

# Workplace dress codes present barriers to people living with disabilities

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According to the U.S. Census, nearly 20 million people of working age live with a disability. While past research has indicated that people living with disabilities face barriers in workplace participation, researchers from the University of Missouri have now found one hindrance to workplace participation for people with disabilities is the lack of appropriate clothing. This barrier increases their stigma and decreases their confidence.

"People with [disabilities](#) are no different than any other consumer looking for [clothing](#)," said Kerri McBee Black, instructor and doctoral candidate in textile and apparel management. "Consumers want clothing that expresses their sense of style. They want clothing that makes them feel confident. Unfortunately, the apparel industry has yet to sufficiently meet the demand for this population."

McBee Black and Jung Ha-Brookshire, an associate professor of textile and apparel management at MU, conducted interviews with people with disabilities who had sought or were seeking employment to identify barriers that the [study participants](#) faced in the workplace. A common theme among all participants, regardless of the disability, was the lack of appropriate clothing options that would be sufficient in the workplace.

One participant of the study who is living with multiple sclerosis told the researchers that after a surgery, she had to look for adaptive clothing that would accommodate her colostomy bag. She struggled finding options that made her feel attractive, which impacted her overall confidence.

Other participants reported similar problems finding professional clothes that were appropriate for work. In many cases, the researchers found that people with disabilities weren't even applying for jobs because they believed they couldn't meet the expectations associated with the office dress code.

"Throughout the interviews we heard from participants that people living with disabilities want to work; yet, they experience public and self-stigma, both of which undermine their confidence," McBee Black said. "Making sure that everyone has access to attractive, professional clothing will help [people](#) living with disabilities feel welcome in the [workplace](#)."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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