so, or match, or a certain sort of label, for me I don't have to worry about that. (T2)

When T2 spoke about his favourite piece that he wore to the interview, a jacket, his dispirited view of clothing in his appearance was also apparent. He noted that while he likes the jacket, he feels that people are not looking at him for his jacket but because he is in a wheelchair. This perception according to T2, "just completely kills what the jacket was supposed to represent" (T2). What is interesting here is the extent to which T2's perception of other individuals seeing him has affected the way he dresses and how he feels he does not need to be overly concerned

with his appearance because it is the wheelchair that will be remembered, not his clothed appearance.

N7 also gave reflections on appearance with respect to being a wheelchair user and how this relates to a sense of independence and a sense of self:

I used to coach children and when – the one thing that drove me crazy is the kid would get off the [basketball] court, I used to coach track as well, and the first thing that would happen is the parent would go push the chair – or push the child. So here they would compete, at the end of the race ‘oh I’m so proud of you’ and then you get pushed off the court. And you lose the sense of independence, and I think that gets passed on. That ‘who cares I’m in a chair anyways’ you know? ‘I don’t need shoes’ or ‘I need booties because I need to keep my feet warm’ or ‘I need booties because my feet are too big ... well have you tried to look presentable?’ Where I think it’s just someone with low self-esteem or figure that because they’re in a chair: ‘who cares?’ (N7)

N7 went on to articulate that the sense of the chair as the focus would disappear with one’s personality as someone gets to know you. His views on clothing appearance and how they relate to self-esteem and dignity differ from that of T2 and yet they are commenting on the same concept. While T2 admittedly does not care to put much effort into his appearance based on his understanding of how public society will interpret his appearance, N7 makes a counterargument. N7 feels that by not caring about appearance, something he feels everyone must care about to a certain degree, that one is just conceding to the stereotypes of persons with physical disabilities. Each of these contributors has come to their own conclusion about clothing and appearance as a result of their own experiences and derived meanings. In effect, T2 and N7 are both right, many different people can interpret appearance in many different ways, and these experiences and meanings undoubtedly influence the way they dress.

P1 commented on the stereotypes of slob, assumptions of a mental disability, and not being a valuable contributor to society with respect to her own appearance. P1 has a significant

disability activism background and started public speaking at a very young age, which influences her views of ‘the stare’ and stereotypes.

I guess I always felt there was a need for education because I was so aware of it coming my way [the stare]. And okay so that maybe means I need to ‘present’ in a certain way too, in order to be approachable or to be... yep I am going to get a lot of stupid things coming my way too, but I am going to get that anyways, so let’s see if there is a way to present that isn’t necessarily a stereotype. (P1)

For P1 this presentation that is not a stereotype is her way of rupturing the perception that persons with physical disabilities are no more than the physical disability. For these reasons P1 noted that she makes an effort to do her hair and makeup well, and dress nicely as a way of unsettling the stereotype of persons with physical disabilities. P1 also commented, “if you’re going to stare at me, then make me a priority” (P1). This is a sharp way of stymieing the stare that P1 and other contributors feel subjected to. Instead of enfreaking with the attention given by the stare, P1 is calling for attention and action to the needs of persons with disabilities. It seems that much of what is the focus of these contributors’ attempts to break from the tropes of disability versus the norm, is in an attempt to call attention to the reality that the norm does not exist.

Thomas notes there is nothing more real about bodies than ones “missing a leg or the inability to make the sounds we call speech” disability is in fact all about real bodies due to their undesirability as seen through the eyes of our current social system.<sup>387</sup> This undesirability as created through our current social system is reflected onto persons with physical disabilities and seems to be evidenced through the lack of understanding and design for real bodies with human needs. At the same time the difference between ‘the ideal’ and ‘the disabled’ continues to widen “as processes of aestheticisation gather pace – a gulf that has always been wider than it is for

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<sup>387</sup> Thomas, “The Disabled Body,” 64.

bodies that approximate cultural understandings of ‘normal’ and ‘average.’”<sup>388</sup> Susan Bordo expands this sense of falling short with respect to the culturally successful image: “they are not only or primarily about the desirability or attractiveness of a certain body size and shape, but about how to become what the dominant culture admires, how to ‘get it together,’ be safe from pain and hurt.”<sup>389</sup> This is understandably something, under the current notion of what is desirable, that persons with a physical disability will never experience. This is arguably exacerbated by the absence of fashionable clothing available for the seated body. Concepts of the body ideal as seen through expectations placed on the body and aesthetics, how they blend and impact the way that different bodies are treated, is important to note.

#### Wear and Tear: The Wheelchair and Clothes

In addition to the role of the wheelchair in the appearance of the contributors to this research with respect to stereotypes, the wheelchair also influences what some of the contributors wear as it can damage clothing. Both individuals who use power chairs and quickie chairs, noted damage, the latter reporting more. F9 remarked that she hesitates to buy new clothes because she is conscious of how quickly they will likely be ruined by the armrests on her power chair or by food stains. As a result she struggles to purchase more expensive and delicate clothing because she may only be able to wear it once. There are many pieces of Velcro on the armrests of the chair, which F9 says pull on sweaters, leaving threads pulled or even holes.

Both T2 and N7 explained that they wear dark clothes as they are easily soiled. Constantly opening doors, having hands on tables, or on the wheels of the quickie chair and then putting them on their laps causes pants to become dirty quickly. N7 also noted that his shirt cuffs

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<sup>388</sup> Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illness*, 132-133.

<sup>389</sup> Susan, Bordo, “Beyond the Anorexic Paradigm,” In *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, ed. Brian S. Turner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 250.

are easily damaged in the wheels of the chair, at times causing a shirt to be thrown out prematurely. N7 also mentioned how the wheels of the chair flick up water or slush, or as P1 noted, dog poo. There are special fenders called clothing guards that prevent water from soaking the upper leg of the user, which is especially important in the winter when the water likely includes salt. P1 remarked that in the past she has brought a change of clothing with her when getting wet from the spray off the wheelchair might occur.

P1 explained the chair influences the colours she wears as well. She explained “I love colour as an artist, as a visual person, as a painter, but my chair wrecks everything, so I would wear more colour, I would wear white (gasps) - you know if my chair didn’t wreck everything” (P1). It is somewhat distressing that a piece of equipment, that also functions as part of the individual’s identity also limits what can be worn and does relatively significant damage to the pieces that can be worn. This reality of using a wheelchair, in combination with the limitations in clothing that many of the contributors mentioned with respect to comfort and function, seems to make having a favourite piece of clothing difficult, as it will eventually be ruined.

#### Appearance: Glitter and Feelings about the Self

The following section reveals the variety of different ways the contributors feel about their clothes, and how their clothes make them feel about themselves. Like the other areas that have been observed in this analysis, the views and opinions on clothing vary. Some contributors have very practical and functional views, whereas others enjoy being able to experiment with clothing and note that this has an effect on how they feel about themselves. This section of analysis does continue certain themes that have already arisen, including the stereotypical perceptions of persons in wheelchairs. It also speaks to some of the realities of day-to-day life for contributors and their experiences with clothing.

As a result of J8's clothing evolution from over-sized clothing to clothes that fit him in a way that he finds suitable, he has very positive views about clothing and how it makes him feel about himself, "...whether it be from the slob days of wearing the oversized clothes, or the now absolutely loving clothes and loving the confidence that it gives me as a disabled man" (J8). He continued and noted "I think there were a lot of times subconsciously when I was in university when I looked like a slob, and felt like a slob" (J8). Here J8 indicates the way in which his previous style of dress impacted his feelings about himself. And while J8, with the help of his assistants, makes a specific effort to get dressed in a stylish way everyday, he confessed when he eats food it often ends up everywhere. So while he is wearing what he feels to be a nice looking outfit, if no one is around, he will go out with food stained clothing. J8 laughs these situations off, and states this is just part of his daily life.

J8 admits to judging individuals based on their appearance, although he wishes he did not, he made an interesting comment with respect to his own experience and his good friend:

So I like to think that, that when I look at people with disabilities, other people with disabilities specifically, I understand the whole sometimes you've got to wear practical clothing, and yet it's hard for me not to, and this is awful, but it is hard for me not to sometimes think... Like with my friend NAME who just wears track pants all the time. Right? And I know it's because his attendants won't put him in anything else, but I've said to him and I can say this to him because we're like brothers, we lived together for six years at university... I have said to him you need to insist that you put some actual pants on... you look like Grover. Like I, I love you but you look like Grover. And, and so I think that I do. And I'd... but I'd like to think that I do out of the sense of knowing where I was and knowing where I am now and knowing what it could do for me. (J8)

For J8, clothing plays a large role in how he feels about himself, something he would like his friend to experience. At the same time he is also keenly aware of the role of one's visual appearance in society.

K6 had a similar experience to J8. She recounted:

There was a time when I would wear loose yoga pants and a loose top or something and I eventually went like ‘no this is too depressing’. Like this is a message to myself about who I am. And that’s why I made that rule that I have to wear real clothes in the house, because it makes me feel better about who I am (K6)

Feeling better about herself, through positivity, is something that K6 has been actively doing since a near death experience while in hospital. K6 decided she was going to try and be a more positive person and have a better outlook on life: “I worked really hard on positivity and finding joy every day and discovered that it is work ... and I worked very hard at not getting lost in what I call the “if onlys”. If only I could do this if only I could do that ...” and so she also tries to avoid doing this with clothes (K6). She does not focus on clothes that she cannot wear, for financial or comfort reasons. What both K6 and J8 are expressing is how clothes are not only a way of communicating about oneself to others, but also communicating something about the self, to oneself. In doing so, one is being self-reflexive and communicating sense of self-respect similar to what N7 articulated earlier.

Despite not being interested in fashion trends and what other people wear, X4 had very specific views about her own manner of dress and others. X4 is not concerned with blending in, “I dress the way I like to dress. And basically screw everybody else. Unless like I said, I don't want to look like crap” (X4). The way X4 dresses is done to “partly to communicate my style, but yeah it's mainly I want to look neat, I want to look presentable but I also want to dress in what I feel best in, you know?” (X4). X4 certainly recognizes the role of her appearance in society, and yet wants to dress in what she prefers, not a trend or specific style. This is a view that she carries over to others. X4 feels strongly that people should not follow fashion trends and should wear what they want to because they want to. Personal style is really a personal choice, to X4, not something that someone else thinks – “people should dress how they want to dress,

whatever is their own personal style, not what somebody else wants them to dress like or what they think other people want them to dress like” (X4). Seemingly, X4 does not want individuals to feel pressured into wearing something, and would rather they wore whatever they felt was appropriate, as a way of showing personal agency.

T2 would likely agree with X4, that people should wear whatever they would like to and not follow trends or feel drawn to brand name clothing as status symbols, but his overall view of clothing has become very practical. As a result of his own feelings that he is not recognized beyond the wheelchair he uses, T2 feels that clothes are just a way to cover the body:

But clothing is again, just something that you need to do, you need to have, you need to wear. It's no longer an expression of myself anymore, it's no longer a feeling you know when you put on a sweater that feels right. It's no longer a sweater that feels right, it's just something that covers me. It's lost, clothing has lost its meaning and happiness, it's kind of, it's just, it's just clothing. (T2)

T2 went on to describe this feeling of meaning and happiness as “glitter” and stated that even his favourite piece of clothing, a sports jacket, would only get a three on the glitter ten-point scale. T2 described the jacket by stating: “it just feels right. It feels comfortable. It's one of those rare things that I own that makes me feel somewhat normal. I guess” (T2). T2 commented that clothes are no longer the item that he was excited to buy and wear to school the next day when he was a child and thus they are practical things he needs to appear in society. It is fair to say for T2, that even though he is aware of his own appearance, as clothing has no “glitter” for him, he follows the basic fashion rules, and otherwise wears what he finds most suitable.

P1's favourite garment was also a jacket, specifically a red one. Unlike T2, this piece would have ranked high on the glitter scale for P1. She explained, “so I wear it, you know to events that I want to stand out. I wear it for when I need to make myself feel better” (P1). For P1 the red jacket is a piece that makes her feel good about herself. She feels the red colour of the

jacket is sexy, but also feminine; she loves the feel and the fit of the jacket, but only wears it on special occasions. The jacket is beginning to show wear, according to P1 and because she knows that she will be unable to replace it, it is something to be worn only sporadically or for special occasions. It appears that this jacket is something that P1 feels good about herself wearing, but also a piece that she cherishes. While P1 did not mention receiving any specific compliments when wearing the jacket, it is safe to say that here, it is more about how P1 feels in the jacket than the public perception of her in it.

A compliment on appearance would make anyone feel good about him or herself. However, K6 reflected that when she receives a compliment on her appearance, “It makes me feel noticed for [something] other than the disability and makes me feel like people see me rather than the chair” (K6). H5 shared when asked about receiving compliments on his appearance, “people rarely say hi and stuff so they are not going to be like ‘oh you look ... like your clothes’” (H5). So it seems that here in lies a conundrum. By and large something about another is judged through his or her appearance, but there is an additional acknowledgement aspect that shifts the judgment.

Receiving a compliment is one thing, but not even being said hello to, depending on the circumstance, is something P1 would say is like being actively not noticed. H5 cares about his appearance, as evidenced through his other comments, but he also has circumspection of his weight. H5 commented, “like I am 120lbs but when you have no muscle there [abdomen] it all just kind of like pops out... which is really devastating. So I wear it [a binder], but that’s why I like fall, so I can wear sweaters and not have to wear the binder” (H5). H5 wears his abdomen binder, which is a medical piece of clothing like a corset to assist with circulation, in order to help his figure. He does not like that his stomach is not flat, what K6 referred to as a pouch, and

this largely influences what he feels comfortable wearing. To wear clothes in an attempt to show that you are friendly, sociable or even approachable, is a purpose of clothing not often considered and to have these efforts go unnoticed or unacknowledged is unimaginably disheartening. As P1 stated you might just be trying to get across that you are human. In receiving a compliment one can feel acknowledged beyond the wheelchair, but in not receiving one and not even being addressed as evidenced by H5, can make one wonder if they are even noticed in a wheelchair, or at all.

#### Backstage: Getting Dressed

As was elaborated by some contributors, they require the assistance of a PSW, or attendant to get dressed. And thus the attendant is inherently involved in the appearance of the individual. While none of the contributors to this study spoke of difficulties in being dressed in the clothes they wanted to wear, there were past experiences, experiences of friends, and general comments that were made on the subject. As has been addressed, the final appearance of the individual will be noticed by others and conclusions drawn from this appearance. So while at first this seems to be a simple process, it has larger overtones especially when the final appearance is not the one desired. X4 shared her experience of being dressed as a child, which has had a large influence on her view that people should wear what they want to, not what others want them to wear:

Sometimes they would make me wear jewelry or you know that I didn't like wearing it for whatever reason I just did not like wearing jewelry I don't know why...or they would have me in dresses when I wanted to wear pants and you know all kinds of stuff. But in, not that they always dressed me the way I didn't want, but it just, I had no say in the matter... when you don't have a say in the matter it's like, you know, even if they dressed you in stuff that you like, it's like okay I still want to dress how, you know pick my own stuff, you know what I mean? (X4)

For X4, while she was often dressed in things that she wanted to wear, it was about not having the freedom of choosing what she wanted to wear that irritated her. As it is often the case that children are dressed in clothing that they are not overly fond of, for X4 this lack of independence to choose what she wanted carried over into other daily practices, such as what cereal was eaten for breakfast or even the opportunity to use a white cane. The opportunity to choose what to wear in this case is a symbol of personal freedom. Wearing what one wants is prerogative that may often be taken for granted, and X4 is now specifically wearing what she wants.

There is also a theme of being dressed in clothes that are easy to don and doff, often track pants or sweat pants, which is important to consider when being dressed by another person. J8 spoke of his friend who was noted earlier, and K6 articulated what being dressed in something easy to don and doff means. For K6 wearing clothes that are easily donned and doffed on purpose, “it’s part of the dehumanizing of people with disabilities is that now it is about what is easiest for others” (K6). K6 noted that when the person assisting in the process of getting dressed is a family member, the situation may be different, but a PSW or an attendant is being paid to do it, thus it really should be about what the individual wants to wear. J8 shared the experiences of his friend and one instance in particular at J8’s wedding. J8 stated that his friend whom he has known for many years, “his attendants to refuse to put him in anything but track pants” (J8). While J8 has told his friend in the past that he should demand to be dressed in something else, this appearance came to be an issue at J8’s wedding:

This friend was actually in our wedding party... and I said I don't care what you have to do you are not showing up to my wedding in pants that look like Grover. Like I just, I can't... I can't do it. But even then, he, we had said to our wedding party all black. And he showed up in a blue dress shirt and white pants and I said, ‘what happened to the all black man?’ And he said ‘my attendant just grabbed this, she was running late so this is what I have to go with’...It's *my* wedding! Come on... (J8)

This story exemplifies many of the complications and frustrations with respect to appearance, but also relying on someone else to assist in donning and doffing clothes. J8 specifically seeks out attendants who will assist him in getting dressed in the manner he desires, but in the situation described by him, how important one's appearance can be is indicated. So while it is easy to acknowledge that our clothed appearance is a representation of our identities we are as individuals, this representation may be far from our control.

This is comparable to Goffman's concept of backstage, the area where one prepares to make a performance, or appearance. Goffman notes that a performance can include more than the individual on personal terms and "team impression" can be treated as one act.<sup>390</sup> What can be explored through this sense of team performance is the role of the PSW or attendant in one's final appearance. Goffman explains that the teammates are dependent on each other to play their respective role, much like an individual who requires assistance getting dressed is reliant on his or her PSW to do so.<sup>391</sup> Important to team performance is where it is taking place. Goffman's description of regions and region specific behaviour outlines what he refers to as the "backstage": where the preparation for the performance is made.<sup>392</sup> What is outlined with the example of J8's friend is how the assistant can play a large, unacknowledged role in the appearance and thus the performance might not have been the one intended by the performer.

### Conclusion

The interdependence of the wheelchair and one's dressed appearance, as told by the contributors to this study, is a multi-layered relationship. Much of the conclusions based on the contributors' appearance seem to be largely out of their control, as a result of the prevalence of stereotypes that represent how society views and treats persons with physical disabilities.

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<sup>390</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 80.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Dressing in clothes to problematize perceptions of persons with physical disabilities as not being valued members of society, not having a mental disability, being educated, social, and even human, is a profound intention when getting dressed. But it also illustrates how the contributors to this research feel that they are received or judged by others, and in turn affects how they get dressed. The role of the PSW or attendant in this process is also relevant, perhaps having an unintended role in the individual's creation of the self.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Clothing is a series of pieces of cloth stitched together with a variety of fastenings and openings that cover the body like a second skin. What makes clothing more than simple pieces of cloth sewn together at the seams are the meanings, agency, and purpose it can fulfill or is imbued with from use. There are physiological needs that clothing serves, such as keeping the body warm or cool, ease of donning and doffing, and comfortable for both standing and seated positions – these are all the more important for persons with physical disabilities. A sense of self-actualization is on the other side of this cloth. That a piece of clothing allows an individual to communicate something about him or herself, a sense of personal style, political motivations, likes, dislikes or perhaps something much deeper, such as being seen beyond the wheelchair, is the other function of clothing. Whether or not persons with mobility disabilities have access to pieces of clothing that fulfill both these needs is a complicated matter.

In this study, the duality of clothing, which could be simplified to style and comfort, are qualities that are not often found together in one garment and what often made it a favourite from the perspective of the contributors. In addition how frequently the contributors noted that they dressed for function or comfort, and that style became a consideration only after they knew a piece was going to “work,” a notion that this thesis has explained using affect theory, denotes that priority is given to function over style. This is a priority however that was not necessarily chosen by the individual but forced into his or her lap as the only option. As clothing is primarily designed for the standing body, many noted that they “make do” with what is available, at times choosing to wear clothes that they would rather not. If, as done by a few contributors, style is given priority, there is an element of physical sacrifice, as explicitly exemplified by H5’s experience of wearing slim fit pants to look stylish for his presentation later in the day. Similarly N7 noted that if he had worn jeans to the interview, “I would be dying to get home and take

them off’ (N7). What this often-daily negotiation between style and comfort or function symbolizes, is something distant from the individual choice of what to wear.

This negotiation originates in an absence of options, caused by the relationship between the norm and the Other, the ideal and the deviant or the able and disabled. As a result of the view of physical disability as a problem, persons with disabilities have historically been kept from the primary interest of society. The view of disability as a problem, as explored in this thesis through the medical sociology of disability, has trickled down to shape the priorities of clothing design. Prevalent within the medical sociology of disability, the perspective of disability as the individual’s problem to solve appears in clothing, and that perhaps through the use of guidebooks on getting dressed independently it could be solved, or at the very least not require attention and be relegated to a place out of sight. Being kept from view is a form of disability oppression. Clare states “Disability oppression, as reflected in high unemployment rates, lack of access, gawking, substandard education, being forced to live in nursing homes and back rooms, being seen as child like, and asexual – that needs changing.”<sup>393</sup> How oppression evolves through appearance is explained through who is controlling what one wears and thus the final appearance.

Supported through the framework of Symbolic Interaction this thesis has established that one’s appearance and the agency to create an appearance is not only linked to one’s sense of self, but also plays a role in interactions and subsequent actions, either by the individual self reflexively or by those the individual interacts with. Siebers writes, “aesthetics is the domain in which the sensation of otherness is felt at its most powerful ... the emotional impact of one body on another is experienced as an assault on autonomy and a testament to the power of otherness.”<sup>394</sup> Through the perpetual comparison to the ideal, a standard Evans notes is a

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<sup>393</sup> Clare, “Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies,” 360.

<sup>394</sup> Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 25.

creation of the current social system rather than one that serves “human needs,” is how this form of oppression occurs. While the ideal is specific to bodily form, as clothes cover the body and are often a reflection of its contours and shapes, a sense of Otherness persists.<sup>395</sup>

This difference is amplified by the lack of clothing designed for a body that is not the ideal. As Pullin describes “Design for disability [in general] has traditionally sought to avoid drawing further unwelcome attention to the disabilities it addresses by trying to be discreet and uncontroversial, unseen or at least not remarked on.”<sup>396</sup> While clothing is designed for different bodies, labeled adaptive or functional, this inclusion is in fact a form of exclusion as realized through the work of Titchkosky. She explains that focusing on exclusion alone misses that inclusionary practices are often exclusionary as a result of being developed through the social structure that perpetuates the dichotomy of disability and ability.<sup>397</sup> By creating clothing with labels that distinguish it from normal, the Other is immediately invoked. For example, designating clothes adaptive implies that only certain bodies require clothes with adjustments. Whereas other bodies, specifically the norm, already fit ‘nonadaptive’ clothes – unaltered for difference. This was also seen in the clothes showcased in the *Modern Hospital Journal*, specifically divided into the needs of those wearing them, “adapted garments, geriatric clothing, and special items for the incontinent,”<sup>398</sup> or really the needs of those who were dressing these individuals. However, a fine line is being navigated here as the reality is different bodies have different needs.

What is also missing from this discussion of clothing design for different bodies is the reality that it is not only the label that is exclusionary. Having to seek out a specific store resigns

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<sup>395</sup> Mary Evans, “Real Bodies an Introduction,” In *Real bodies: A sociological introduction*, ed. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 11.

<sup>396</sup> Pullin, *Design Meets Disability*, 113.

<sup>397</sup> Titchkosky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*, 149.

<sup>398</sup> “Clothing for the Handicapped,” 154.

these needs to the periphery. As was noted in Thoren's study and by contributors to this study, persons with physical disabilities want to be able to go and have access to clothing just like anyone else. As F9 explained the time and effort it would take her to go to an 'adaptive' boutique store downtown "just the amount of time to go like... take the bus there and then come back and then maybe go back for another fitting," almost makes it not worthwhile. T2 also explained with respect to physical access "as far as getting around and getting into stores, they don't even have access points for people in wheelchairs, never mind what material they are selling and what not at this point. For people in wheelchairs, never mind what they are selling inside" (T2). This notion of access leads back to a quote cited by Wendell earlier in this thesis: "not everyone who is not disabled now can play basketball or sing in a choir, but everyone who is not disabled now can participate in sports or games and make art, and that sort of general ability should be the goal of deconstructing disability."<sup>399</sup> Thus in deconstructing disability, equal accessibility needs to be constructed, not only through classification but also opportunity, which inherently undermines oppression. Perhaps through universally accessible clothing the disabled body can be affirmed, a concept Dolmage argues is the only way to reconceive disability.<sup>400</sup>

Moving away from tactics that invoke Otherness and yet award every body the attention they deserve may prove difficult. Part of this conundrum is located in who is doing the labeling. Through the exploration of the politics of design from the perspective of individuals with disabilities, it seems awarding those for whom the design will serve the voice of telling their needs and wants, provides a sense of agency. At the same time no body is perfect and therefore no body follows drafting pattern blocks perfectly. This calls into question the goals of current

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<sup>399</sup> Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 56.

<sup>400</sup> Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*, 91.

design standards and methodologies. In a consumer culture where clothes are designed more often than not as cheaply as possible, what are our concerns with fit and what demonstrates a good fit? Arguably there are fashion trends that are about looser fitting clothes such as “homeless chic” made popular by the Olsen sisters, as certainly there are situations where someone is wearing something that may not “fit,” but the garment is appreciated for other reasons. Thus instead of making fit the scale on which the efficacy or satisfaction of a garment is measured, the garment should be considered from the end user’s perspective on whether or not the garment serves the purpose he or she would like and how this influences what is worn.

In one of the final statements in her case study, Kidd concludes that even with the advances in design and fit technology for “adaptive” clothing, referring to 3D body scanners, a seamstress or tailor with exceptional skills will always be necessary.<sup>401</sup> With this statement Kidd confines future clothing designs to bodies not requiring ‘extreme’ alterations. At the same time, again looking at fit, Kidd never considers why clothes must be form-fitted. This was something articulated at the *Fashion Follows Form: Designs for Sitting* exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum. Starting in the nineteenth century, the fullness in trousers was changed to the slimmer style pants we now wear. The co-curator, Izzy Camilleri, an ‘adaptive’ clothing designer, designs clothes in a similar manner to the way trousers had been designed before this shift:<sup>402</sup> full in the bottom as necessitated by horseback riding and hidden by long jackets, in order to allow for pants “perfectly suited for sitting.”<sup>403</sup> Perhaps if clothes were designed with the movements of the end user in mind then tailors and seamstresses would not be as critical

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<sup>401</sup> Kidd “A Case Study” 171.

<sup>402</sup>Exhibition label, “The Art and History of Fitting Trousers,” Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, *Fashion Follows Form: Designs for Sitting*, 14 October 2014.

Camilleri did not know that her designs were similar to those of pre-nineteenth century styles, this was a connection made by ROM curator Alexandra Palmer.

<sup>403</sup> Exhibition label, “The Art and History of Fitting Trousers,” Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, *Fashion Follows Form: Designs for Sitting*, 14 October 2014.

with respect to alterations. Since persons with mobility disabilities are rarely considered as end users, here again evidence appears contributing to the reality that physical difference is not a priority of fashion design. Similarly Hayman notes that while fashion scholarship is an area of research that is always discussing bodies and clothes on the body, it rarely discusses bodily difference or variance.<sup>404</sup>

While physical difference is where Otherness can be felt the most acutely, especially when one cannot wear the clothes he or she might want to, the wheelchair is part of one's appearance and functions as a symbol of physical difference. What physical disability can be interpreted as in an interaction may vary, but the stereotypes of persons with mobility disabilities persist and have ramifications felt by the individual. As Mead explains while one is an individual in the larger social group, the group provides a frame of reference for the individual. The individual is able to note the perspectives of others as well as those of the organized social group, of which Mead explains the individual and the others are members.<sup>405</sup> The individual is not only taking into consideration the attitudes of his or her "integrated social relations" to the others in the group, but the group as a whole.<sup>406</sup>

When the perspective of the group is that an individual with a physical disability is responsible for "solving" his or her "problem," possibly through changing a mindset as noted in structural-functionalism, and not participating as a contributing member of society, these views shape the individual's sense of self. As was evidenced in this research, this has impacted the way in which an individual with a mobility disability might choose to dress. He or she may choose to try and subvert the stereotypes of disability by dressing fashionably or in an eye-catching manner, or he or she may come to the conclusion that all anyone will ever see is the wheelchair

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<sup>404</sup> Hayman, "Dress & Disability," 116.

<sup>405</sup> Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, 255.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

and therefore what he or she chooses to wear does not really matter beyond considerations of function or comfort. Neither of these views is any more right than the other, but what they show is that not only is the lack of clothing available for persons with mobility disabilities emblematic of society's views of disability, but judgments made based on appearance including the wheelchair are equally reflective of perspectives fundamentally influenced by the medical sociology of disability.

While clothes as part of one's appearance are in tension as they are "stationed at a boundary between self and other, making a distinction between private and public, individual and social, is likely to be vexed by the forces of border wars,"<sup>407</sup> for persons with mobility disabilities this tension includes negative stereotypes. Specifically those perpetuated through the wheelchair as a cultural object and the tropes of slob applied to those who look "too" comfortable, for example. Clothing is a medium through which identities are created, negotiated, and finally communicated through an appearance. Cavallaro and Warwick explain, "Dress lingers at the border of selfhood as an apparently unifying system, which, however, concurrently hints at prospects of breakdown and dissolution, at the impermanent status of symbolic identity as an arbitrary construct."<sup>408</sup> An appearance, seemingly symbolic of a fixed identity, is not constant and is influenced by factors often beyond an individual's control.

Through the exploration of clothing, design, and fashion from the perspectives of individuals with mobility disabilities, this research has discussed this situation beyond terms of these individuals being an untapped market, but has also framed this sense of being left out of mainstream fashion design as symbolic of the way society perceives persons with mobility disabilities. As was first noted in the introduction, the article from the *Modern Hospital Journal*

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<sup>407</sup> Karen Hanson, "Dressing Up Dressing Down: The Philosophic Fear of Fashion," *Hypatia* 5, no. 2 (1990): 119, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810159>.

<sup>408</sup> Cavallaro and Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame*, 41.

described clothes designed for persons with physical disabilities not only thirty years ago, but from the medical view of disability. It seems to be more than the case that this view has barely changed; it has additionally been camouflaged in what at first glance seems to be inclusionary practices. Furthermore, the design practices of fit and intended function of clothing have been shown to prioritize the ideal body over others – a form of oppression. Oppression in this case is not having one's needs or want considered, and with respect to clothing this invokes the politics of design, ultimately that someone else is making the decisions on what is the most suitable for someone else. This prevents one from having the agency to choose his or her appearance, a practice closely related to those implemented in institutions.

As a result, the individuals in this research 'make do' or simply adapt; a practice that is not exclusive to dressing. T2 explained:

You always have to adapt, I mean that's what it's about, you always have to adapt to your environment to whatever is coming around. So dressing yourself is no different from trying to get into a building or anything like that. So you always kind of have to, you know, adjust yourself and the way you dress accordingly (T2).

In fact 'making do' or "adjust yourself" is a practice that has evolved out of consistently having one's needs ignored, and as illustrated by T2 is not a practice specific to clothing at all. Thus the quotidian practice of getting dressed, and the number of negotiations and considerations made during this process is an example of the extent to which the needs of persons with mobility disabilities are unmet and ignored. Thus this thesis reveals how pervasive the medical view of disability in society is, and how the act of getting dressed is an example of its influence.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

## Pre-Interview Questionnaire – Tell me a little about yourself!

You are more than welcome to leave any of these questions blank if you would prefer not to answer. The information provided will allow the results of the interviews to be organized and analyzed according to similar circumstances and experiences. If you have any questions about one of the questions below please contact the Principal Investigator, Emma Thompson, by email ([emmath@yorku.ca](mailto:emmath@yorku.ca)) or phone (647-520-8829).

Name:

Age: (please circle one) 18-23 24-29 30-35 36-41 42-47 48-53 54-59 60-65 66-71  
72-77 78+

Gender:

What city do you currently live in?

Would you say that you live close to or have access to a shopping center?

Do you sew or alter your own clothing? How often do you do this? (Every time you need or buy a new piece or only occasionally?):

Do you seek out specialty clothing stores or manufacturers? How do you see their collections?

Do these stores provide custom alterations?

Do you feel these stores offer the styles or pieces you want?

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Sample Interview Questions

Interview Introduction (sample): Hi Jane Doe, my name is Emma and I will be interviewing you today. Before we get started may I please have your questionnaire sheet and your signed consent form? I am going to give you this handout with counseling services information. While I do not believe that anything we will be discussing today may cause you harm, I want to ensure that you will have someone to talk to about anything that we have discussed today and would like to discuss further. I will be recording this discussion, if you feel uncomfortable answering a question you may feel free to pass and we will go on to the next question or we can take a water break, and if you would like to leave the interview at anytime you are more than welcome to. Do you have any questions for me? Okay, let's get started ...

*Tell me a little about your morning routine when getting dressed:*

How do you normally choose what to wear? (Average day)

What factors do you consider when getting dressed?

- role of PSW or significant other
- what functional aspects? weather etc.

What do you think influences the way you dress?

Have you ever looked at your closet or through your drawers and thought: "I have no idea what to wear?" Do you have an example? Or see below.

Is there a certain 'strict' style or formula that you follow? Or do you wear whatever you feel like putting on?

Would you say you have a personal style? What about it do you think is unique?

How would you describe the evolution of your style or manner of dress if you think there has been one? And what influences do you believe are responsible for this?

What are your closet 'staple' pieces?

- why?
- where do you purchase them?

Dress for style or function?

- what elements play into this rational – standing out vs blending in?

Do you try to follow fashion trends? Explain.

- Do you enjoy experimenting with different fashion styles? Why?

Have you ever had or thought about having a session with a wardrobe stylist or coordinator?

What is your favourite season to dress for and why?

*Communicating via dress:*

Do you find yourself ever trying to specifically communicate something when getting dressed?

If so, what? And how do you go about doing so?  
 - ex of C8 promoting sexiness

What impact do you think your roles in life, job, emotional relationships, hobbies, etc. have on the way you dress?

Do you try to construct a sense of individuality with your clothing choices? Or do you wear them just because you think they look nice or because you like them? Or are there other motivations?

- Do you intentionally dress to show different sides of yourself?
- Have you ever found yourself dressing for another?

Have you ever tried to judge something about another's character from their clothes?

Have you ever received comments on the way you dress? How did you react to them?

### Fit and Design of Clothing:

Do you have any custom made pieces? Why? For a specific event or because you couldn't find something you wanted?

Do you find that there are certain clothes that you want to wear but don't feel flatter you? Do you purchase clothes to emphasize different aspects of your body?

Do you ever find yourself sacrificing comfort to wear a certain piece or accessory? Can you tell me about that?

Are there specific qualities or construction details you look for in clothing?

What are they and can you tell me a little bit about why you seek them out?

### Clothing Emotions

Have you ever had an experience where you were unhappy with an outfit and felt that this caused you to change your behaviour or actions? Were you less social?  
 - more social positive or negative

Do you find that certain clothes in your closet make you act or behave differently than others?  
 Do you have any examples?  
 - impact of clothing

### Shopping for Clothes:

When you go out shopping or when you shop online do you normally find what you are looking for?

Do you feel that you are under considered or an untapped market with respect to fashion?

Would you spend more money on clothes if you could?

Are there any particular clothes you wished you owned but don't?

*On the piece the participant brought along:*

How did you come to own this piece?

Why did you choose this in particular to talk about?

Are there any memories specifically associated with it?

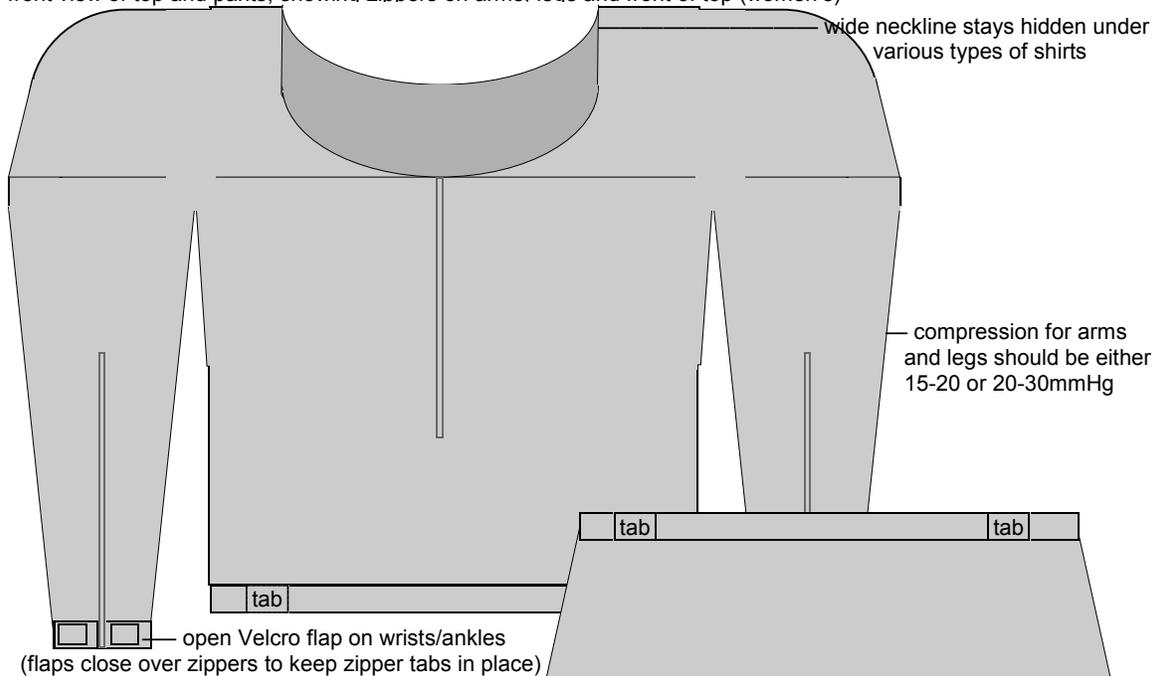
What do you think it says about you when you wear it?

What do you want it to communicate about you?

APPENDIX C: TECHNICAL DRAWINGS COMPLETED BY X4

2-Piece Compression Body suit (scaled to 20% of actual size)

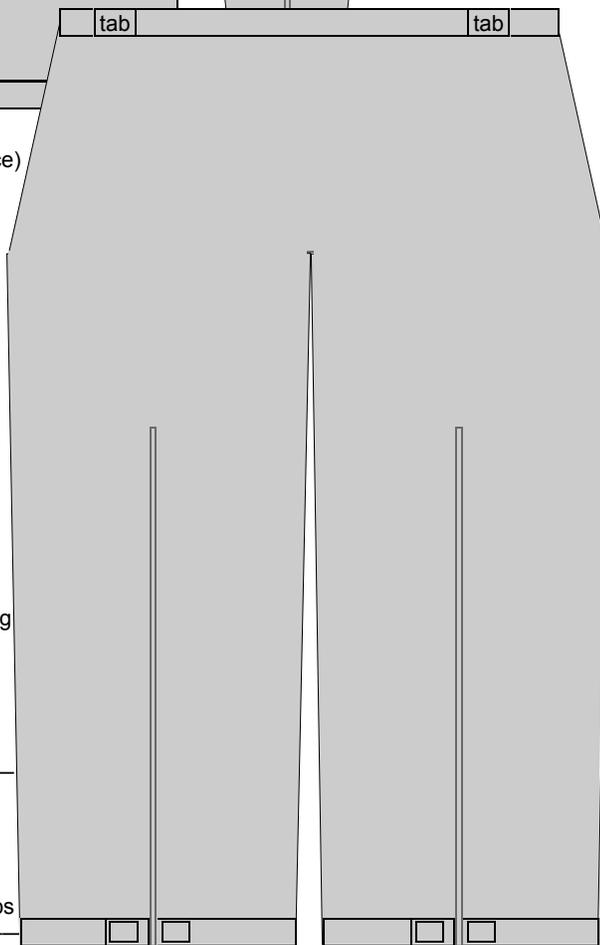
front view of top and pants, showing zippers on arms, legs and front of top (women's)



- bands at wrists, ankles, waist and bottom of top are each 1" wide
- 4 large hook tabs on outside of waistband (located at same positions for front and back) attach to 4 corresponding tabs inside top on hem, these tabs are used in the fly for some pants and should help keep the top from riding up
- crotch should be gusseted
- the rough "hook" velcro on the wrist and ankle tabs should be narrower so there will be a border around it to keep the hook velcro from catching on clothing
- should be made of strong stretch polyester, stretch nylon or a polyester/spandex blend
- all zippers should be strong nylon coil #8 or #10, and a padded strip should be sewn behind each zipper to act as a barrier to prevent dig-in and chafing
- this design can also be used as a swimsuit if made of chlorine-resistant materials

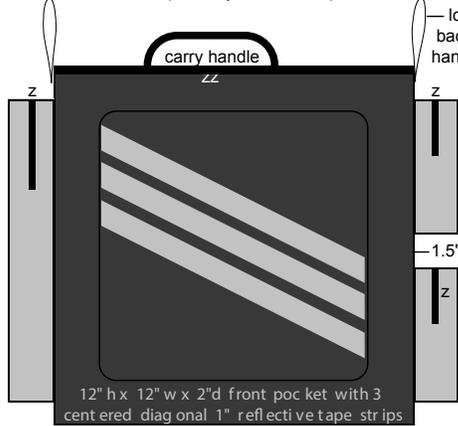
zippers on legs go from mid-thigh to bottom (zippers on arms go from mid biceps to wrist)

Velcro flaps at wrists and ankles to secure zipper tabs

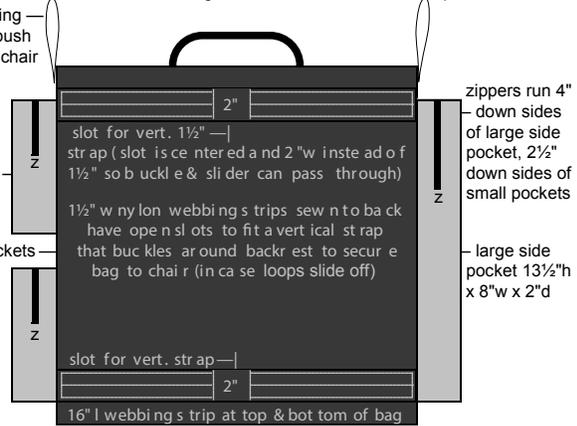


Nylon Humungoid Wheelchair Backpack 16"h x 16"w x 10"d (scale 20% of actual size)

front view: shows loops, carry handle and pockets

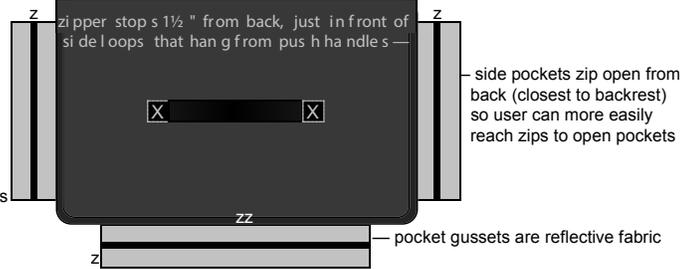


back view: shows webbing with slots for securement strap



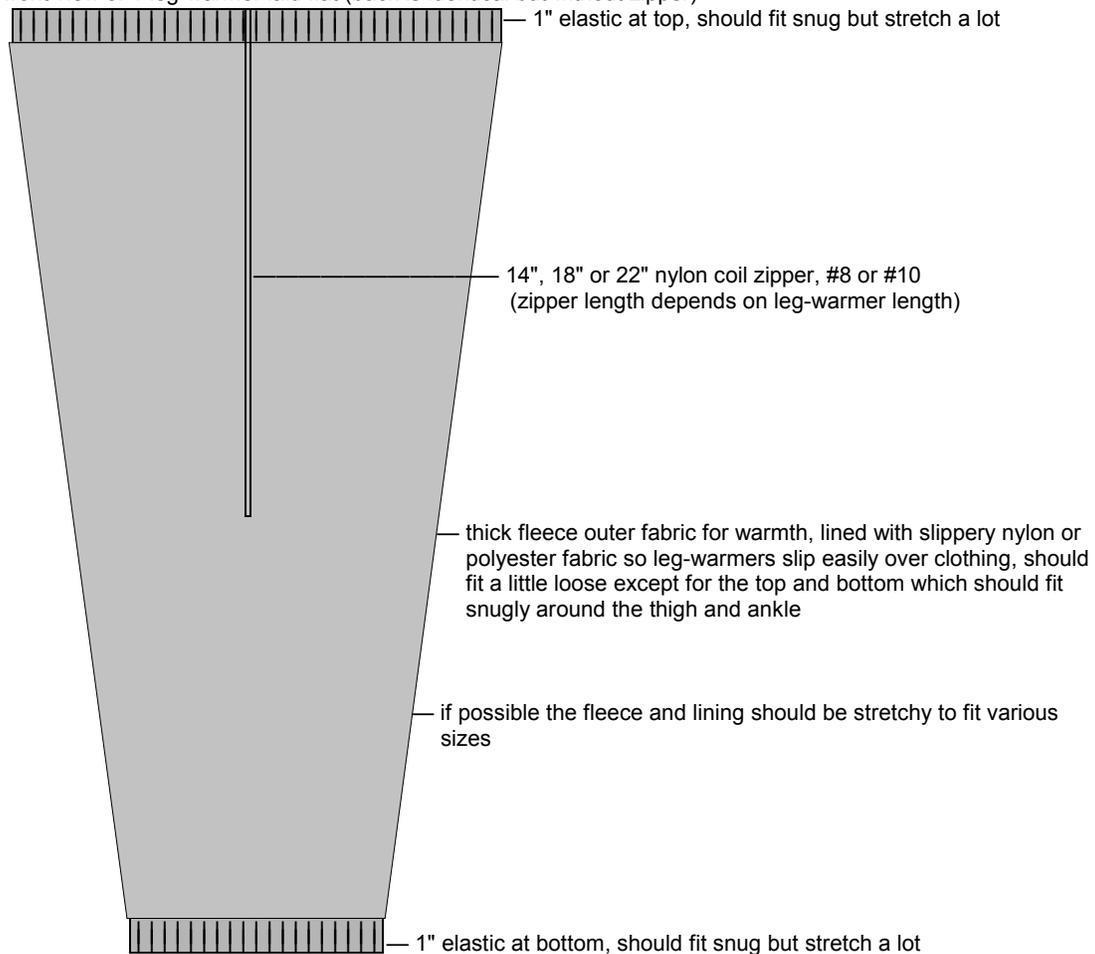
- X in box = reinforced sewing for secure attachment
- z = zipper: Zippers should be #10 nylon coil.
- zz = 2-way zipper with head-to-head sliders
- The backpack is made from heavy 1000D+ ballistic or cordura nylon with strong zippers and reinforced seams. Nylon webbing 1 1/2" w is used for top loops, a securement strap & 2 strips sewn to the bag back to hold the strap.
- The head-to-head zipper around the top flap stops 1/2" short of the back so closing is easier when the bag is full.
- The main pack is 16"h x 16"w x 10"d. The front pocket is 12"h x 12"w x 2"d, the large side pocket is 8"w x 13 1/2"h x 2"d, and the small side pockets are each 6"h x 8"w x 2"d.
- See Page 2 for instructions to make the back strap.

top view: shows carry handle, pockets and head-to-head zipper running around 3 sides



## EZ Fleece Leg-Warmers (scale 25% of actual size)

front view of 1 leg-warmer laid flat (back is identical but without zipper)



## Possible Sizes:

Petite-Narrow: 26" long, 9" circumference at ankle band, and 19" circumference at top band  
 Petite-Medium: 26" long, 11" circumference at ankle band, and 23" circumference at top band  
 Petite-Wide: 26" long, 14" circumference at ankle band, and 27" circumference at top band  
 Regular-Narrow: 31" long, 9" circumference at ankle band, and 19" circumference at top band  
 Regular-Medium: 31" long, 11" circumference at ankle band, and 23" circumference at top band  
 Regular-Wide: 31" long, 14" circumference at ankle band, and 28" circumference at top band  
 Tall-Narrow: 36" long, 9" circumference at ankle band, and 19" circumference at top band  
 Tall-Medium: 36" long, 12" circumference at ankle band, and 24" circumference at top band  
 Tall-Wide: 36" long, 15" circumference at ankle band, and 30" circumference at top band

## Possible Colors:

black, gray, light blue, navy, magenta

EZ-On Full-Coverage Swimsuit (about 20% of actual size)

front view of size 18-20 petite suit laid flat, showing arm, leg & front zippers (back almost identical but w/o zippers)

