

Lack of appropriate clothing can hinder people with disabilities

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There are many important events in a person's life, including weddings, graduations, school dances and job interviews. The clothing industry has long profited from these events and the special clothing they require. However, according to new research from the University of Missouri, approximately 30 million Americans living with mobility challenges and impairments lack the appropriate clothing required for social engagements, work and exercise. Following this new study researchers suggest that apparel manufacturers could play a vital role in helping people navigate social barriers by providing more accessible clothing options.

"People don't enter the world able-bodied and independent, but the [clothing](#) industry continues to exclusively cater to able-bodied individuals despite the fact that people with disabilities often miss out on important life events due to clothing-related problems," said Allison Kabel, assistant professor of health sciences in the MU School of Health of Professions. "People with mobility impairments can still live independently, but it is more difficult if they don't have clothing that meets their needs."

Kabel and Kerri McBee Black, instructor of textile and apparel management in the College of Human Environmental Sciences, conducted a national study to identify how clothing impacted the lives of people with mobility impairments. Approximately half of the respondents reported that they have declined to participate in activities or events because they lacked or were unable to wear appropriate

clothing. For example, people missed attending weddings, funerals, school dances, baseball games and graduation. Examples provided in the study include:

- One respondent missed her best friend's wedding because she was unable to find appropriate attire that would accommodate her mobility impairments. Her friend has yet to forgive her.
- Numerous respondents reported difficulty in finding warm coats for the winter that still allowed full use of mobility aids and devices as the bulky coats have a tendency to get caught in wheels.
- A high school respondent was unable to attend the Homecoming dance because she didn't have shoes or a dress to wear.

Participants also expressed concerns about finding appropriate clothing for [job interviews](#) or occupation-specific clothing, such as uniforms. More than half of the respondents struggled finding athletic clothing necessary for exercise.

"The lack of attractive, functional clothing can be detrimental to overall well-being if individuals are unable to present themselves according to personal standards," Kabel said. "Declining to participate in an event or refusing to interview for a new job because you don't have appropriate clothes can be embarrassing for a person and can have long-lasting negative impacts on self-esteem and relationships. This research supports the need for new clothing designs to help eliminate the clothing-related barriers for people with disabilities. "

"Clothing-related barriers experienced by [people](#) with mobility disabilities and impairments," was published in *Applied Ergonomics*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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