

ADAPTIVE APPAREL ADVOCACY: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW MINDY  
SCHEIER CATALYZED THE ADAPTIVE APPAREL MARKET

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

ADAPTIVE APPAREL ADVOCACY: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW MINDY SCHEIER CATALYZED THE ADAPTIVE APPAREL MARKET

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Mindy Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate and her collaboration with Tommy Hilfiger®, to launch a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line, *Tommy Adaptive*. The recent interest of apparel brands to embrace the PLWD consumer suggests a possible shift in the apparel industry toward an inclusive approach to fashion. A single, main case study design was used to examine the phenomenon. The study found that Scheier was motivated to become an advocate for the adaptive apparel market by the apparel needs and challenges of her son. This motivation led Scheier to engage in an in-depth consumer market and design innovation research to gain knowledge of the apparel needs and challenges of PLWD. This knowledge led to a collaboration with a supply chain partner, which led to the first-of-its-kind mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel line with Tommy Hilfiger®. The study also found that Scheier sacrificed her career goals, her income, and her dignity to ensure adaptive apparel went mainstream in the apparel industry. The study's findings have contributions to the Social Model of Disability, MRCS, R-A, and GSCM theory and implications for apparel brands and entrepreneurs wishing to enter the adaptive apparel market as well as for policymakers, and apparel researchers.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 contains the following sections: (a) background of the study, (b) purpose of the study, (c) significance of the study, (d) definition of key terms, and (e) organization of the study.

### Background of the Study

People living with disabilities (PLWD)<sup>1</sup> make up nearly 13% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017) and contribute \$21 billion of disposable income to the marketplace (Yin, Shaewitz, Overton, & Smith, 2018). PLWD can be considered the largest minority group in the U.S. (Drum, McClain, Horner-Johnson, & Taitano, 2011). In fact, PLWD are the largest percentage of the population if one includes chronic disease as a disability. Nearly half of American adults are thought to be living with chronic disease and disability. (Coresight Research, 2019). Despite the potential for specific apparel to accommodate the needs of PLWD and the fact that PLWD are a substantial portion of the U.S. population with significant spending power, PLWD are often overlooked and ignored by the apparel industry (Hall, 2019; Hammett, 2019).

However, the outlook toward PLWD is slowly changing. Recently, Coresight Research (2019) predicted that the U.S. adaptive apparel market could reach \$47.3 billion in 2019 and grow to \$54.8 billion by 2023. Apparel brands and retailers such as Asos<sup>®</sup>, Kohls<sup>®</sup>, Land's End<sup>®</sup>, Nike<sup>®</sup>, Target<sup>®</sup>, Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, and Zappos<sup>®</sup> have recently launched products, complete lines, or have started carrying adaptive apparel lines and

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<sup>1</sup> For this study the term PLWD will be used in the context of the study's framework. However, the term people with disability (PWD) will be used in Chapter 4 as the research participant requested the term to be used when she referenced the disability population as she feels more comfortable with this terminology. Whereas, the term PLWD is more widely used in academic researcher, therefore, the researcher prefers to use the term PLWD.

products for children, men, and women. This trend suggests a shift in thinking for apparel brands as they appear to be more willing to embrace a more inclusive approach to their business (Hall, 2019).

This trend toward a more inclusive approach within apparel brands also suggests a social movement directing attention to PLWD, disability issues, and the barriers still facing PLWD. In fact, social movements are what drive inclusion and democracy in society (Moghadam, 2013). Historically, the disability rights movement has followed the civil rights movement and the feminist movement in an effort to improve the social structure for marginalized populations (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2015). Thus, it appears the same is happening today with the current disability movement. After the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements, which have gained considerable attention in the last few years, the disability community has advocated for the removal of social barriers preventing their full participation in society.

For the most part, disability and the issues and barriers facing disability appear to be gaining attention in the U.S. among non-apparel brands, retailers, and companies. Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court decided not to hear a case brought against Domino's<sup>®</sup> pizza by Guillermo Robles, a blind consumer. Mr. Robles sued Domino's<sup>®</sup> on the basis that they violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) because their website lacked software that would allow a blind consumer to order online. By not hearing the case, the U.S. Supreme Court opened the door for further litigation on the matter and likely pressure by disability advocates to force eCommerce sites, like Domino's<sup>®</sup>, to create a more accessible online and mobile environment for consumers with disabilities (Domino's Supreme Court decision spotlights online web accessibility, 2019).



Despite Domino's lack of access for PLWD, other brands, retailers, and companies are making efforts to accommodate the needs of PLWD. Recently, Starbucks® opened its first sign language store in Washington state. Deaf employees wear an apron, created by a deaf supplier, featuring the word "Starbucks®" spelled out in American Sign Language. Those employees who do not have hearing impairments wear a pin that reads "I sign" (Hammett, 2019). Procter & Gamble's® *Herbal Essence*™ brand introduced an inclusive bottle design to accommodate consumers with low vision. The bottle, designed by a blind employee of Procter & Gamble®, features tactile impressions that help the consumer differentiate the shampoo from the conditioner, as the bottles share the same shape (Hammett, 2019). One could argue that these steps, taken by Starbucks® and Procter & Gamble®, simply highlight the social philosophy of brands and not their interest in tapping into a profitable market. However, statistics by the U.S. Department of Labor suggest that this is not the case; they estimate that PLWD have access to \$175 billion in discretionary spending, more than four times that of the tween market (8-14-year-olds), a demographic that is highly sought after by brands (Expanding your market: Customers with disabilities mean business, 2006). Thus, it could be stated that brands and retailers are finally taking notice of PLWD and seeing this population as a viable and profitable market to embrace.

Within the apparel research realm, the literature demonstrates the apparel challenges facing PLWD, including donning and doffing, manipulation of fasteners, fit, freedom of movement, and issues related to fabric type and construction. (Azher, Saeed, & Kalsoom, 2012; Banks, 2001; Carroll & Gross, 2010; Gonzalez et al., 2012; Lamb & Kallal, 1992; Nessly & King, 1980; Warden & Dedmon, 1975; White & Dallas, 1977).

Other researchers focus on the concept of apparel as an important factor in social appearance for PLWD (Carroll & Kincade, 2007, 2008; Lamb, 1993, 2001). However, the existing literature does not address the complexity of supply chain management and how this impacts the ability of apparel brands to introduce adaptive apparel into the marketplace. Due to this, PLWD have been unable to find appropriate and adequate apparel to fit their needs, have continued to face societal barriers due to the lack of apparel availability, and have continued to be ignored in the apparel industry by mainstream apparel brands (Kabel, McBee-Black, & Dimka, 2016; Kabel, Dimka, & McBee-Black, 2017; McBee-Black & Ha-Brookshire, 2018).

Recently, apparel brands finally recognized the lack of apparel availability and began serving PLWD by providing adaptive apparel lines to address the unique apparel needs of this market (McBee-Black & Ha-Brookshire, 2018). This increased interest in adaptive apparel and PLWD seems to align with the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream fashion forward adaptive apparel line, for children, produced by Tommy Hilfiger® in 2016. This line was a result of a partnership with Mindy Scheier and Runway of Dreams, a non-profit organization working to develop the first adaptive apparel line to ensure PLWD are included in the apparel industry. This partnership eventually led to the development of the *Tommy Adaptive* line that Tommy Hilfiger® introduced in 2018. This first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line featured easy to take on and take off apparel with magnetic and Velcro closures. In addition, the line featured access points of entry at the shoulder and pant hem side seams. This first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line featured the same styles, trends, and designs that are indicative of the Tommy Hilfiger® aesthetic. The media attention this line received was significant, and it

was shortly after this launch that other brands began offering adaptive apparel lines (Bahadur, 2016; Diament, 2016; Kuperinsky, 2016; Novellino, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Mindy Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate and her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®, to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. To achieve this objective, the social model theory of disability, moral responsibility of corporate sustainability theory (MRCS), resources advantage (R-A) theory, and global supply chain management theory (GSCM) will be used as the guiding theoretical frameworks for this study and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

### **Significance of the Study**

Today, the total number of PLWD is significant and will only continue to grow—especially if one considers temporary physical disability that all humans experience in their lifetime. This recent interest of apparel brands to embrace the PLWD consumer and enter the adaptive apparel market suggests a possible shift in the apparel industry toward an inclusive and democratized approach to fashion. The insights into how and why this shift occurred, by investigating Scheier’s role in the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children as a catalyzing event, could pave the way for other apparel brands who might be interested in serving the underserved markets beyond physical disability.

Specifically, this study’s findings are expected to demonstrate how the social model of disability, a new and divergent view of disability, might have impacted the

overall inception of the adaptive apparel line for children, which was the first-of-its-kind in the marketplace. In addition, the study's findings are expected to highlight how MRCS, R-A, and GSCM theories help explain the motivations, negotiations, and practical business implication discussions the advocator strategized to launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children in partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®. The in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of this pioneering event, the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children in partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®, could help apparel researchers, businesses, and educators in the apparel field.

For researchers, the study's findings can offer an understanding on how social movements (such as the social model of disability) affect the way businesses prioritize their organizational goals. That is to say, by investigating how and why Scheier advocated for adaptive apparel and subsequently solidified a collaborative partnership with Tommy Hilfiger® to launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, the study findings could highlight how Scheier's advocacy served as the impetus for Tommy Hilfiger® to consider the need to balance their other business goals with the needs of an underserved market. This insight can open an array of new research opportunities, including how social movements affect businesses' goals and supply chain rearrangement. Perhaps the study's findings could also demonstrate the pathways apparel businesses could take to become certified as a B corporation, which is a business certification process that evaluates how a business's operations and business model impact its workers, its community, the environment, and its customers (Certified B Corporation, n.d.).

For apparel businesses, the study's findings could provide a blueprint for other apparel brands to offer products to other historically underserved markets, which could have significant market leadership implications for apparel brands seeking to diversify their consumer markets and product offerings. Additionally, the insights into the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children could showcase how creating a new brand became the company's competitive advantage and the creation of new supply chain values. Finally, the study's findings could also highlight the advantage of having a collaborative partner or stakeholder as a key firm resource in order to support diversifying consumer markets and product/brand offerings.

For apparel educators, the study's findings could facilitate an apparel and textile curriculum focus on innovating markets and apparel products of the future, including historically underserved markets. This can include the introduction of inclusive and user-centered design approaches in the product development curriculum along with the inclusion of PLWD or other underserved consumers, and the introduction of innovative apparel products into the global supply chain management curriculum. Additional implications include retail and marketing strategies for PLWD or other underserved consumers. How should apparel brands and retailers reorganize their omnichannel strategies to accommodate the needs of an increasingly diverse consumer market? Now that we have the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, what should we teach our retail students so they can better serve the consumers of apparel and textiles?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Below are the definitions of key terms that are used throughout the study.

**Table 1.1***Definition of Key Terms*

Key Term	Definition
<b>Advocate</b>	“One who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group” (Advocate, n.d., para. 3).
<b>Apparel</b>	All clothing and wearable accessories (study definition).
<b>Apparel Industry</b>	Refers to the industry segment that includes “manufacturers and contractors, garment wet processors, apparel wholesale representatives, and direct importers who sell garments to retailers and apparel retailers” (Brown & Rice, 2014, p. 539).
<b>Adaptive Apparel</b>	Refers to “special clothing designed and made for people with impairment, who face difficulty in dressing themselves” (Azher et al., 2012, p. 2).
<b>Competitive Advantage</b>	Refers to a firm who gains superior financial performance by offering product to new market segments not previously offered (Barney, 1991). Competitive advantage is related to a firm’s value in association with its resources utilized to produce that value (Hunt, 1997).
<b>Moral Responsibility of Corporate Sustainability</b>	References the need for a corporation to be truly sustainable, which means the entire supply chain must also be sustainable (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).
<b>Disability</b>	Serves as an “umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. It is not a health problem, it is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person’s body and features of the society in which he or she lives” (World Health Organization, n.d., para. 1-2).
<b>Innovator</b>	One who “introduces as or as if new” (Innovator, n.d., para. 1).
<b>Medical Model Theory of Disability</b>	The view that disability must be cured for the user to participate fully in society (Oliver, 1996).
<b>People Living with Disability</b>	Reflects people who live with a form of disability, physical or mental impairment, that limits some of their life activity. It can also include individuals who may not have a disability but identify as having a disability (study definition and Americans with Disability Act, 1990).
<b>Resource Advantage Theory of Competition</b>	A general theory of competition that “describes the process of competition” among firms to achieve a relative advantage in its resources, which can yield marketplace positions of competitive

	advantage for some markets, thereby gaining superior financial performance (Hunt & Arnett, 2003, p. 4).
<b>Social Model Theory of Disability</b>	The view that society serves as the barrier to full participation among people living with disabilities (Oliver, 2013).
<b>Supply Chain</b>	“A set of three or more companies directly linked by one or more of the upstream or downstream flows of products, services, finances, and information from a source to a customer” (Mentzer, 2004, p. 4).

### **Organization of the Study**

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents background, purpose, significance, and key terms used in the study. Chapter 2 presents relevant theories and literature, including social model theory of disability, MRCS theory, R-A theory, and GSCM theory. Chapter 2 ends by presenting a conceptual model for this study and a summary of the study’s research questions. Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative research approach to this study, the case study descriptions and examples, the data collection and data analysis method, the trustworthiness of the study, and finally, the researcher’s reflection. Chapter 4 presents the research findings and major themes. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and concludes the study with a discussion of practical and theoretical implications, research limitations, and future research directions.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Chapter 2 contains the following sections: (a) social model theory of disability and (b) theoretical frameworks, including approaches to moral responsibility of corporate sustainability (MRCS), resource advantage (R-A) theory, the intersectionality of R-A theory and MRCS, and global supply chain management theory (GSCM). These sections are followed by the conceptual model and summary of the research goal.

### **Social Model Theory of Disability**

The term disability can be defined differently based on its use and context. When used in a medical context, the term disability is mostly viewed in relation to medical conditions, difficulties in body functions, or the treatment or therapy of the medical conditions (Oliver, 1996). This approach suggests an attempt to cure the abnormality that causes the disablement of the person (Brault, 2010; Minaire, 1992). When used in a social context, the term disability is viewed within the intersectionality context between a person's impairments and the environmental barriers faced relational to their impairment (Hd, 1994). Historically, disability has been viewed through the medical model lens, suggesting that PLWD should be institutionalized and segregated in society so as to support the treatment of the specific impairment causing the disability (Griffo, 2014). The insinuation of the medical model is that PLWD are to blame, due to their impairment, for being unable to participate in society. This suggests that if the impairment were cured, the disability would no longer be a factor in their inability to fully integrate into society (Griffo, 2014).

For centuries, this medical model prevailed in society, and the infrastructure supporting this model took hold. Medical schools focused on curing, treating, and



rehabilitating the impairment (Griffo, 2014). Disability-related policies and services were predicated on the idea that the impairment was the barrier to social participation and therefore demanded the attention and focus of those working to support the improvement of life for PLWD (Griffo, 2014). Further, PLWD were not the focus of consumer product developers when designing consumer products. In fact, Freeman, Kaiser, and Wingate (1985) said products for PWLD are often designed for functional properties to accommodate the impairment rather than consideration toward aesthetic and style of the users. Products for PLWD were focused primarily on comfort and ease of use (Freeman, Kaiser, & Wingate, 1985; Shannon & Reich, 1979).

The medical model of disability became a targeted focus of disability scholars in the 1960s and the 1970s when the disability movement gained traction with policymakers in the United Kingdom and the United States (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Through the disability movement, the historical references and definitions of the terms disability and impairment were challenged, and the disability community argued that how society itself is organized is the greatest threat to societal participation, not their impairments themselves (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). This led to the inclusion of the social model of disability as the preferred contextualization of the disability movement (Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

The disability scholars and advocates in the U.K. played key roles in establishing the social model of disability. Michael Oliver, a disability scholar, is credited with the development of the social model theory of disability (Oliver, 1981). He suggested that disability is “about nothing more complicated than a clear focus on the economic, environmental and cultural barriers encountered by people who are viewed by others as

having some form of impairment – whether physical, mental or intellectual.” (Oliver & Barnes, 2012, p. 21).

Oliver’s suggestion was predicated on the idea that, up to that point, practitioners had operated under the medical model when working with PLWD, and that no longer was that approach addressing the overall needs of PLWD (Oliver, 2013). Oliver (2013) promoted the use of both the medical and the social model as the best way in which to contextualize disability in society. However, many in the disability community latched onto Oliver’s declaration and called for a shift from the medical model of disability to a social model of disability for which to frame the discriminatory challenges facing PLWD (Oliver, 2013). With this new contextualization of disability, the disability community used the social model of disability to force changes among those in the media and within society by pushing for change in images used to depict PLWD, for improved transportation services, and greater accessibility to the built environment. In the United States, this culminated in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, which called for a “clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities” (*Americans with Disabilities Act*, 1990).

Today, according to Quinn (2009), there is widespread adoption of the social model of disability by most disability rights organizations, including international disability policy organizations that have adopted the social model definition and view of disability in many landmark policy and advocacy documents. Specifically, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), through the World Health Organization, supports functioning and disability as an evolving dynamic

between one's health conditions and the contextual factors one faces, both personal and environmental (*World report on disability*, 2011). To further demonstrate the global acceptance of the social context and implications of disability, the United Nations declared the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which promotes the rights and freedoms of PLWD and calls for the elimination of discrimination toward PLWD through initiatives that support the inclusion of PLWD into all facets of the social environment (Quinn, 2009).

The global acceptance, by the disability community, to embrace the social contextualization of disability suggests a shift in focus to promote the elimination of the social and environmental barriers that have plagued PLWD for decades. Therefore, in this light, the term disability is defined as a “result from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Quinn, 2009, p. 1). The term disability is different from the term impairment, which is defined as lacking all or part of a limb, a limb defect, a lack of body mobility, or restricted activity related to lack of accommodation, which limits full societal participation (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). Moreover, as the goal of this research study is to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate and her collaboration with Tommy Hilfiger®, the innovator, to launch a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line, the social model theory of disability is used to demonstrate that apparel is a key social barrier causing marginalization and oppression of PLWD's social participation.

### *Apparel and the Medical Model of Disability*

Until recently, in the apparel literature, the focus on apparel and disability has been largely referenced in the medical model of disability. Previous researchers were focused on apparel design with a more functional and less appealing approach to accommodate PLWD and were less focused on apparel design that satisfied the aesthetic and styling needs and wants of PLWD (Azher et al., 2012; Freeman et al., 1985; Lamb & Kallal, 1992; Wingate, Kaiser, & Freeman, 1986). Primarily, researchers focused on apparel challenges facing PLWD, such as donning and doffing, manipulating fasteners, fit, freedom of movement, or textile performance and function (Dallas & Wilson, 1981; Shannon & Reich, 1979). For example, Azher, Saeed, and Kalsoom (2012) attempted to design “special garments” (p. 53) that allow for ease of donning and doffing, without assistance, for women with arthritis. When discussing the specific apparel needs for PLWD, they suggest that PLWD have the “opportunity to enjoy life and [special garments] becomes a wonderful way to prove that sick people with special needs and disabilities may improve the quality of their life” (p. 53). This approach to apparel and disability is rooted in the medical model of disability framework.

Further, Wang, Wu, Zhao, and Li (2014) routinely use the term “disabled people” to reference PLWD throughout their study and take a medical model of disability approach when they suggest that the “redesign of wheelchair users’ apparel can help reduce the physical strain and work load of their personal helpers” and, therefore, it is “meaningful and beneficial to design disabled people oriented clothing to meet their physical demand, as well as psychological demand” (p. 550). Again, the connotation made by these authors is that PLWD require functional over aesthetic needs. Further, the

use of the term “disabled people oriented clothing” assumes that their apparel is categorized by lack of ability as opposed to the person.

Interestingly, a study by Rusk and Taylor in 1959 focused on the intersection of apparel adaptation for PLWD and fashion. The authors conducted a three-year research study focused on designing “specially designed garments which combine fashion and function” (p. 138). The authors employed a “top name designer in fashion circles” to consult on the study (p. 138) conducted by the occupational therapy department of the Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. The authors were concerned with the lack of available apparel for PLWD as they were gathering data to support the dissemination of information to PLWD regarding self-help devices. After extensive wear testing by PLWD and redevelopment of the designs based on participant feedback, the six items were developed, including a coat-dress which was designed to “counteract the destructive effect of crutch-walking on clothes – the pull across the shoulder blades and wear under the arms; to give greater ease in putting the garment on and taking it off; and to give greater comfort in wearing” (p. 139).

Despite the one example of fashion and function by Rusk and Taylor (1959), apparel brands and retailers have paid little to no attention to the needs and wants of PLWD and have maintained a medical model approach to apparel design for PLWD. In fact, for decades, apparel for PLWD was found through medical supply vendors, and apparel brands focused on the medical and caregiver needs for PLWD, with little or no considerations for aesthetic or style. Brands, such as Buck and Buck and Silvert’s dominated the market, promoting adaptive apparel that supported the ease of donning and doffing for PLWD and their caregivers, as well as comfort and performance of the

apparel. Adaptive apparel is defined by Azher et al. (2012) as “a special clothing design made for people with an impairment, who face difficulties in dressing themselves” (p. 2).

Despite the continued declaration by PLWD that functional features that lack an aesthetic and stylish appeal are not desired, a medical model approach has dominated the apparel industry (Freeman et al., 1985). The industry has focused on accommodating disability impairments, which further stigmatizes and alienates PLWD. For some PLWD, apparel is a means of self-identity and reflection, as well as to identify with able-bodied people. However, when apparel is designed using a medical model of disability view, it is often considered unattractive and lacking innovation (Freeman et al., 1985). Further, within the medical model of disability, PLWD believe that apparel designers often lack knowledge and awareness of their needs (Freeman et al., 1985).

### ***Apparel and the Social Model of Disability***

Lamb (2001) was one of the first scholars in the apparel discipline to suggest research aimed at exploring the relationship between apparel and the social model of disability. She posited that using a social model of disability is comparable to apparel scholarship as researchers focus on appearance and social realities (Lamb, 2001), therefore suggesting that when disability is framed as a social construct, a person’s relationship with apparel, also a social construct, becomes more evident. Lamb argued that the apparel discipline and the apparel industry are ripe for a movement from the medical model approach to the social model approach in the disability movement.

Lamb (2001) connects the social importance of appearance and its role in apparel, stating that apparel should not contribute to discrimination or the reduction in self-esteem of the wearer. She concludes that apparel researchers would likely take the role of apparel

in appearance management for granted; however, for those in the apparel industry, they may overlook and discredit the importance of the wearer's appearance when considering the apparel needs of PLWD. Thus, Lamb suggests that apparel scholars can investigate how apparel contributes to the social barriers facing PLWD. She considers the idea that apparel for "mainstream" (p. 138) has changed drastically since the development of functional apparel in the 1960s. However, apparel for specialized or marginalized consumers has not. She also considers that designers are unintentionally creating apparel that fosters difficulty for PLWD due to their lack of knowledge of PLWD's needs. Lamb's (2001) position has been further highlighted in a recent manuscript by Kabel, McBee-Black, and Dimka (2016). Kabel et al. (2016) highlighted apparel related barriers for PLWD. This article directly connected apparel to the lack of social participation among PLWD by exploring the barriers PLWD faced and contextualized within their societal roles.

The social model of disability theory has taken a prominent position in the disability community by demonstrating how social barriers are limiting access for PLWD. It is argued that apparel is a barrier facing PLWD. However, within the apparel industry, apparel brands have maintained a medical model of disability theory approach to providing apparel to PLWD. Historically, the apparel industry has marketed apparel to PLWD, which was functional and utilitarian, lacking aesthetic and style. Despite repeated declarations by apparel researchers and PLWD, the apparel industry made little to no movement toward providing the apparel wanted and needed by the PLWD market.

***Industry's Initial Responses to the Social Needs of PLWD: Adaptive Apparel***

While researchers highlight the demand to address the social needs of PLWD through apparel, apparel brands have responded by moving beyond the medical needs of PLWD and providing apparel that satisfies their social needs. Tommy Hilfiger® first innovated and introduced an adaptive apparel line for children, in 2016. Mindy Scheier, president and founder of Runway of Dreams™ (RoD), a nonprofit organization, was the chief advocate for the realization of this line.

Scheier, a former fashion designer and a mother of a child living with muscular dystrophy, began her nonprofit organization, RoD, in 2013 after struggling to find jeans that would accommodate her son's leg braces and allow him to use the restroom independently by managing buttons and zippers due to his low muscle tone (Novellino, 2016). Because of the disability, her son consistently wore sweatpants to school because they were the only option allowed for his independence. However, he became unhappy with his lack of apparel options and no longer wanted to wear sweatpants. He asked his mother if he could wear jeans to school, and Scheier was not certain that would be an option. Using her fashion design skills, Scheier, bought jeans and adapted them to accommodate her son's leg braces and that allowed him to independently manage buttons and zippers due to his low muscle tone. She realized that if this was an issue for her son, it had to be an issue for others with disability. She spent two years researching the issue of apparel and disability and interviewing dozens of PLWD to discover their apparel needs. After extensive research, she narrowed her focus to 3 areas for major adaptation of children's apparel: (a) magnetic closures; (b) adjustable pant legs, sleeves, and waistband; and (c) the flexibility of donning and doffing using different points of entry (Novellino, 2016).



With this focused approach, Scheier felt she needed to take this idea to the national level so that more PLWD, especially children, could benefit from these new adaptive apparel solutions. She approached several children's apparel brands, yet only Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> responded to her request. She presented her adaptive apparel line for children to Gary Sheinbaum, the CEO of Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> North Americas, to advocate for the inclusion of adaptive apparel in mainstream fashion. In 2016, Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> launched a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children under partnership with Runway of Dreams and Mindy Scheier (Novellino, 2016), featuring the same product offerings by Tommy Hilfiger's<sup>®</sup> traditional children's line, only with adaptive features. The sizes ran from 4 to 20 for boys and from 4 to 18 for girls, which is the same as their traditional, non-adaptive lines. The line features the adaptive accommodations suggested by Scheier (i.e., magnetic closures, adjustable pant legs, sleeves, and waistbands, and flexibility in donning and doffing; Novellino, 2016; M. Scheier, personal communication, April 18, 2019).

Tommy Hilfiger's<sup>®</sup> entrance into the adaptive apparel market marked the first time a major fashion-forward apparel brand offered an apparel line for PLWD without altering or compromising the products' aesthetic and style. Since then, Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> has expanded their adaptive apparel line into the men's and the women's markets with similar features to the children's line (Davidson, 2018; Leaper, 2018; Lubitz, 2018; Meyersohn, 2018). Tommy Hilfiger, principal designer and visionary, stated that "the democratization of fashion is one of the core values the brand was founded on" (McDonald, 2019, para. 12), and the adaptive collection builds on this vision of inclusivity by "transforming the way the fashion industry defines diversity by serving the

needs of people with disabilities” (McDonald, 2019, para. 12), suggesting the possibility of motivation beyond profit maximization.

**Growth of the Adaptive Apparel Market.** Today, new apparel brands are engaged in the adaptive apparel market. Billy Price, the founder of *Billy Footwear*<sup>®</sup>, an adaptive footwear company, suffered a spinal cord injury at the age of 18 that left him paralyzed from the chest down. He struggled with daily tasks, including putting on shoes. He and a business partner innovated a new shoe design featuring zippers along the side of the shoe and around the toe for ease of wear. This design benefits wearers with club feet, braces, or even those with muscular dystrophy (McDonald, 2019). Price stated that they are designing a shoe using “universal design where you can bridge between the adaptive world and the nonadaptive world” (McDonald, 2019, para. 16). This philosophy of democratization and inclusivity of fashion is echoed by industry analysts. Beth Goldstein, a fashion footwear and accessories analyst for the NPD Group, a market research firm, stated that firms entering the adaptive market are assisting in eliminating the stigma previously associated with PLWD. She emphasized that brands are beginning to understand that the needs of today’s consumers are wide-ranging, and this is pushing the apparel industry to be more inclusive, by stating that “when brands focus on meeting a specific consumer need, they often create great product that appeals to a broad audience” (McDonald, 2019, para. 22).

Since 2016 the adaptive apparel market has grown exponentially. Coresight Research (2019) estimates the global adaptive apparel market will grow to a \$349.9 billion market by 2023, and the U.S. market will grow to \$54.8 billion by 2023. Brands

such as *Nike*<sup>®</sup>, *Target*<sup>®</sup>, and retailers such as *Zappos*<sup>®</sup> have all joined Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> as early innovators within the adaptive market, launching their lines in 2016 and 2017.

More recently, apparel brands such as Land's End<sup>®</sup> and Kohl's<sup>®</sup> have entered the adaptive apparel marketplace. Land's End<sup>®</sup> is providing school uniforms, dress shirts, and casual clothes for kids in addition to professional and casual wear for adults under the line *Universal Collection* (Pearson, 2019). Kohl's<sup>®</sup> introduced adaptive apparel in three of its primary children's wear brands: *Jumping Beans*, *SO*, and *Urban Pipeline*. Much like the Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> adaptive line, Kohl's<sup>®</sup> is taking their traditional apparel lines and adapting them to provide closures that accommodate ease of dressing, in addition to tagless apparel and materials that provide comfort for children with sensory-sensitivity disorders (Tyko, 2019).

As society advanced, so did the needs of consumers, including PLWD. Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, as an innovator, recognized this shift and realized that accommodating the apparel needs of PLWD was a necessity. In addition, market analysts have recognized the global impact of providing apparel to PLWD and are pushing for apparel brands to include adaptive apparel lines into their product offerings in an effort to appease the PLWD market as well as capitalize on the profit potential. The catalyzing effect of the advocate and innovator collaborative partnership between Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> highlights how competitive resources are accomplished in the apparel industry. Throughout this study, we will label Mindy Scheier as the advocate and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> as the innovator in the context of launching a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Therefore, this research study aims to gain in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Mindy Scheier catalyzed the adaptive

apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate. The next section will detail three theories proposed to explain this phenomenon: moral responsibility of corporate sustainability, resource advantage theory objective, and global supply chain management.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This section discusses three key theories that could help identify the research gaps and develop the research questions for this study. MRCS theory could help investigate the motivations for launching a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children by both Mindy Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, the advocate and the innovator. R-A theory could help elucidate how Scheier was able to see that adaptive apparel was a key resource for the apparel industry and subsequently advocate and convince Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> that mainstream adaptive apparel was a new key resource for their firm. Finally, the GSCM theory provides insight into the complexity of the apparel supply chain so that the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children can be better understood in terms of the impact on the supply chain management and coordination the introduction of adaptive apparel had on the apparel supply chain.

#### ***Moral Responsibility of Corporate Sustainability Theory***

To gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the motivation to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children by both the advocate and the innovator, the MRCS theory is reviewed. The theory elucidates that for a corporation to be truly sustainable, the entire supply chain must also be sustainable (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). Sustainability is defined according to the discipline genre for which it is being applied (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). The most widely used definition of

sustainability is provided by the Brundtland Commission as “developments that meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 8). Sustainability, as it applies to the organizational management literature, emphasizes the social, economic, and environmental components of business management and defines sustainability as “a wise balance among economic development, environmental stewardship, and social equity” (Sikdar, 2003, p. 1928). MRCS theory is predicated on the belief that all members of a supply chain would establish sustainability goals together and work toward their goals in a consistent and collaborative manner. This, according to MRCS, would include all members and facets of the supply chain, from top management down to all employees. For this belief to be implemented, all supply chain members, companies, and their employees must “behave faithfully” (Ha-Brookshire, 2015, p. 227) when considering their sustainability efforts. Therefore, each company within the supply chain must be wholly committed to sustainability and implement clear sustainability goals and objectives and have corporate structures that support the execution of those sustainability goals and objectives with little to no variation from company to company and from within each company (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

Ha-Brookshire (2015) developed the MRCS theory based on the directive by the United Nations General Assembly to adopt “grand challenges toward sustainable development” (p. 228) and under the premise that in order for corporations to be truly and effectively sustainable, they must focus on social and environmental improvements as much, if not more, than financial gains. The author based this assumption on Elkington’s triple-bottom-line theory, which suggests corporations, to be classified as sustainable,

must focus on the triple bottom line of financial, social, and environmental improvements (Elkington, 1999). This shift in thinking regarding corporate sustainability contradicts the centuries-long approach to business, which suggests that the only members within an organization that matter are the stakeholders. In fact, for most businesses, the belief has been that employees, customers, suppliers, and members of the community are not the company's direct concern (Dicken, 2015). Thus, Ha-Brookshire (2015) suggests that to meet the grand challenges of sustainability set forth by the United Nations, corporations have a moral responsibility to do the right thing, beyond financial gain, to support social improvement and environmental protection.

Thus, Ha-Brookshire (2015) envisioned a firm's approach to moral responsibility under the auspice of two types of moral duties—perfect and imperfect duties—which was initially professed by Kant (Kant & Gregor, 1996). Perfect duties, such as honesty, are inflexible and absolute duties requiring all individuals to operate accordingly for all situations and circumstances. Imperfect duties, such as charity, are flexible and provide individuals with the opportunity to determine how they will fulfill them. In the business setting, Ha-Brookshire (2015) also argues that corporations can be defined and classified as people, following the “corporate personhood” concept, which is an over 100-year-old paradigm dominated in the legal literature (French, 1979, p. 210). That is, corporations have the same rights and responsibilities as people do and can operate in either a perfect or imperfect duty structure. However, whether a corporation considers sustainability as its perfect or imperfect duty is the challenge and can ultimately determine if a corporation is operating with a moral responsibility toward corporate sustainability (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

Therefore, Ha-Brookshire (2015) posited that corporations could be categorized into one of six different corporate sustainability performances: (a) truly sustainable corporation, (b) occasionally unsustainable corporation, (c) occasionally sustainable corporation, (d) consistently sustainable corporation in selective areas, (e) occasionally unsustainable corporation in selective areas, and (f) occasionally sustainable corporation in selective areas. How a corporation is categorized is based on whether the corporation sees sustainability as a perfect duty. If they do, and they have clearly defined goals and a well-defined corporate structure with no gap between the corporation and individual members' sustainability behavior, a firm would be categorized as truly sustainable. If the corporation has clearly defined goals and a well-defined corporate structure but faces gaps between the corporation and individual member's sustainability behaviors, the firm would be categorized as occasionally sustainable. If the corporation does not have clearly defined goals but sees sustainability as a perfect duty, it would be categorized as an occasionally sustainable corporation.

On the other hand, if the firm does not believe that sustainability is a perfect duty and they have clearly defined goals and a well-defined corporate structure around sustainability with no gaps between the corporation and the individual members' behaviors, the firm would be classified as consistently sustainable in selective areas. If the corporation has gaps between their and their individual members' sustainability behaviors, the firm would be categorized as occasional sustainable in selective areas. Without clear goals, the corporation who viewed sustainability as an imperfect duty would be categorized as occasionally sustainable in selective areas (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

Ultimately, according to Ha-Brookshire (2015), it requires both the corporation (i.e., its policies, structures, and organization) and its members (i.e., employees, vendors/suppliers, and stakeholders) to operate in a morally responsible manner. Corporate moral responsibility must sustain despite corporate members moving in and out of the company or due to the change in the corporate structure. Further, when corporations have a well-defined corporate structure for which all members can easily understand, apply, and follow, the corporation's morally responsible behavior improves. Consequently, when a corporation's structure is unclear or non-existent, the shared knowledge of the corporation and its members become critical to the moral or immoral behavior of the corporation. Meaning that when corporate structure toward moral responsibility is lacking, the dedication and goals of corporate sustainability are often left to interpretation by the members within the corporation. This can result in inconsistent behavior and, therefore, gaps between the corporation's goals and the individual's behavior toward sustainability (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

These gaps between the corporate goals, structure, and members' behavior can lead to corporate hypocrisy (i.e., when a company believes it is something that it is not; Ha-Brookshire, 2015). Thus, when a firm is perceived as hypocritical in its stance, consumers' attitudes toward the firm will turn negative, leading to potential brand distrust as well as distrust among the corporation's individual members (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). This distrust can lead to a downturn in corporate sustainability efforts and a disconnect between corporate sustainability goals and corporate sustainability behaviors (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). In fact, a study by Jung and Ha-Brookshire (2017) empirically tested four major areas of sustainability to determine consumer perceptions of morally



responsible corporate activities toward sustainability. They found four key areas businesses can focus on to achieve moral support from their consumers (in this case, the U.S. consumers): (a) working conditions support, (b) environmental support, (c) community support, and (d) transparency enhancement. The authors propose that these four areas can measure the different levels of corporate sustainability performance from the most important to the least important duties, allowing for businesses to be ranked as truly sustainable or not.

Interestingly, Jung and Ha-Brookshire (2017) found that consumers value corporate sustainability efforts differently, and the various demographic characteristics of consumers influence their views toward a business's morally responsible efforts. These findings, it is suggested by the authors, could allow businesses to clearly understand how to prioritize and implement their morally responsible activities to best meet their consumers' expectations. This suggests that corporations can use their environmental and social sustainability goals to meet their economic sustainability goals.

In fact, Dicken (2015) suggests as much with his classification of a firm's approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is defined as the "relationship between business and larger society" and "a company's voluntary activities in the area of environmental and social issues" (Andersen & Skjoett-Larsen, 2009, p. 3). He states that firms can fall along the CSR spectrum from inactive to pro or interactive. An inactive firm may focus solely on profit maximization as its reason for doing the right thing, while a pro or interactive firm may approach CSR as doing the right thing, doing well by doing good, with the expectation of medium-term profitability (Dicken, 2015). Dicken continues that the pro or interactive CSR firm involves all its external stakeholders,

which includes consumers and suppliers, from the beginning of their CSR life cycle and engages with these external stakeholders in an ongoing fashion.

However, in today's global market, it has become increasingly difficult for corporations to maintain a morally responsible approach to their corporate sustainability, mainly due to the increasingly fragmented global supply chain (Andersen & Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Dicken, 2015). This global fragmentation can affect the performance of a corporation's supply chain. LoMonaco-Benzing and Ha-Brookshire (2016) posit that there needs to be a "value congruence" (p. 2) between the consumer and the corporation for consumers to embrace the moral responsibility approach to corporate sustainability of a firm. Further, it is suggested that the employee–corporation relationship regarding MRCS also elucidates a value-oriented approach to corporate sustainability (LoMonaco-Benzing & Ha-Brookshire, 2016). The authors suggest that as employment is a social contract between the employee and the employer, they both expect particular behaviors under the contract; therefore, employees will attempt to identify the corporation norms and will work to align the organizational values with their personal values around the corporate norms (LoMonaco-Benzing & Ha-Brookshire, 2016). In fact, Ha-Brookshire (2015) argues that due to the global fragmentation of supply chain networks, how successfully a supply chain performs is directly impacted by the performance of all member corporations within the supply chain. Therefore, for a supply chain to be categorized as truly sustainable, each corporation within the supply chain must also be truly sustainable. It is with this impetus Ha-Brookshire (2015) suggested the moral responsibility theory of sustainable supply chain (MRSSC).

MRSSC, much like the MRSC, provides a framework for categorizing a supply chain's sustainability. MRSSC suggests that if the entire supply chain considers sustainability as a perfect duty and the supply chain has clear and convergent goals, as well as having supply chain partners that are truly sustainable, the supply chain can be categorized as truly sustainable. If, however, the entire supply chain fails to have clear and convergent goals with its supply chain partners, the supply chain is categorized as occasionally sustainable. If the entire supply chain has clear and convergent goals yet its partners are not truly sustainable, the supply chain is categorized as occasionally unsustainable (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

On the other hand, if the entire supply chain fails to consider sustainability as a perfect duty, yet has clear and convergent goals and the supply chain partners are consistently sustainable in selective areas, the supply chain can be defined as consistently sustainable in selective areas. If the entire supply chain has clear and convergent goals, yet is not consistently sustainable in selective areas, the supply chain is defined as occasionally unsustainable in selective areas. Finally, if the entire supply chain does not have clear and convergent goals, it is defined as occasionally sustainable in selective areas (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). The catalyst of MRSSC is the presumption that all partners must actively engage with sustainability as a perfect duty in order to attain true sustainability within the supply chain and the corporation (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

When corporate sustainability is used in a more comprehensive manner, it can be used as an underpinning when considering other sustainability efforts of the firm. For example, when considering new partnerships between apparel firms and consumers, the partnership itself could be formed with the shared visions for their moral responsibilities

toward sustainability. Indeed, Elkington (1999) alluded to the development of these new consumer relationships by suggesting that, to achieve triple bottom line performance of sustainability, companies must engage in new partnerships that help each partner perform more efficiently. These new consumer partnerships can provide a platform that supports the mutual achievement of goals that each could not accomplish on their own. Although Elkington's focus was on environmental sustainability, he did suggest that some companies were focusing their sustainability efforts on issues such as Third World development and human rights, a more social sustainability focus.

Elkington's (1999) suggestion regarding new partnerships is demonstrated through the relationships Scheier, the advocate, builds with Tommy Hilfiger® to create the first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line for children. Further, the moral duty experienced by Scheier may ultimately impact her new partnerships, leading to additional feelings of moral duty demonstrated by Tommy Hilfiger®. Therefore, by exploring the advocate's motivation to promote adaptive apparel in the industry and how she went about approaching the innovator, Tommy Hilfiger®, may provide critical insight into how she was able to advocate a new adaptive apparel line, specifically within a moral duty framework. That is, was moral duty ever considered during their partnership formation processes? Further, the results can also provide insight into whether the social model of disability ever influenced Scheier's advocacy process. If both moral duty and social model of disability affected her motivation, how did the advocacy process play out? The insights gained from this study could help discern what influenced the decisions of Scheier (the advocate) to support and create a new adaptive apparel line from the

perspectives of MRCS and the social model theory of disability. Thus, this study seeks to ask the following:

RQ1: What motivated Scheier (the advocate) to create a new adaptive apparel line with major apparel companies? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the advocate's motivation? How did the advocacy process play out?

### ***Resource Advantage (RA) Theory***

To gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of how the advocate, Scheier, realized adaptive apparel was a key competitive resource advantage and then convinced Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator) that it was, the RA theory is reviewed. RA theory, according to Hunt and Arnett (2003), is posited as a “general theory of competition that describes the process of competition” (p. 4). Hunt and Morgan (1996) developed RA theory from Austrian economics and heterogeneous demand theory as a competitor to the neoclassical perfect competition theory. According to the authors, RA theory deviates from perfect competition in that its focus is on the firm's divergent, imperfectly mobile, and costly to copy resources and “stresses the importance of market segments, heterogeneous firm resources, a comparative advantage/disadvantage in resources, and marketplace positions of competitive advantage/disadvantage” (p. 5).

Barney (1991) suggests that firms can achieve sustained competitive advantage through the implementation of strategies that build upon the firm's internal strengths by their responsiveness to environmental opportunities and by neutralizing external threats and reducing the internal weakness of the firm. Gupta (2013) relates resource advantage

or competitive advantage to the core competencies of the firm. He suggests that a firm's core competency is a

unique capability acquired by a firm over a period of time in form [*sic*] of a resource, operations facility, specially skilled manpower, knowhow or delivery of service which gives the firm sustainable competitive advantage in future [*sic*] in quality, design, production or distribution of a product/service or in cost of the product and is viewed as a relative value addition by a prospective customer. (p. 11)

Hunt (1995) suggests that competition is a struggle among firms to achieve a comparative advantage (the ability of a firm to produce more efficiently than any other activity it performs) in resources that provides a "marketplace position of competitive advantage" (p. 329) and, because of this, superior financial performance. Therefore, firms can maintain their competitive advantage if they reinvest in the resources that provided them with the advantage initially and if their competitor's acquisition and innovation efforts fail (Hunt, 2011).

Barney (1991) argues that firms can maintain a sustained competitive advantage when the firm implements a "value creating strategy" (p. 102) that is not implemented by competitors at the same time and when the competing firm is unable to copy the "benefits of the strategy" (p. 102). Hunt (2011) argues that innovation is also key to an organization achieving a sustained competitive advantage as well as better organizational growth, sales, and profit. Thus, Hunt (2011) suggests that innovation allows organizations to improve value for consumers, identify new opportunities to improve growth and identify new market segments and resources within new markets.

According to Hunt and Arnett (2003), firms can approach innovation proactively or reactively. A proactive approach to innovation, according to Hunt (2011), suggests an entrepreneurial approach by the firm. Firms can proactively innovate to gain financial superiority and to maintain a competitive advantage. Whereas, reactive innovation suggests the firm is innovating for the sole purpose of competing with other firms for market segment advantage. Gupta (2013) also suggests that innovation is necessary to achieve competitive advantage by stating that businesses should be capable of innovating things that are difficult for competitors to duplicate. Hunt and Arnett (2003) suggest that firms learn through competition, and thus competing firms; to achieve comparative advantage in a market segment, a firm will attempt to “neutralize and/or leapfrog” (p. 7) the competition through “acquisition, imitation, substitution, or major innovation” (p. 7). Therefore, the constant struggle among firms, as Hunt (1995) argues, is to achieve comparative advantage in resources that will yield a marketplace position of competitive advantage, thus leading to financial superiority.

As was stated by several researchers (Barney, 1991; Gupta, 2013; Hunt 1995), a firm’s reliance on resources is a central tenant of R-A theory. Firm resources are defined as the “tangible and intangible entities available to the firm that enable it to produce efficiently and/or effectively a market offering that has some value for some market segments(s)” (Hunt, 1995, p. 322). Gupta (2013) suggests that a firm’s resources, or core competencies, are not “ordinary skills” that any organization can acquire easily. He suggests that a firm’s resources (or competencies) are built over time and are unique to that organization and to that industry. However, much like Hunt (1995), who states that a

firm's resources are hard to copy, Gupta (2013) states that a firm's resources are "simply impossible" (p. 12) for a competitor to copy.

Further, Hunt and Morgan (1996) posit that a firm's resources are financial, physical, as well as legal, human, organizational, informational, and relational. Barney (1991) suggests that a firm's resources include "all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etc. controlled by a firm that enable the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness" (p. 101). Barney (1991), in an effort to consolidate the vast resources of a firm, developed three categories of firm resources: physical capital resources, and human capital resources. Hunt (1995) also suggests that resources need not be restricted to a firm's tangible assets, but could include anything that provides the firm with value. In fact, Hunt and Arnett (2003) suggest that R-A theory considers the relationships between the firm and its suppliers as well as the firm and its consumers as a fundamental resource that leads to marketplace advantage, subsequently leading to superior financial performance and value of the firm. Thus, according to Hunt and Arnett (2003), R-A theory is a "moderately socialized, embedded theory of competition" (p. 2), thus positioning social relationships and social structures as critical resources of value, which affect competition.

Hunt (1995) suggests that because many firm resources are heterogeneous and immobile, some firms will have a comparative advantage and others a disadvantage in efficiently and effectively producing market offerings that have value for a specific market segment. Firms who achieve competitive disadvantage determine that they must use their current resources more efficiently or more effectively, or they must seek new



resources. Hunt (2011) suggests that due to “heterogeneous intra-industry demand” (p. 9), firms are best considered as “collections of market segments” (p. 9), meaning that different product offerings are necessary within the same industry. Thus, when the heterogeneous “imperfectly mobile resources” (p. 9) are combined with heterogeneous demand, they suggest “diversity as to the sizes, scopes, and levels of profitability of firms within the same industry” (p. 9). Therefore, when a firm succeeds through innovation with a specific market segment, consumers benefit from the expansion into the same market segment by other firms as they attempt to capitalize on the profitability achieved by the innovating firm. However, when an innovating firm fails (competitive disadvantage) they will seek market segments that align more closely with their resource assortment, and that can provide a comparative advantage. Therefore, shifting their resources, firms can achieve efficiency and effectiveness in other market segments.

Although R-A theory is heavily focused on superior financial performance to dictate the competitive advantage/disadvantage of the firm, R-A theory also suggests that the type and scope of the resources a firm has access to can directly affect its competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Hunt, 1995). Unique resources, therefore, suggest a firm’s competitive advantage. According to Barney (1991), some firms possess the same type of physical, human, and organizational resources and, therefore, cannot truly achieve competitive advantage over another firm. However, Barney (1991) also posits that one firm may implement a strategy or use a resource in such a unique way that it can gain competitive advantage where the other firms falter. He references this phenomenon as “first-mover advantages” (p. 104). First-mover advantages suggest that when a firm is the first to implement a strategy, they gain a sustained competitive advantage over their

competition (Barney, 1991). Barney (1991) argues that firms can gain this advantage through access to distribution channels, by developing strong connections with their customers, or upon achieving a strong positive reputation. He also suggests that it can be difficult for a firm to achieve first-mover advantage because when a firm does have heterogeneous resources, a competing firm could likely also achieve the advantage by utilizing the same resources. The catalyst, Barney (1991) suggests, for first-mover advantage is the uniqueness of the resources the firm possesses.

Barrier to entry is another factor of consideration when using R-A theory to discuss the competitive advantage of the firm. According to Barney (1991), some firms with homogeneous resources may gain competitive advantage if the barriers of entry are significantly difficult for competing firms. Barney (1991) suggests that firm resources must be immobile for barriers of entry to exist. If the resources are mobile, it is evident that competing firms would have access to these resources and, therefore, competitive advantage could not be gained by one firm over another. Therefore, for a firm to achieve sustained competitive advantage, due to barriers of entry by competing firms, the firm resources may not be homogeneously distributed among firms, and the resources may not be mobile.

For this study, one can theorize that for Scheier and ultimately for Tommy Hilfiger® their ability to capitalize on the first-mover advantage, key to R-A theory, was directly related to the heterogeneous resources acquired through Scheier's in-depth, user-centered research, her adaptive apparel design innovations, as well as the sense of moral duty felt by both the advocate, Scheier, and the innovator, Tommy Hilfiger®. Further, one could argue that without an organizational structure that allows for innovation in thought

and in partnership, new market segments like PLWD and new markets like adaptive apparel, would continue to go unnoticed.

According to R-A theory, firms need to innovate to compete. Central to proactive innovation is what Hunt and Arnett (2003) call “renewal competences” (p. 9). These competencies enable firms to anticipate changing consumer needs or desires or meet the unmet needs of consumers, envision new market offerings that benefit the consumer, and “foresee the need to acquire, develop, or create the required resources, including competences, to produce the envisioned market offerings” (p. 9). It is in this light that adaptive apparel can be considered as a resource advantage of the firm. It can be argued that the recent growth of the adaptive apparel market is a direct result of apparel firms anticipating the changing needs of consumers or meeting the unmet needs of consumers, as well as envisioning new market offerings that would benefit consumers and innovating the required resources necessary to provide the new market offerings.

Further, R-A theory suggests that renewal competences of the firm allow firms to “influence or shape their environments and renew or reshape themselves” (Hunt & Arnett, 2003, p. 9). Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, as a leading innovator in the adaptive apparel market among mainstream fashion-forward apparel brands, has influenced and shaped the adaptive apparel environment. Subsequently, according to R-A theory, a firm that enters a new market segment as a reactive innovation does so through imitating the resource of the competing firm or finding a superior resource. They also learn from the competing firm’s successes or failures in the new market segment (Hunt & Arnett, 2003). Again, this can be recognized within the adaptive apparel market where Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> was the first to enter the adaptive apparel market by introducing easy to don and doff apparel

utilizing magnetic closures, adjustable hems, and flexible entry points for children.

Competing firms took their lead and used the same adaptive features with their product offerings, seemingly learning from Tommy Hilfiger's<sup>®</sup> successes and failures.

Further, just as Barney (1991) suggested, firms can achieve first-mover advantage by being the first to implement a strategy or enter a market that other competing firms have yet to recognize. In this study setting, for Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, adaptive apparel could be categorized as a firm resource used to gain first-mover advantage in the marketplace and gain a new competitive advantage. It appears that Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> utilized adaptive apparel as a core competency within the firm (Gupta, 2013), according to media coverage of the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children in 2016 (Bahadur, 2016; Davidson, 2018; Diament, 2016; Franklin, 2018; Johns, 2018; Kuperinsky, 2016; Lubitz, 2018; Meyersohn, 2018; Novellino, 2016; Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive, n.d.). In that, adaptive apparel could have been seen by Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> as its unique capability to gain competitive advantage through the introduction of a new, valuable product for a prospective consumer, which had been previously ignored in the marketplace. However, it is not known how the advocate communicated the needs for launching a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children as a potential competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, nor, is it known why Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> was so quick to react. Furthermore, it is also not known whether or not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influenced Scheier's advocacy or Tommy Hilfiger's<sup>®</sup> evaluation before acting to create a new adaptive apparel line is also not known.

Therefore, as the goal of this research study is to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by

exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate and her collaboration with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, the innovator, to launch a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line, R-A theory is used to better understand whether or not Scheier was seen as a key competitive resource, as well as, whether adaptive apparel became seen as a key competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. Thus, for this part of the study, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: How did Scheier (the advocate) advocate for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> (the innovator)? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence her advocacy?

***RA Theory and MRCS Theory: Their Intersectionality in the Adaptive Apparel Market***

In this study setting, if Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> recognized adaptive apparel as a competitive resource, then R-A theory and MRCS theory can intersect to explain the recent social phenomenon of the adaptive apparel market within the apparel industry. R-A theory suggests that a firm can gain competitive advantage by utilizing its unique resources, which can be both tangible and intangible (Hunt, 1995). Further, R-A theory argues that social relationships and key external stakeholders, as well as consumer-driven market responses, can all be defined as unique firm resources (Hunt, 1995). In fact, Thoeni, Marshall, and Campbell (2016) position R-A theory within the realm of market segmentation, arguing that market segmentation is a resource that firms use to gain a competitive advantage.

Thoeni et al. (2016) suggest that the purpose of segmentation is to identify “smaller, mutually exclusive homogeneous groups within a presumed larger

heterogeneous market” (p. 2196). This suggests that individuals vary from each other based on their needs, behaviors, or attitudes; therefore, positioning market segmentation as a resource proposes that firms can gain competitive advantage by defining a “greater number of segments (and possibly offer a greater variety of products addressing evermore specific needs)” (p. 2196). Hunt (2011) suggests that a firm, in an effort to gain a competitive advantage, can use both product differentiation and market segmentation as resources. In this light, it is possible that Tommy Hilfiger® might have utilized product differentiation (adaptive apparel) and market segmentation (PLWD) as firm resources when entering into the adaptive apparel market, although it is now known.

R-A theory also suggests that firms can gain competitive advantage through new product development and strategic business alliances (Hunt, 1995), or “alliance market orientation” as defined by Bicen and Hunt (2012). Bicen and Hunt (2012) suggest that market orientation and business relationships play a critical role in new product development and ultimately are defined as a firm’s competitive advantage resource. In fact, Bicen and Hunt (2012) argue that alliance market orientation serves as both a firm’s informational and relational resource. As an informational resource, alliance market orientation allows a firm to gather market intelligence, dispense this market intelligence through inter-organizational collaboration, and then effectively and efficiently respond to the intelligence gathered. Further, Bicen and Hunt (2012) suggest that alliance market orientation also serves as an idiosyncratic and non-fungible resource, meaning that the collaboration itself cannot easily be transferred to other relationships and therefore becomes of significant value to the firm and its market segment.

Given these views and today's market phenomenon, the rise of the adaptive apparel market could be easily understood as a form of alliance market orientation. The relationship between Scheier (advocate) and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> (innovator) suggests a partnership that provided a new market segment, PLWD, and new product line, adaptive apparel. It can be argued, then, that this partnership "makes possible the integration of the partner firms' individual resources, that is, it allows alliances to extract the competitive advantage potential from the combination of the partner firms' respective resources" (Bicen & Hunt, 2012, p. 597). How this alliance took place and was negotiated is not known, and it would be extremely beneficial to know. Therefore, how this alliance took place and was negotiated is not known, and it would be beneficial to understanding how Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel industry and solidified adaptive apparel as a new market segment for PLWD.

Firm resources can also be conceptualized from a social and moral perspective. This is suggested by Litz (1996), who states that an organization's sustainability is intrinsically connected to the interests of its stakeholders. That is to say; firms must satisfy their stakeholder needs if they wish to maintain legitimacy. Again, stakeholders are defined broadly to include not only internal stakeholders of the firm (i.e., employees and shareholders) but also external stakeholders (i.e., consumers and the communities for which the firm operates). Ha-Brookshire's (2015) MRCS alludes to this connection as well with her categorization of the level of sustainability within a corporation. She posits that to be a truly sustainable organization; there must not be any gaps between the corporate sustainability goals and the sustainability-related behavior of the corporate members. Further, she suggests that a truly sustainable organization would not attempt to

gain financial performance while also impacting social and environmental change within their corporation and its supply chain.

In this study setting, understanding if and how MRCS impacted the negotiation between Scheier, the advocate, and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, the innovator, is necessary to understand the potential intersectionality between R-A theory and MRCS theory. One could argue that negotiations between Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> took place even when both parties agreed to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children—particularly formulating and maintaining critical resources to gain and sustain competitive advantage while pursuing moral duties. Ha-Brookshire (2015) suggests that negotiation can be defined as a process of compromise utilized in an effort to avoid argument or dispute. According to Hopmann (1995), there are six aspects of a negotiation process, identified by bargaining, and they are: (a) initial offers are made by the parties involved; (b) commitments are made to certain positions in an effort to hold firm; (c) promises of rewards and threats of sanctions are issued to entice the other party into making concessions; (d) concessions are made as one party moves closer to another; (e) previous offers are retracted and concessions are made as parties draw apart; and (f) finally, when the demand to concede overtakes the urge to retract, the parties will converge upon an agreement that is somewhere between the initial offers. The goal of the negotiation process is to reach an agreement that is mutually beneficial to both parties—in this case, both Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>.

The apparel research literature addresses negotiation when considering the characteristics relevant to the supply chain functions unique to the apparel industry, which is one of the key factors for firms' competitive advantage. Rana and Ha-



Brookshire (2019) posit that, during negotiation, two or more parties can be confronted by their diverging interests, which can create conflict during the negotiation. In fact, Rana and Ha-Brookshire (2019) suggest that there are internal and global characteristics of negotiation. Internal characteristics relate to the specification of the product, service, or consumer need the design process will impact. The authors suggest that during negotiation, knowledge between the designer's "vision of innovation and the feasibility of execution" (p. 141) can be bridged to meet consumer demand and economic benefits. A second internal characteristic of negotiation within the apparel industry is that which addresses cost, schedule, available materials and processes, aesthetics, and market considerations, all of which are key resources affecting competitive advantages. The inference here is that, during negotiation, the parties will need to consider the cost and lead-time during product development to ensure the needs of all parties are being met in order to gain and sustain competitive advantages (Rana & Ha-Brookshire, 2019). In this study, what is not known is what was negotiated between Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger® in order to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children.

Further, whether or not these negotiations were affected by MRCS and the social model theory of disability is also unknown. Therefore, as the goal of this research study is to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate and her collaboration with Tommy Hilfiger®, the innovator, to launch a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line, the intersection between R-A theory and MRSC theory is used to explore the negotiations between the advocate and the innovator. Thus, the

following research question is proposed to gather the advocate's perceptions toward the negotiation between the two parties:

RQ3: What did the negotiation between Scheier (the advocate) and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> (the innovator) look like from the advocate's perspective? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the negotiations?

### ***Global Apparel Supply Chain Management (GSCM) Theory***

As Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> managed the impact of their moral duties on their negotiation process, it may have also been necessary for them to negotiate the challenge of introducing adaptive apparel into the global supply chain. The GSCM model may help us understand the complexity of the apparel global supply chain (AGSC) and, subsequently, the challenges Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> faced in reorganizing its global supply chain (GSC).

Within highly competitive markets, such as the apparel industry, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to gain market share through traditional business practices; therefore, companies are attempting to redefine their competitive landscape (Mentzer, 2004). Mentzer (2004) argues that companies, to maintain their competitive edge, are looking toward new markets that have shifted their power dynamic from that of the corporate buyer to that of the end-user. For some companies, this results in new cooperative relationships, much like the relationship between Scheier, Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, and the PLWD market. This shift to a consumer-driven market focus is supported by a power shift in the management of the GSC. Power within the GSC has also shifted to the consumer or end-user and, therefore, satisfying the consumer has developed as the

driving force for companies (Mentzer, 2004). Supply chain is defined by Mentzer (2004) as “a set of three or more companies directly linked by one or more of the upstream or downstream flows of products, services, finances, and information from a source to a customer” (p. 4).

Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013), building on Mentzer’s (2004) directive, apply the idea that new markets lead to competitive advantage by stating that the ultimate goal and focus of the apparel industry is to satisfy consumers’ needs and wants. Mentzer (2004) posited that in order to accomplish consumer satisfaction, the firm must embed supply chain management (SCM) into nearly all aspects of the firm’s traditional business practices (i.e., marketing, sales, research and development, forecasting, production, purchasing, logistics, information systems, finance, and customer service). SCM is defined by Mentzer (2004) as “the systemic, strategic coordination of the traditional business functions within a particular company and across businesses within the supply chain, for the purposes of improving the long-term performance of the individual companies and the supply chain as a whole” (p. 4). According to Mentzer (2004), the goal of SCM is to achieve financial performance, suggesting that instead of the traditional approach to business and SCM where supply chain functions were used to support traditional business functions, the SCM is the network for which all business functions should be determined. This positioned SCM as a more critical business function over traditional business functions and allowed for all supply chain functions to be collected under the SCM network umbrella.

Despite the groundbreaking impact of Mentzer’s (2004) theory, Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013) argue that his SCM framework cannot be “blindly” (p. 23) adopted

by the apparel industry. In fact, Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013) posit that due to the unique nature of the apparel industry's approach to consumer satisfaction, the ultimate goal of an AGSC must reside in consumer satisfaction and not on business profit. The authors argue that for some consumers, this satisfaction may be gained through consuming products that are socially and environmentally responsible. Gereffi and Frederick (2010) also support this argument by suggesting that as apparel industry and consumer trends change, the AGSC will trend toward more exclusive product lines and an increased focus on social and environmental standards.

Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013) further argue that satisfying consumer's needs and wants has become increasingly difficult in the AGSC due to the "extremely fragmented and globalized" apparel industry (p. 22). The authors suggest that globalization of the apparel supply chain has caused some consumers to become disillusioned and often distrustful of the apparel industry. Dicken (2015) also argues this point by suggesting that the highly fragmented AGSC has been dominated by a buyer-driven approach and not a consumer-driven approach. He argues that the most significant shift in the AGSC network is the domination by major and specialty retail chain buyers on the global apparel production network. This, combined with increased off-shore production of apparel items and the rise of the fast-fashion market, has led to a continued chase for cheap labor and an effort by the major retailers and brands to squeeze their supply chain partners (Dicken, 2015). In fact, Dicken (2015) suggests that the "highly concentrated purchasing power" (p. 466) of large retailers and brands gives them "enormous leverage over clothing manufacturers" (p. 466).

More consumers will become disillusioned, and brands will continue to battle the distrust building among apparel brands as firms focus on managing their AGSC in order to leverage their purchasing power and not on how they can use their AGSC to satisfy the needs and wants of their consumers (Dicken, 2015; Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013). It is suggested, however, that one way to ensure competitive advantage through supply chain management is to diversify products and markets (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010) and focus on satisfying consumer's needs and wants as well as capitalize on the unique supply chain functions apparent in the AGSC (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013). It was in this light that the authors developed the AGSC model. Traditionally, within the AGSC, there are critical high-value activities operated by lead firms (i.e., retailers, brand marketers, and brand manufacturers), including design, marketing, consumer services, and logistics (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010). These activities, according to the GSCM model developed by Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013), are considered key apparel supply chain functions and can be placed into context within the traditional supply chain model.

The GSCM model consists of three major sections that define the apparel industry: (a) humans' wants and needs, (b) apparel supply chain, and (c) human satisfaction as an outcome. As individuals, we each have different apparel wants and needs; some are based on our individual needs or wants, while others are affected by our biological or psychological needs. Collectively, our needs and wants of apparel have been shaped through social norms (i.e., we must remain clothed in public) and cultural expectations (i.e., certain religious events require specific apparel). Ultimately, our needs and wants are influenced by our individual environment, that is, political, social, economic, technological, and natural (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013).

Therefore, by establishing the goal of the apparel industry's GSCM as achieving human satisfaction from apparel products, the AGSC can be seen as functioning differently than that of traditional business or marketing supply chain management frameworks (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013). As is suggested by Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013), the apparel supply chain ranges from fiber producers to the ultimate end-user of apparel. To provide the most desired goods to consumers, there exists a variety of functions necessary within the apparel supply chain. To bring an apparel product to market, an apparel firm must conduct the necessary research, including forecasting and trend research, to ensure they are meeting the needs of their specific consumer market and conduct consumer market research to better understand the behavior of their targeted consumer. Fundamental market research is also imperative to ensure the apparel firm's understanding of any economic, political, cultural, or social implications that may impact their targeted consumer. Creativity is also required to ensure that the apparel design satisfies the needs of the consumer market. Finally, product development is a function that interprets the creative design into samples, which leads to the creation of patterns, production steps, and methods, and fit and production samples (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013).

Production and sourcing are also key apparel supply chain functions. Sourcing activities are necessary before production to ensure all necessary components of the product are ready and available for production. Sourcing activities can include design, pattern making, cutting and sewing, fiber production, finishing, and coordinating logistics. Merchandising supports the supply chain to ensure the production of the optimal amount of goods as promptly as possible for financial gain. Finally, retailing and

distribution consist of the many ways in which the final apparel product can be sold to the ultimate end-user. This may consist of traditional brick-and-mortar retailing and e- and m-commerce (i.e., omnichannel retail strategy; Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013).

According to Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013), for these supply chain functions to be successful, there must be coordination within the organization as well as intra-organizational coordination. This, as suggested by Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013), is best handled through creative problem solving, leadership, and education within the apparel industry and supply chain. These supporting activities ensure the apparel firm successfully satisfies the needs and wants of its consumers (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013). However, some argue that as the AGSC network changes, so will the management of the network (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010), making it increasingly difficult to satisfy the needs and wants of consumers. They argue that, due to the global fragmentation of the apparel supply chain, apparel firms are under pressure to provide quality items at low prices and work with suppliers who can provide flexibility in production and services offered. Further, they suggest there is an overall push to move toward smaller production runs to mitigate the decrease in apparel demand but also to support the increased focus on niche markets (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010).

In this study setting, a niche market could be identified as the adaptive apparel market and PLWD. The apparel needs and wants of PLWD have been historically ignored within the apparel industry (Kabel, McBee-Black, & Dimka, 2016), and PLWD have failed to find satisfaction with the apparel provided to them (Freeman et al., 1985). The difficulty in finding apparel that satisfies the needs and wants of PLWD can be directly connected to the complexity of the global supply chain. However, unlike other

brands, Tommy Hilfiger® was able to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. What is not known is what role Scheier played to help Tommy Hilfiger® work within its existing supply chain when they launched the mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Further, it is not understood what role Scheier played so that Tommy Hilfiger® could ensure all their supply chain members supported the production of adaptive apparel.

Therefore, as the goal of this research study is to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate and her collaboration with Tommy Hilfiger®, the innovator, to launch a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line, GSCM theory is used to understand the role Scheier (the advocate) played in helping Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator) manage and negotiate its existing supply chain to accommodate the inclusion of adaptive apparel. Thus, the following questions are proposed:

RQ4: What role did Scheier (the advocate) play in helping Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator) manage and coordinate its existing supply chain during the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children?

### **Research Conceptual Model and Summary of Research Questions**

Chapter 2 traced how the apparel industry has recently embraced adaptive apparel as a viable market for PLWD, moving from a medical model of disability approach to apparel for PLWD to a social model of disability approach. It also utilized MRSC and R-A theory to suggest that adaptive apparel can be seen as a firm's moral duty in order to support the needs and wants of PLWD and as a firm's competitive advantage resource. Further, it explored how adaptive apparel may have impacted the supply chain functions



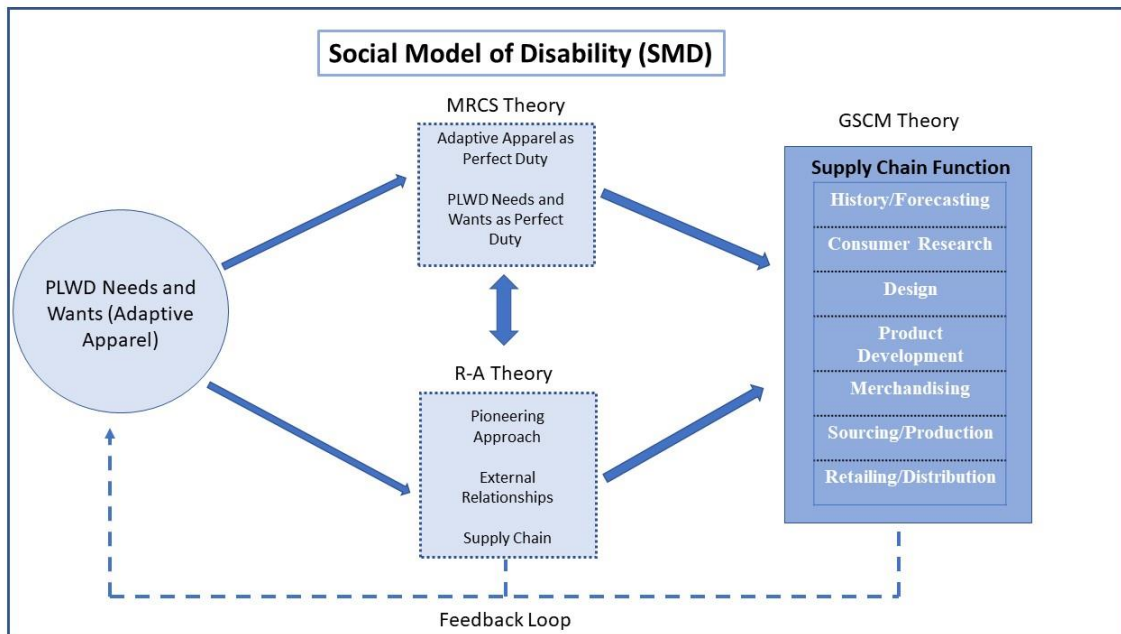
in the GSCM model. Therefore, as the goal of this research study is to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Scheier catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate and her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, the innovator, to launch a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line for children, a conceptual model was created to showcase the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study.

This conceptual model represents the four key theories guiding this research, the social model theory of disability, MRSC theory, R-A theory, and GSCM theory. This framework reflects the approach this study takes by utilizing the social model theory of disability as a guiding theory; influencing all other theories at work in this study. The needs and wants of PLWD, through the inclusion of adaptive apparel into the marketplace, are impacted by MRCS theory, in that if adaptive apparel and the needs and wants of PLWD are seen as perfect duties it could represent a morally and/or socially responsible firm. This moral and social responsibility would then relate to the development of adaptive apparel as a key competitive resource through Scheier's adaptive apparel advocacy, the relationships she builds to ensure adaptive apparel is included in the apparel marketplace, and ultimately her influence on the apparel supply chain network by creating adaptive design innovations. Both MRCS and R-A theory influence the AGSC and its unique functions. Which, is ultimately guided by GSCM theory, looking specifically at how, if at all, did the introduction of adaptive apparel into the AGSC impact the overall supply chain network and/or the apparel supply chain functions within the AGSC network. The feedback loop, represented in this model, suggests that there might be impacts, from the supply chain, that feedback into adaptive

apparel advocacy and thus, influence, how adaptive apparel is seen as a morally responsible thing to do by the firm as well as, as a key competitive resource for the firm.

**Figure 2.1**

*Research Study Theoretical Framework Conceptual Model*



In summary, to accomplish the research goal set forth in this study, the following research questions were examined:

RQ1: What motivated Scheier (the advocate) to create a new adaptive apparel line with major apparel companies? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the advocate's motivation? How did the advocacy process play out?

- RQ2: How did Scheier (the advocate) for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator)? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence her advocacy?
- RQ3: What did the negotiation between Scheier (the advocate) and Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator) look like from the advocate's perspective? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the negotiations?
- RQ4: What role did Scheier (the advocate) play in helping Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator) manage and coordinate its existing supply chain during the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children?

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

Chapter 3 contains the following sections: (a) qualitative approach, (b) case study approach, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis.

#### **Qualitative Research**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). This differs from quantitative research, which is a method used to test theories through an examination of the relationship among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers use a qualitative research method when the study design requires the need to focus on an inductive style, which is the “individual meaning, and the importance of reporting the complexity of a situation” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.4).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest there is a multitude of qualitative research design approaches, including narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnography, and case study. Narrative research allows the researcher to study individuals to gather stories about their lives for the purpose of retelling. Phenomenological research derives from philosophical and psychological backgrounds and supports the researcher describing the lived experiences of individuals as it relates to a phenomenon for which the participants are involved. Grounded theory is based in the sociology discipline and is used so as to allow the researcher to derive “a general, abstract theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). Ethnography is also grounded in sociology and allows the researcher to study shared behaviors and actions of an entire cultural group in

their natural setting over some time. Finally, a case study, which is used in multiple fields of study, allows the researcher to develop an in-depth and holistic analysis of a case where the case is bounded by time and activity.

### **Case Study Approach**

To achieve the objective of this study, a case study design was determined to be the best approach to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in-depth and holistically, within its real-world context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 16).

Case study method is defined by Yin (2014) as a method that attempts to highlight a decision or a set of decisions by exploring why the decisions were made, how they were implemented, and the ultimate results of the decisions. In fact, Yin (2014) suggests that a case study method should be used when *how* or *why* questions are being asked and when “such questions deal with operational links” (p. 10) that need to be tracked over a period of time rather than determining the frequency or incidence of the phenomenon. It is suggested that a case study is relevant when the research questions posed require an “in-depth description of some social phenomenon” (Yin, 2014, p. 4).

Yin (2014) suggests six sources for evidence when conducting a case study: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. Utilizing various sources of evidence to support your case study can be complimentary and make for a strong case study (Yin, 2014). Further, Yin (2014) suggests that a case study would be used when a researcher wants to understand a real-world case, and they assume that to understand the case, they will need to involve critical

contextual conditions relative to the case. In fact, Stake (1995) suggests as much by stating:

It is not unusual for the choice of a case to be no ‘choice’ at all. Sometimes, we are given, even obligated to take it as the object to study. We are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case. We have an intrinsic interest in the case. (p. 3)

Stake (1995) posits that case study research is not sampling research. He suggests that researchers do not utilize case study research to understand other cases; instead, a case study is deployed to understand each case. According to Stake (1995), our research questions will lead us to ask the question: Which are the units of analysis that are most likely to “lead us to understandings, assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalizations?” (p. 4). In fact, Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that the idea of qualitative research is to “purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material)” (p.185) that will help the researcher best understand the social phenomenon being studied. Therefore, it is based on this criterion that a single-case study was deployed to explore the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children through the lived experiences of Scheier, the advocate, who helped create the adaptive apparel movement and collaborated with Tommy Hilfiger®, the innovator, to launch the first mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel line for children.

Yin posits that a single-case study design is appropriate when the case to be studied is critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggests that when designing a single case study, the theories used should have “specified

a clear set of circumstances within which its propositions are believed to be true” (p. 51). It is at this point that the single case study can help determine if the propositions are true or not or whether alternative explanations might be more relevant to the case (Yin, 2014). As is demonstrated in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework for this study can help ensure whether the propositions of the study are true or not, or whether there are alternative explanations. Further, the theoretical frameworks used for this study support the selection of the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children as the single-case to be studied while exploring the lived experiences of Mindy Scheier, the advocate, as she worked with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, the innovator, to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children .

Another rationale for using a single case study approach, according to Yin (2014), is whether the case is unusual. It can be argued that Scheier’s advocacy for the inclusion of adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion through her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> is unusual as she helped launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream fashion-forward apparel brand for children. Further, Yin (2014) suggests using a single case study approach when the case is considered revelatory. One could argue that the uniqueness of launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children and the insight acquired throughout the processes, precluding the launch, can provide significant benefit to the apparel industry and serve as a historical representation of a catalyzing moment in time. Moreover, a case study approach will allow the researcher to understand how Scheier worked collaboratively with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, her purpose for advocating for the adaptive apparel market, as well as what took place during her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>.

This insight is necessary to understand the impact of the a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children launch on the apparel industry.

### *Bounding the Case*

When utilizing a case study as a research method, it is necessary to bound the case (Yin, 2014). This includes the identification of the unit of analysis (case or cases to be studied) as well as defining the specific events or processes to investigate and, finally, specify the period for the beginning and end of the case. Yin (2014) posits that “to justify doing case study research, you need to go one step further: You need to define a specific, real-life ‘case’ to be a concrete manifestation of the abstraction” (p. 34). Moreover, Yin (2014) suggests that when defining your case or units of analysis, the researcher should “compare their findings with previous research” (p. 34), suggesting the researcher should provide key definitions in the study that are clear and relevant to the phenomenon of study. Yin further suggests that the researcher should either use units of analysis that are similar to those previously studied or which “innovate in clear, operationally defined ways” (p. 34). Therefore, for this study, the unit of analysis will be a single, main case, the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, as it was experienced by Mindy Scheier, the advocate who helped create the adaptive apparel movement and collaborated with Tommy Hilfiger® to launch the adaptive apparel line for children.

To bound the case further, this study examines the events and processes that led Scheier to become an advocate for adaptive apparel and convince, and subsequently, partner and collaborate with Tommy Hilfiger® to launch the first mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel brand for children in the apparel industry. All the experiences



and knowledge she had and gained throughout the process will be explored, as well as how her experiences and knowledge helped her achieve a partnership opportunity with Tommy Hilfiger®.

### ***Description of the Advocate, Scheier***

Scheier founded Runway of Dreams in 2014 after her son Oliver, who lives with a rare form of Muscular Dystrophy, wanted to wear jeans to school like his friends. She was frustrated that she was unable to find apparel to accommodate his needs, and the lack of apparel was forcing him to wear sweatpants<sup>2</sup> while his friends were wearing jeans (About Runway of Dreams Foundation, n.d.). Using her fashion design background, Scheier began traveling the country to observe PLWD during their daily dressing routines. She used this information to better understand the apparel issues they faced. It was during these observations that Scheier realized how important apparel was to them and how unsatisfied they were with their apparel options (M. Scheier, personal communication, April 18, 2019).

Armed with this information, Scheier was determined to fix this issue. She felt confident she could design apparel that provided ease of donning and doffing and be fashionable and stylish. Although she realized she could not create a garment that would solve all the issues for all disabilities, she believed she could create apparel that would accommodate most disabilities. This realization prompted the development of children's apparel using adaptive features. Scheier purchased children's apparel and added vent-slits to the hem of jeans and encased magnets inside to allow for the vents to open and slide

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<sup>2</sup> Because Oliver was born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy, he wore leg braces that made it difficult to fit anything other than loose fitting pants over the leg braces. In addition, it was difficult for Oliver to manipulate pants with buttons and zippers to his low muscle tone.

over prosthetics. She removed zippers from pants and replaced them with magnetic closures, making it easier for someone with dexterity issues to get in and out of their pants. She opened the neckline of a t-shirt from the neck to the sleeve, along the shoulder, and added magnetic closures. She placed magnets along the placket of dress shirts and removed the need button the dress shirt. Using her son as a wear-tester, she determined that these style adaptations were not only functional but stylish because he was thrilled to wear them (M. Scheier, personal communication, April 18, 2019).

With this new design insight and knowledge about adaptive apparel, Scheier set out to change the apparel industry, one brand at a time. However, Scheier was repeatedly turned down by numerous apparel brands until she pushed forward and finally got the attention of Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. After preparing for weeks to present her adaptive apparel line and advocate for the inclusion of adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion, she was shocked to discover that it took little convincing for Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> to agree to include adaptive apparel in its product offerings. After working with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> on the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, launched in 2016, Scheier collaborated with the brand as they developed their first stand-alone adaptive apparel line, *Tommy Adaptive*, launched in 2017 (M.Scheier, personal communication, April 18, 2019).

### **Data Collection**

The researcher deployed data source, method, and theory triangulation to provide a rich understanding of the phenomenon of the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children through the perspective of Scheier, the adaptive apparel advocate, and her lived experiences during the process leading up to the launch. Semi-

structured interviews, observations of Scheier, and review and analysis of a variety of archival documents were reviewed for the study. The University of Missouri Institutional Review Board approval was granted before the collection of data and required only verbal consent, by Scheier, to participate in the study. Verbal consent was given during the interview session. The verbal consent script used for the interview with Scheier is provided in Appendix A.

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posit that interviews exist on a continuum from highly structured to unstructured. Unstructured interviews allow the researcher to ask open-ended questions as you would in a typical conversation, and they are used when the researcher does not know enough about the phenomenon to ask relevant questions. While, structured interviews provide the researcher with previously developed questions that will be asked in sequential order and are typically used to gather demographic data. The semi-structured interview allows the researcher flexibility in their question-asking, as there is no specific order for which the questions must be asked. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 111).

One face-to-face interview took place at the workplace of Scheier in Livingston, New Jersey. With a follow-up interview taking place on the phone after the first interview. The follow-up interview was scheduled after the transcript from the first interview was coded for the first time and found gaps in the data that required additional questions. The face-to-face interview began with a broad question asking Scheier to talk

about her career in the fashion industry. The goal of this question was to make Scheier feel comfortable and to allow her to discuss her personal and professional journey that led to the case of study. A full list of the interview questions posed to Scheier can be found in Table 3.1.

**Interview Questions that Address the Research Questions.** According to Yin (2014), your research design should establish research questions that answer who, what, where, how, and why. How and why questions are most commonly used when using a case study method and are preferred when the research study is examining a contemporary event where the behaviors cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2014). Research study questions help the researcher identify the relevant information that needs to be collected about the units of analysis (cases) (Yin, 2014). According to Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002), research questions provide the “scaffolding for the investigation and the cornerstone for the analysis of the data” (p. 31). Therefore, the authors state, “researchers should form interview questions on the basis of what truly needs to be known” (p. 31).

The research questions in this study derive from the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Each question that was posed was intended to elicit insight into how the theory supports or does not support the findings. Table 3.1 presents the research questions of the study, based on theory, and the interview questions posed to Scheier. The researcher used broad, overarching interview questions to help invoke a thick description of the events and processes of the case. Further, the researcher used the method of probing to guide the interview into a more in-depth and holistic conversation about the phenomenon. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) probing is asking follow-up

questions or comments during the interview process. The researcher will probe when they need a more in-depth understanding of what the participant is discussing or are seeking clarity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

It is worth noting that through the interview process the researcher did not formally ask questions of the participant. The initial broad question posed to Scheier about her career path led her to begin talking, in a chronological way, about her process from early in her career to her recent engagement with adaptive apparel. Therefore, the researcher utilized the method of probing frequently throughout the interview process to gain more clarity about situations, events, and processes for which Scheier would describe. Moreover, the researcher would probe for more detail or to redirect Scheier back to a specific line of questioning. This method of questioning resembled a more conversational tone to the interview process and allowed Scheier to feel more comfortable and provided emotional and deeper insight into her processes and thoughts.

**Table 3.1**

*Research Questions Related to Theory and Interview Questions for Mindy Scheier*

Theory: MRCS Theory and the Social Model Theory of Disability	
Research Question	Interview Question
<b><i>RQ1: What motivated Scheier (the advocate) to create a new adaptive apparel line with major apparel companies? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the advocate's motivation? How did the advocacy process play out?</i></b>	1) Tell me about your career in the fashion industry. <i>[Probe for details regarding training, evaluation of the industry, awareness of adaptive apparel, how did or did not the industry approach PLWD and adaptive apparel]</i>
	2) How did you get involved in designing and producing an adaptive apparel line? <i>[Probe for MRCS and social model theory of disability influences]</i>
	3) Tell me about the responses you received from the apparel industry when attempting to promote the inclusion of adaptive apparel. <i>[Probe for MRCS and social model theory of disability influences]</i>

	4) How has your philosophy and approach to the apparel needs of PLWD changed since your initial involvement with adaptive apparel? <i>[Probe for potential moral responsibilities and social model theory of disability]</i>
Theory: RA Theory and the intersectionality of MRCS and RA Theory	
Research Question	Interview Question
<b><i>RQ2: How did Scheier (the advocate) advocate for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator)? How did or did not MRCS, and the social model theory of disability influence her advocacy?</i></b>	1) Tell me about your initial discussions with apparel brands before launching a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. <i>[Probe for key resources that Scheier used to advocate from the R-A theory perspective. Probe for potential moral responsibilities and social model theory of disability]</i>
	2) Tell me about how your knowledge of the apparel industry and the design process impacted your discussions with apparel brands initially. <i>[Probe for key resources that Scheier used to advocate from the R-A theory perspective. Probe for potential moral responsibilities and social model theory of disability]</i>
	3) Discuss the talking points you provided to apparel brands when discussing why they should adopt adaptive apparel. <i>[Probe for key resources that Scheier used to advocate from the R-A theory perspective. Probe for potential moral responsibilities and social model theory of disability]</i>
Research Question	Interview Question
<b><i>RQ3: What did the negotiation between Scheier (the advocate) and Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator) look like from the advocate's perspective? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the negotiations?</i></b>	1) Tell me about your initial meetings and negotiation with Tommy Hilfiger (TH) when launching a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. <i>[Probe for key negotiation tactics that Scheier used to negotiate from the MRCS and social model theory of disability. Probe for potential key resources discussed or utilized during negotiation]</i>
	2) Discuss the talking points you used when negotiating the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. <i>[Probe for key negotiation tactics that Scheier used to negotiate from the MRCS and social model theory of disability. Probe for potential key resources discussed or utilized during negotiation]</i>
	3) Describe for me what you think went well during your initial meetings with TH. What did not go well? <i>[Probe for R-A theory, social model theory of disability, and MRSC theory implications]</i>

	4) Describe for me the moment when you knew you had made it with TH. <i>[Probe for the social model theory of disability and MRSC theory implications]</i>
Theory: GSCM Theory	
Research Question	Interview Question
<b><i>RQ4: What role did Scheier (the advocate) play in helping Tommy Hilfiger® (the innovator) manage and coordinate its existing supply chain during the launch of Tommy Adaptive?</i></b>	1) Tell me about all that took place before the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children in 2016. <i>[Probe for GSCM theory implications]</i>
	2) Tell me about how you approached the challenges of supply chain management with TH during the launch of a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. <i>[Probe for GSCM theory implications]</i>

### ***Documents, Archival Records, and Artifacts***

In addition to interviews, the researcher used documents and archival records (i.e., media coverage of the phenomenon, research and process documentation, etc.).

Documents, archival records, and artifacts are “ready-made” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162) sources of data that are “easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p. 162). Documents most commonly used in a qualitative study include official records, organizational promotional materials, letters, newspaper accounts, corporate records, government documents, historical accounts, diaries, blogs, and others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

When the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children launched in 2016, there was extensive media coverage. Using the media coverage allowed the researcher to place Scheier’s description of the events in context with how Scheier, Tommy Hilfiger® and the adaptive apparel line for children were positioned in the public domain. In addition, the archival records allowed the researcher to support the findings from data collection. During the interview, Scheier provided the researcher with a multitude of documents and records to support the case study research.

These documents included photographs of her son Oliver before and during her adaptive apparel advocacy. Scheier also provided technical design packages that she created when working with a technical designer to conceptualize the findings from her adaptive apparel research. These documents were also coded and analyzed during data analysis and are incorporated in Chapter 4 for contextualization. Scheier also provided documents developed to “pitch” adaptive apparel to the apparel brands. These documents included “pitch” decks and technical design packages used when collaborating with apparel brands, including Tommy Hilfiger®. Finally, Scheier provided access to photographs of her research process including her focus groups and observations of PLWD. All documents, archival records, and artifacts utilized for this study were positioned within the study’s theoretical framework and guided by the research questions of this study.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that in addition to other traditional forms of document analysis, the researcher should use a research journal during the data collection phase. A research journal can then become a source for data analysis. For this study, the researcher took field notes during the interviews and used a research journal to document their observations and insights immediately following the interview. The research journal included a reference to initial insights and gut-reactions to the answers provided by Scheier. Moreover, the researcher made notes regarding the interview location, the demeanor of Scheier during the interview process, and other details relevant to the researcher at the time. From the research journal, the researcher created a series of case study memos to guide initial findings during the data analysis process. These field notes and memos were used later during data analysis.



According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), using documents, archival records, and artifacts is no different from conducting interviews or observations. The authors suggest that whether the researcher is in the field collecting data or online collecting data, they are still guided by their research questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings. What is most interesting about using these types of evidence for data collection is the possibility of “accidental” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 175) valuable data. It is necessary for the researcher to maintain an open mind and perspective during data collection to take advantage of opportunities for unique data collection.

Overall, 191 pages of Scheier’s documents were reviewed, coded, and analyzed. These documents included technical packages, proposals, pitch decks, and other business and process documents. Eighty-eight images documenting Scheier’s process and prototype development were also included in the coding and analysis. Media coverage of the launch of the adaptive apparel line for children with Tommy Hilfiger® and the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children resulted in 149 pages of published articles being coded analyzed. Finally, 65 pages of field notes and case study memos were reviewed and analyzed.

### ***Observations***

Case study takes place in real-world settings of the case and therefore provide the researcher with an opportunity for direct observations (Yin, 2014). Observation happens when the researcher takes field notes documenting the behavior and activities of the individuals being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), observations are different from interviews in that they typically take place where the phenomenon of interest occurred, and they represent a firsthand encounter with

the phenomenon of interest. Interviews, however, are typically interwoven with observations. The terms fieldwork and field study connote both interviews and observations and could include the study of documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observation ultimately allows the researcher to “provide some knowledge of the context” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139) of the phenomenon of study. Also, observations can provide better insight into the phenomenon being studied without adding to the anxiety that may occur during person-to-person interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Therefore, for this study, the researcher conducted observations of Scheier, the advocate, in her home and work environment to help gain insight into how her personal and professional lives converged or diverged to impact her role as an advocate for the adaptive apparel movement. Scheier works from home, and therefore, her home is her work environment. Scheier currently serves as the executive director of Runway of Dreams. The researcher’s observations were guided by the theories and research questions underpinning this study. During all observations, the researcher took field notes. At one point, during the observation and interview, Scheier joined a conference call to discuss the next runway show being developed for adaptive apparel. Scheier’s engagement on this conference call allowed the researcher to witness Scheier as she was working and advocating for PLWD and adaptive apparel. Although, content from this call was not allowed to be included in this study, as it was outside the bounded case of study, the insight gathered from her interaction with others and how she advocated for PLWD and adaptive apparel was noted. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that “subtle factors” (p. 141), such as those captured on the conference call, are also worthy of observation,

suggesting that informal or unplanned activities, nonverbal communication (i.e., dress), and what is not happening are important to observational data collection.

The researcher was also given access to the adaptive apparel sample closet Scheier maintained in her home. The closet included the prototypes developed from her initial research and development of adaptive apparel. The researcher took photographs of these prototypes and these images can be found incorporated in Chapter 4 as they relate specifically to the research questions and theoretical framework guiding this study. Moreover, the researcher reflected on the observation through the use of field notes and used the findings from the observation to develop initial themes by categorizing the field notes into thematic areas connected to the theories and research questions of the study. Overall, nearly 60 pages of field notes and case study memos were reviewed.

### ***Trustworthiness***

According to Yin (2014), rigor can be communicated by establishing a strong case study from the design phase through the composition phase. He suggests the use of four tests to ensure the quality of the research design: (a) external validity, (b) construct validity, (c) reliability, and (d) internal validity. External validity can be tested during the design phase, for example, by using theoretical frameworks to guide the research study, which strengthens the ability of the researcher to collect data and provide useful strategies when analyzing the data (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggests that during the design phase, the researcher uses theory to “have a sufficient blueprint for your study” (p. 38). For this study, theoretical frameworks have been identified and have been used to guide the research design and will be used to guide data collection and data analysis.

Construct validity and reliability can be implemented during the data collection phase of the research study. Construct validity allows for the identification of the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin, 2014, p. 46), while reliability ensures that data collection procedures used can be replicated (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggests that in order to meet the standard of construct validity, the researcher must (a) define their concepts of study and relate them to the overall objectives of the study, and (b) identify operational measures that match these concepts, preferably citing published studies that make similar connections. For this study, all concepts have been identified and defined and are established, according to prior research, in the literature review of this study.

The use of multiple sources of evidence can help increase the construct validity of the study as well as establish a chain of evidence during data collection. Construct validity is also strengthened by utilizing a member check of the research findings (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), the most significant benefit of using multiple sources of evidence during a case study is the development of “convergent lines of inquiry” (p. 120). This means that any finding or conclusion from a case study using multiple different sources of data is likely to be more “convincing and accurate” (Yin, 2014, p. 120). For this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, documents, and archival records and artifacts to provide meaning to the phenomenon of study. In addition, member checks were utilized as Scheier was given the opportunity to review the findings and provide feedback to the researcher.

Scheier was sent Chapter 4 and asked to review for accuracy and integrity. She provided written feedback and the researcher and Scheier spoke on the phone and went

through Chapter 4 line-by-line to review her requested edits. Scheier's initial comment was "I am simply floored by the incredible work you have done in retelling my story from such an analytic and precise lens. I think you did an exceptional job in capturing the details of how this all unfolded." Scheier's concerns were focused on the choice of words used. For example, Scheier discussed her desire to reference the disability population as people with disabilities (PWD) and not people living with disabilities (PLWD). She commented that "she had been cautioned against using [the term] 'living with'" and that she wanted to ensure that when she was directly quoted or referenced that the term PWD was used. The researcher discussed how disability scholars use person-first language and that PLWD would be used when referencing the study's organizational and theoretical framework. The research participant agreed upon this compromise.

Additional comments provided by Scheier included the need to ensure that the term, children, was included when discussing the first partnership between Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger®. The researcher edited the document to ensure that when referencing the first partnership between Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger® the words, "adaptive apparel line for children" was included. Moreover, Scheier requested that the term collaboration or co-branded be replaced with partnership. These changes were made through the study as well.

When discussing how her son Oliver would be highlighted in the study's findings, Scheier requested that a reference to his inability to independently manage buttons and zippers, due to his low muscle tone, be included when discussing his story about wearing sweatpants or when discussing the adaptations Scheier made to accommodate PWD. Moreover, Scheier was adamant that the tone of the study not indicate that (a) she was

against the idea of making a profit from adaptive apparel or (b) she saw herself as a martyr when she moved her business model from for-profit to non-profit. She stated very strongly, during our member check conversation, that to imply that her goal was “not to make money but to educate” suggests that the industry may believe that the population of PWD and the adaptive apparel market is not a viable and profitable business endeavor. Therefore, she wanted to ensure that her decision to move from a for-profit to a non-profit was simply a business decision to ensure the idea of adaptive apparel was not lost. Further, when discussing her *Joan of Arc* reference, Scheier insisted that the study’s findings highlight that she used the term *Joan of Arc* to allude to the dedication and drive the historical figure had. Scheier was sent the final draft of the study after the edits were made.

Reliability supports the replication of the study by other researchers. The overall goal of reliability, according to Yin (2014), is to minimize errors and biases in the study. To ensure replication, it is necessary to document all procedures followed during the data collection and analysis phase. Yin (2014) suggests the use of a case study protocol to support documentation of procedures as well as the use of a case study database to track the procedures methodically. Yin (2014) states that to ensure reliability, the researcher should conduct their study as if “someone was looking over your shoulder” (p. 49). For this study, a case study protocol (see Appendix C) was used to support the focus and process of the study. The researcher used field notes to create data collection memos, which were used to develop themes for coding and analysis of the data. All procedures were documented and organized into a case study database to support future research activities. Ultimately nearly 60 pages of field notes and case study memos were created and used during the data analysis phase of the study.

Internal validity is managed during the data analysis phase of the study. According to Yin (2014), internal validity is necessary when a study is explanatory—when the researcher wishes to explain how and why one event leads to another event. Incorrectly identifying a causal relationship between  $x$  and  $y$  without awareness of  $z$  may have an impact on the study's findings (Yin, 2014). Further, during case study research, it is common for researchers to make inferences. However, how can you ensure these inferences are accurate? Yin (2014) suggests that the researcher must anticipate these questions during the design phase to address the internal validity of the study findings. Therefore, Yin (2014) suggests the use of pattern matching, explanation building, addressing rival explanations, and possibly using logic models to manage internal validity.

For this study, the researcher used explanation building to support the internal validity of the study. Through explanation building, the researcher used theoretical frameworks to explain the social phenomenon of study. The case is explained as well as Scheier's role and lived experiences in launching a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Explanation building can also be accomplished through robust descriptions of the coding process, allowing the reader to follow the researcher's process in arriving at the final theme outcome (Yin, 2014). In fact, Erlandson (1993) alludes to this when suggesting the use of "thick description" (p. 32) during data analysis, allowing the reader to gain a more in-depth insight into the research processes and participants. This allows the reader to feel as if they are a part of the process. Detailed field notes were used to ensure the use of thick description during the data analysis phase.

### ***Location and Environment of Data Collection***

The first interview was a face-to-face interview that took place at the home office of Scheier in Livingston, New Jersey on December 6, 2019. After the initial interview was conducted, and the interview was transcribed, initial coding revealed additional questions were needed to fill gaps in missing data. Therefore, a subsequent interview was scheduled on the phone with Scheier and recorded and transcribed for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

This study utilized an inductive and iterative approach to analyze the data, which coincided with the data collection. Yin (2014) suggests that the first stage in data analysis should be for the researcher to “play” (p. 135) with the data, “looking for patterns, insights, or concepts that seem promising” (p. 135). Stake (1995) suggests that “all research depends on interpretation” (p. 41) and goes on to suggest that “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins” (p. 71). Therefore, Stake (1995) suggests that the researcher should analyze the data as the data is being collected by positing that “analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71). Creswell and Creswell (2018) support this proposition by suggesting that when analyzing qualitative data, the researcher must work inductively, “building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up” (p. 181) by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract information. This allows the researcher to work consistently between the data and the themes until a well-established set of themes has emerged.

For this study, the researcher simultaneously collected and analyzed data by reviewing all field notes and creating memos, after the first interview, reflecting on the



data collected. From the memos, the researcher began thematic categorization, connecting the data collected to the theoretical frameworks used in the study and to the research questions guiding this study. The initial themes helped guide the follow-up interview conducted by phone. This allowed the researcher to change their approach and questioning to gather data that was missing from the first interview.

This iterative process continued during the review of the documents and archival and artifact records provided to the researcher. Whereas, the researcher analyzed documents and photographs, made notes, created coding memos, and connected the initial findings to the theoretical frameworks and research questions underpinning the study. The researcher engaged in three rounds of coding memos, each time referring back to the theoretical framework and research questions guiding the study and synthesizing and restructuring codes to generate theme development. These coding memos were used during the coding process, which is discussed in the next section in more depth. Using a constant comparative method, each stage of the initial data analysis was compared to the next, allowing for refinement and rearrangement of themes during the data collection phase (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### ***Coding and Theme Development***

After the interview data were transcribed, the researcher began coding the transcribed data. Coding is the process of “organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Codes are “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). To code the data means that the researcher is taking sections of data and

labeling those sections with a term, using the original language of the participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A primary purpose of coding, to the qualitative researcher, is to retrieve and categorize data units so the researcher can easily access data to “cluster” the data segments as they relate to specific research questions or theories or themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020, p. 63). This clustering allows the researcher to conduct analysis and draw conclusions.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), building on previous work by Saldaña, suggest that there are two types of coding stages (a) first cycle and (b) second cycle. Whereas, first cycle coding methods are deployed to assign initial codes to the units of data to be analyzed and create summaries of the data, and the second cycle coding builds on the codes developed in the first cycle and begins to group the summaries into smaller themes. There is a multitude of coding methods that a qualitative researcher can deploy. Often, the researcher will use a combination of methods as each study is unique and the data collected may not lend itself to one specific form of data coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020).

For this study, the researcher, using the research questions and theoretical framework guiding the study, developed initial codes, and general ideas from the transcribed interview data. The coding methods used were a combination of descriptive, in-vivo, process, and concept coding. These methods will be described further in this section. To organize the data, the researcher compiled the initial codes into a data table, copying data segments, which have been color-coded by the research questions and theoretical framework. The table included a column for first and second coding stages as

well as line numbers for all transcribed data. This organization allowed for ease of review and verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020).

The coding process continued for all data, including documents and archival records until all data has been reviewed (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020). The goal of this process is to generate themes that will “cut across your data” (p. 207) by capturing recurring patterns in the data. It is important that, at this phase of the data analysis, these categories or themes can stand on their own. Meaning, they are not the data; they are derived from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

During the coding of the transcribed data, the researcher began by reviewing the data line-by-line and annotating the data with notes in the margins, which helped guide initial concepts, ideas, and theme development. These notations were based on hunches generated from previous research and literature review, as well as ideas grounded in the theoretical framework of the study and supported by the research questions of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This initial step is supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) who suggest that during initial data analysis, it is necessary to be “expansive” (p. 204) when identifying segments of data that the researcher may feel is useful for theme development. This is often referred to as “open coding” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This methodical approach is also supported by Yin (2014), who states that the researcher should review the data, line by line, comparing lines to the research questions, looking for answers and insight. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), assigning codes to the data segments is how the researcher begins to develop theme categories.

The notes generated during the first cycle of coding allowed the researcher to begin to see initial theme development. However, to test these themes, the second round

of coding allowed the researcher to continue to tease out commonalities among the data and test the initial themes. The first coding method used by the researcher was descriptive coding. Descriptive coding assigns labels to data that summarizes, using words or short phrases, the fundamental topic of a data segment (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). This method allowed the researcher to see the initial topics formulating from the data and determine commonality among data.

The second coding method utilized by the researcher was in-vivo coding. In-vivo coding uses words or phrases from the “participant’s own language” to generate codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020, p. 65). During the review of the data the researcher used key words or phrases generated by Scheier as crucial codes in describing the case of study. For example, Scheier suggested that she had a “Joan of Arc” moment when realizing she needed to be the advocate for adaptive apparel. Therefore, “Joan of Arc” became a code to describe the first research question of the study.

Process coding was also used during the analysis of the data because the structure of the case study conformed, inherently, to this method. The data collected followed the process and events for which Scheier engaged as she advocated for the inclusion of adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion. Therefore, process coding allowed the researcher to describe and categorize the actions within the case of study. Process coding is described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), as assigning “ing” words to “connotate observable and conceptual action in the data” (p. 66). Throughout the data analysis, covered in Chapter 4, one can see the use of “ing” words to describe the themes. For example, Chapter 4 discusses the three sections of findings and each of these sections

is led by an 'ing' word. The first section is *becoming* an advocate, the second is *fighting* against all odds and the last section is *sacrificing* for PLWD and adaptive apparel.

Concept coding was also deployed and appeared, from the researcher's perspective, to go hand-and-hand with process coding. Concept coding assigns "meso- or macrolevels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020, p. 66). Concepts suggest an idea, not observable behavior, or can reference a process. Therefore, similar to why the researcher deployed the process coding method, concept coding also seemed to generate inherently from the data analysis. For example, using the research questions and theoretical framework underpinning this study, the researcher coded stages or steps in Scheier's process and connected them to theory.

Thus, as is demonstrated in Chapter 4 and the conceptual models displayed, you can see that each section represents the process that Scheier navigated through on her journey to catalyzing adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion. She first journeyed through the advocacy stage as she became the advocate for adaptive apparel. This stage led her to fight against all the odds, initially by herself and then ultimately through her key partnerships and then Scheier progressed through stages of sacrifice to ensure that adaptive apparel entered mainstream fashion.

After the second round of coding was conducted, using the coding methods described, the researcher began to group the codes that seemed to "go together" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206), to theme the data. Theming the data, according to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), suggests that "extended thematic phrases" are applied to units of data (p. 73). A theme is an "extended-phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2020, p. 73).

After initial coding and subsequent theming of the data, the researcher cross-referenced all transcripts to ensure an agreement about how the data fits with each research question.

For example, we see, within each section of Chapter 4, additional sub-themes utilized to describe progress through each stage made by Scheier. Section 1 includes the for Oliver and the for all stages. These stages show how Scheier became an advocate by first advocating for Oliver, her son, and then ultimately for all PLWD. For section 2 we see that Scheier progressed from fighting solo to demonstrate the viability of the adaptive apparel market to fighting together with, first a supply chain partner and then ultimately with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. Finally, in section 3 we see the stages of sacrifice arise as Scheier progresses through all the stages within section 1 and 2. These sub-themes help identify what the “unit of data is about and what it means” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2020, p. 73).

Next, the researcher, using the initial coding and themes, began to develop conceptual models for each research question. These models were developed to explain data thematically, categorized within each research question. A constant iterative process was undertaken by the researcher, generating a multitude of revisions to the conceptual models. The researcher would manually draft conceptual models after each coding and theme iteration and analyze the validity of the conceptual model. The researcher would review the coded and themed data and generate the initial conceptual model, and then, go back to the data and look for gaps in the analysis or additional details for which to explain the data. This would generate another round of conceptual model revision until the researcher felt the model was a good fit to explain the data and answer the research questions.

It is worth noting that this iterative and constant comparison process did not end during the coding and theming stages. The researcher continued to revise the conceptual models as the study findings were being written. During the writing process and as the findings were being described, the researcher would discover new patterns in the process or a new sub-category to the theme. This would cause the researcher to revert to the conceptual model and revise based on the new analysis. Overall, nearly over 20 revisions were made for each conceptual model presented in the results section.

According to Stake (1995), the process of data analysis does not have a set beginning or end. He suggests that “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins” (Stake, 1995, p. 71). He posits that, as researchers, we give meaning to our first impressions of the data as well as the final compilation. Therefore, it seems congruent to Stake’s philosophy, that for this study, data analysis and conceptual model revisions would continue during the writing up phase.

### **Positionality Statement**

When conducting a research study, it is necessary to understand the epistemological approach of the researcher and to position the researcher within the research study. In other words, what is the role of the researcher, and how does the researcher determine what is reality and truth within the confines of this study? As a researcher, I believe in multiple truths and realities and not one singular Truth. I believe that reality is a construct, with meaning derived by the individual. Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) posit that for one to understand their reality, they must have a frame of reference, a language of commonality from which they understand the world around them. This perspective takes shape in the form of concepts and constructs that are developed through

our individual experiences, our social and cultural influences, as well as our specific place in time.

This epistemological perspective could be categorized as constructivist with a critical theorist influence. As a researcher, I examined, explored, and investigated a social phenomenon, Schier and her role in the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, to attempt to interpret its meaning to the world. What or who I am researching became a part of my new reality throughout this study, therefore providing me with a unique insight into Scheier's journey to launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Ponterotto (2005) posits that the central tenant of constructivism is the "centrality of the interaction between the investigator and the object of investigation" (p. 129), suggesting that it is only through our interaction with the research participants that we can establish deeper meaning to our research. He further suggests that through our research participants, we can create a new reality that expands our understanding of the social phenomenon being studied—which I believe is what I was able to provide to the readers of this research.

It is also necessary to address the potential biases of the researcher. I have been engaged in research on the disability community for several years. Before my career as a researcher, I worked in community advocacy, including within the disability community. Therefore, I have an awareness of the barriers facing this community. Although this depth of knowledge and engagement can be seen as a critical benefit to this study, for others, it may be interpreted as a potential bias of my research findings. In addition, my personal relationship with the case of study, Mindy Scheier, could also be seen as a potential bias of my research findings. I would argue that due to this personal



relationship, it opened doors for me, as a researcher, that would have otherwise been closed. For example, Mindy hosted me in her home, shared intimate and detailed documents related to her journey and invited me into her sample closet.

Because of this potential conflict between the positive and negative related to my previous knowledge and personal relationship, it was important that I remain cognizant of that potential conflict and actively addressed my bias during data collection and data analysis. During the data collection, I needed to lead Scheier to tell “her” own story without prompting or guiding the direction of her storytelling based on my own understanding of the events. At one point, Scheier was describing an event early in her career, and she said, “I’m sorry, I’m going to tell you this part. I don’t know if it is relevant or not.” To which I responded, “It’s all relevant.” Scheier needed to tell her story in her voice, and I sought her story throughout the data collection process.

The initial interview took more time than I expected because I allowed the conversation to progress organically, allowing Scheier to take detours in her storytelling. For me, this was important because Scheier needed to reflect on her journey in order to recount her feelings and beliefs during this time. I believe that this was accomplished, because, at one point in the interview, Scheier stated, “This is really interesting. Oh my God, this is so fun. This is like a walkthrough,” suggesting this research itself was an opportunity for her to reflect on her journey. This level of comfort allowed Scheier to explain her true feelings and emotions during each phase of her journey and allowed me to describe the case using thick descriptions that added meaning and emotion to the data. Further, to ensure that my personal bias would have minimal influence on data analysis, I consistently compared the codes and themes to the research questions and theoretical

frameworks underpinning the study, rather than my personal bias. This allowed the data to speak for itself as well as relate to the theory for which it is conceptualized.

Overall, my experience with this case study was insightful. Not only was I able to go “behind-the-scenes” and investigate how Scheier was able to collaborate on the first-ever mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel line for children, but I was also able to see and hear the angst and emotion Scheier carries for PLWD and adaptive apparel. As a former apparel industry professional [I worked in the apparel industry as a product developer for four years] and current educator in the apparel industry academy, I have battled the stereotypes associated with the apparel industry. Most believe that those working in the apparel industry are most interested in the frivolous side of the industry—clothing for appearance satisfaction only. I believed that most do not understand the social and psychological implications of clothing on the consumer, nor do they appreciate the complexity of the global apparel industry. Therefore, in my opinion, they fail to see the everyday implications of the failure to meet the apparel needs of various consumer populations. They fail to see how the lack of available and appropriate apparel can have a direct and long-lasting impact on the lives of certain consumers. From my perspective, the apparel industry is about much more than looking good or what is the cutest trend for the season. The apparel industry is about providing functional apparel that provides social and psychological benefits for those who wear it.

Throughout this study, my beliefs influenced data collection and analysis. For example, when Scheier exhibited emotion related to finally getting a mainstream fashion apparel brand to take notice of PLWD, I replicated those emotions. I was as excited and relived my own feelings when I saw the *Tommy Adaptive* line hit mainstream. However, I

needed to take a step back and ensure that I did not allow my own emphasis to impact my ability to allow Scheier to tell her story as she felt it and relived it and not allow my emotion to influence my analysis of the data.

This case study provided me the opportunity to see those implications first-hand and witness the passion that drives someone, like Scheier, to decide to become the Joan of Arc for the adaptive apparel movement and to ensure that a forgotten consumer market is included in mainstream fashion. As Scheier said during my interview with her,

Everybody, myself included, we always say, “Oh, the fashion industry, we’re not curing cancer and we’re not sending people to the moon.” Oh well. I have a different opinion to that. This experience [adaptive apparel] was life changing for me and it was a profound change for him [her son Oliver].

## Chapter 4: Findings

This qualitative case study explores how Mindy Scheier, a mother of a child living with a disability and former fashion designer, catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by collaborating with a mainstream apparel brand to launch a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line for children. In Chapter 2, the relationship between apparel and the disability model theories is discussed by revealing the progression of the apparel industry from the medical model theory of disability to the social model theory of disability. For decades the apparel industry has all but ignored the apparel needs of PLWD and instead abandoned this market segment, leaving ancillary brands, such as Silvert's, to focus on accommodating the disability impairments of PLWD and not on providing mainstream apparel options. This was antithetical to the declaration's made by PLWD for apparel that was both functional and fashionable (Freeman et al., 1985; Kabel et al., 2016; Lamb, 2001; Oliver, 1981).

This chapter details the data gathered from the adaptive apparel advocate, Scheier, by presenting her unique experiences and contexts to discover the dominant themes and sub-themes that illuminate our understanding of the events that lead to her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, that launched the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. As was presented in Chapter 3, Mindy Scheier, an apparel industry professional, was introduced to the world of disability and adaptive apparel through the birth of her son Oliver. Oliver was born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy which required he wear leg braces and left him with low muscle tone. Those leg braces resulted in Scheier dressing Oliver in sweatpants or otherwise loose and stretch apparel that would provide Oliver the ability to dress without assistance. These apparel options worked well

until Oliver realized that he was dressing differently than his friends and he did not like that. This newfound awareness sparked Scheier to develop adaptations to Oliver's apparel that would maintain the fashionable elements, but allow Oliver to continue to dress himself. It was through this process that Scheier realized the issue of adapting apparel, that was fashionable but still functional, for PLWD, was more significant than addressing these needs for only Oliver. Rather, it impacted a multitude of PLWD and therefore, prompted her to reach out to the apparel industry to educate them on the needs of this market. Tommy Hilfiger® was the apparel brand that ultimately collaborated with Scheier to launch the first mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Their role in the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children is highlighted in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, "becoming an advocate," explores the first research question of this study: What motivated Scheier (the advocate) to create a new adaptive apparel line with mainstream apparel companies and how did the advocacy process play out? The second section, "fighting against all odds" combines the second and fourth research questions as the data revealed a commonality in the findings related to these two research questions: How did Scheier advocate for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger®, and what role did Scheier play in helping Tommy Hilfiger® manage and coordinate its existing supply chain during the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. The third section, "sacrificing to negotiate," explores the third research question: What did the negotiation between the advocate and the innovator look like from the advocate's perspective?

### **Section 1: Becoming an Advocate: For Oliver and For All**

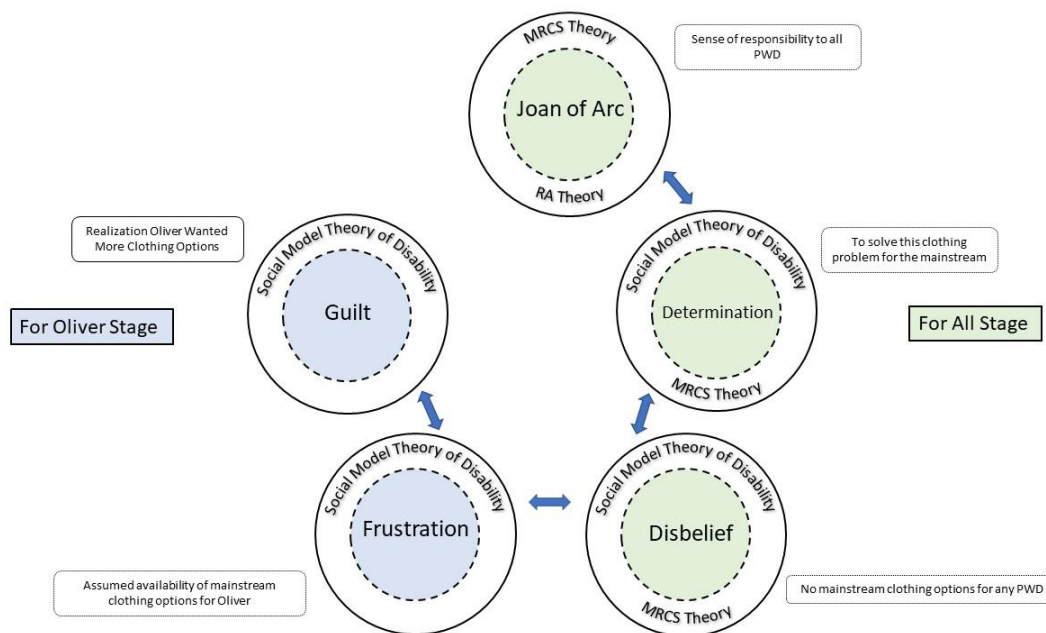
In Section 1, exploring the motivation of the advocate, the results of the data analysis revealed an overarching theme of *becoming an advocate*. Within that overarching theme, two stages of motivation emerged: (a) the *for Oliver* stage and (b) the *for all* stage. In addition, further analysis revealed five phases of motivation within the theme of becoming an advocate: (a) guilt, (b) frustration, (c) disbelief, (d) determination, and (e) Joan of Arc. They are referenced as phases rather than themes because the data suggested that Scheier went through five distinct emotional or motivational phases. It is worth noting that while progressing through these phases, Scheier experienced feelings that assisted her progression from phase to phase. For example, while in the phase of guilt, she also experienced the feeling of determination as she realized she needed to solve an issue for her son.

Furthermore, while in the phase of disbelief, she experienced feelings of determination to solve this issue for others. However, determination, as a phase, represents her commitment to take action. Further, the feelings of frustration and disbelief are found throughout her journey. Scheier expressed feeling frustrated as she worked to solve the problem for Oliver and for others and felt disbelief throughout her journey as she learned more about the needs of persons living with disability (PWD) and realized no apparel brands address this need. This movement back and forth between phases is represented by the double-headed arrows in the model and by placing guilt, frustration, disbelief, determination, and Joan of Arc in dashed instead of solid line circles to demonstrate their ability to cross over throughout the process.

These five phases of motivation are then further placed within the context of two sub-themes within the main theme: either the *for Oliver* stage or the *for all* stage. Figure 4.1 shows that the *for Oliver* stage represents the first two phases of motivation—guilt and frustration—which can be interpreted from the social model theory of disability. The last three phases of motivation—disbelief, determination, and Joan of Arc—are associated with the *for all* stage. The social model theory of disability and the MRCS theory are used to interpret the disbelief and determination phases, while the MRCS theory and the RA theory inform Scheier’s journey through the Joan of Arc phase.

**Figure 4.1.**

*Becoming an Advocate Conceptual Model*



*Note.* This is a graphical representation of the themes that emerged from the study data.

Figure 4.1 is a conceptual model created from the study data to explain Scheier's process in becoming an advocate through the various stages of motivation she encountered (seen in the circles within the model). The process of becoming an advocate is segregated into two stages: the *for Oliver* stage and the *for all* stage. The phases relevant to each stage are color-coded to represent the respective stage of progression (blue for the *for Oliver* stage and green for the *for all* stage).

“Thousands of ordinary housewives have become activists through the experience of having a disabled child” (Blackwell-Stratton, Breslin, Mayerson, & Bailey, 1988). According to Ryan and Cole (2008), parents of children living with a disability engage in advocacy type behavior more frequently and with more fervor than other parents. An advocate is “one who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group” (Advocate, n.d., para. 3). Further realized, activism has been described, within the realm of parenting a disabled child, as the crusadership model, suggesting that the parent strives to achieve affirmation for their child so the child may achieve full participation in society (Ryan & Cole, 2008). For this study, the advocate, Scheier, expressed views of advocacy consistent with this description presented by Ryan and Cole (2008) as well as with the social model theory of disability. The social model theory of disability suggests that it is not the physical impairment or disability that prohibits PLWD from fully participating in society but society's inability to normalize disability (Oliver, 1981).

When Scheier's son rejected sweatpants as his only apparel option, Scheier expressed feeling as if her family was facing barriers in accessing mainstream fashion-forward clothing. These feelings can be interpreted through the social model of disability as societal barriers. In this case, these barriers were placed by the apparel industry and



applied to her son Oliver. These barriers served as the initial motivation for Scheier as she discussed the need to seek out apparel solutions for Oliver. Scheier's journey of becoming an advocate is outlined through the five phases of motivation, in the *for Oliver* and the *for all* stages, that leads to the "becoming an advocate" moniker.

***For Oliver Stage – "How in the world is this kid going to wear jeans to school?"***

As the model in Figure 4.1 illustrates, the first two phases of motivation within the *for Oliver* stage seemed to be filled with guilt and frustration. The *for Oliver* stage encompasses these two phases because Scheier stated she experienced them both while navigating the apparel needs of her son Oliver. She expressed that it was during these stages that she was singularly focused on finding jeans that would work for her son and his leg braces as well as support his ability to independently manage buttons and zippers due to his low muscle tone. She stated she was not yet focused on others living with disabilities, because, she assumed, there would be apparel options to accommodate her son's needs. Therefore, it can be interpreted that during these stages she was not yet aware that the issue was more impactful than just Oliver. These two phases can be conceptualized within the social model theory of disability.

**Guilt.** In exploring what motivated Scheier to become an advocate for adaptive apparel, the data revealed a series of phases through which Scheier progressed on her journey to becoming an advocate. During the first stage, the *for Oliver* stage, the first phase was guilt. As Scheier navigated her role as mother to a son living with a disability, she stated her focus was on how she could ensure he remained as independent as possible, not on finding apparel that was fashionable or trendy. Her focus, she explained, was on choosing apparel that served a function, supporting ease of dress and

independence for Oliver. She described her focus as very much in the mode of “problem-solving to make it [life] easier for him [Oliver].” The problem-solving solution was for Oliver to wear sweatpants “almost every day of his life.”

The decision to wear sweatpants at school was based on her problem-solving focus of finding apparel options that would be easy: “He’ll just wear something that you can pull over his head and something he can pull up. That’s it. Problem solved. Check. Move on.” See Figure 4.2 for an image of Oliver wearing sweatpants. Scheier’s perspective, apparel that supports independence for the PWD, is highlighted in the literature. Banks (2001) suggests that one’s disability does not necessarily result in the inability to dress themselves. Instead, she suggests that a “greater degree of independence

**Figure 4.2.**

*Oliver Scheier Wearing Sweatpants*



*Note.* This image shows Oliver, circa 2013, unhappy with the option of wearing only sweatpants to school. Reprinted with permission.

may be preserved if the patient has the right type of adaptive apparel that will allow her or him to toilet safely and without assistance” (Banks, 2001, p. 1). Therefore, Scheier’s approach to problem-solving and finding a functional solution for Oliver is common among PWD and their caregivers.

This problem-solving tactic worked for Scheier until Oliver was in first grade and came home from school declaring he wanted to wear jeans like all the other kids. He exclaimed that he did not understand why she [Scheier] was not allowing him to wear what the other kids were wearing [jeans]. Scheier described feeling guilty when Oliver confessed this to her:

The fact that I came from the fashion industry. It was my whole career. I could not believe that I missed how profoundly important apparel is to who you are as a person, and I needed my eight-year-old to remind me of that. I needed him to tell me that wearing sweatpants every day makes him feel like he is dressing disabled and can do one last thing, one more thing he cannot do. And I was almost speechless that I really screwed that up.

Scheier’s description of feeling like she had “really screwed that up” seems to address not only her perceived failure as a mother, but also her perceived failure as an apparel industry professional. When interviewing Scheier, I witnessed her change in demeanor when describing this moment to me. Scheier, a typically energetic, fast-talking, multi-tasking, smiling bundle of energy and optimism, changed. Her smile faded, her speech slowed and quieted, her shoulders slumped and the twinkle in her eye dimmed. I could see that her reflection on this time was still emotionally impactful for her. So, for her to “miss” the “significance,” for Oliver, of dressing like everyone else, was profound

and emotional. Not only was she experiencing the guilt that comes with motherhood, but she was also experiencing the guilt of not utilizing her apparel industry expertise to realize the significance of apparel and dressing like his friends, for Oliver.

Early in our interview process, Scheier spoke extensively about her career journey in the apparel industry and took great pride in her acquisition of knowledge through that journey. She expressed, multiple times, when discussing her career journey, that her primary focus during her career was to “understand the world” of fashion from all facets and angles. In fact, Scheier even discussed how some of her jobs were “torture” but that she took the jobs knowing that the knowledge she would gain from that job would help her “learn everything about the industry.”

While Scheier described Oliver’s declaration about wearing jeans as a “really tough moment,” she appeared to quickly shift her focus from feeling guilty about “missing” the clues from Oliver to a proactive mode of making sure Oliver could wear jeans to school while remaining independent. Scheier’s discussion of this moment suggests the guilt she felt as a mother motivated her to act so Oliver could wear jeans like his friends. She stated she knew she could not “look at his little face and say, ‘Sorry you can’t wear jeans.’ I could not think of anything worse to say to him.” So, she tried to stay upbeat and positive for Oliver and told him to go to bed and “get a good night’s sleep” because tomorrow was going to be a big day.

However, before she could solve this problem for Oliver, she stated that she “allowed herself to have a pity-party” and reflected on her guilt. She stated that she sat at her kitchen table and cried for the “first hour” thinking about how “I’ve damaged him...that I’ve really, really screwed that up. I was such a failure that I missed this.” She

describes thinking about how “important” apparel was to her and how apparel helped her feel confident by allowing her to present a curated version of herself to the world. Scheier said that she “couldn’t believe” that she did not recognize that apparel would be just as crucial to Oliver as it was to her. Interestingly, Scheier commented that maybe if Oliver were a girl that she “would’ve been clued into this much earlier.” This reflection seems to highlight the guilt, Scheier was feeling as a mother, in failing to recognize her son’s needs.

Scheier described feeling that this guilt motivated her to find a way for him to wear jeans. However, she also stated that she was concerned about how she could give him jeans to wear that would also maintain his independence. She stated that she did not know

how in the world this kid [was] going to wear jeans to school? He’s not even going to be able to zip them up, let alone do the button, or actually he can’t wear his leg braces, and I can’t send him to school without wearing his leg braces.

That’s not an option.

Scheier described her motivation to find a solution by explaining that she “looked at the jeans and this was two o’clock in the morning, so it’s not like I was about to bring out my sewing machine and so I was like, ‘How am I going to make this work?’” She described taking “the scissors, [and] literally ripped out the zipper and cut out the side seams of the pants.” These modifications, she described, were what she thought would best accommodate his leg braces and allow him to get the jeans on and off without assistance. This would allow him to go to school wearing the jeans he desired, with the leg braces he

needed medically, and without the need for assistance when using the restroom to independently manage buttons and zippers due to his low muscle tone.

I observed, after she discussed her process of modifying the jeans, that she began smiling broadly while reflecting on this time and jokingly admitting that the final version of the jeans looked like an “arts and crafts project.” She explained that they looked like an arts and crafts project because she used stick-on Velcro to open the side seam so he could fit the jeans over his leg braces and a rubber band at the button to make it easier for him to get in and out of his pants and pull them up and down in the bathroom. She added that “any fashion designer would have been horrified by what I did.” See Figure 4.3 for an image of Scheier’s “arts and crafts project.”

### **Figure 4.3**

*Example of Initial Waistband Adaptations Made by Scheier for Oliver*



*Note.* This image shows the first pair of jeans Scheier adapted for Oliver in 2015. She referenced these as her “arts and crafts project.” You see, in the image, the use of a rubber band to allow for ease of donning and doffing so Oliver could remain independent. Reprinted with permission.

However, all Scheier's guilt and angst over not realizing what her son needed from her were forgotten the next morning when she presented Oliver with his adapted jeans. As Scheier was describing this experience with Oliver, she became emotional and teary-eyed. I was able to observe that this experience was still very much an emotional reflection for her and one that seemed to continue to impact her reason for advocating for adaptive apparel. She described Oliver as having an "immediate transformation" when he saw the jeans and realized he would be able to wear the jeans to school, just like his friends:

He was so proud. He was so like, I know this sounds cliché, but he did really hold his head up a little higher that day. [He] smiled bigger. He felt so accomplished that he dressed himself. He just felt like he fit in. I think that's, for the first time in his little life, he had a choice of what he wore to school, that he wore something different.

Scheier describes that it was this moment that she became cognizant of the fact that just because Oliver was managing a disability did not mean he did not care about apparel as much as she did. She stated that she realized she could no longer deny Oliver's need to dress like other kids after seeing how transformative it was for him to wear the arts and crafts project jeans. She explained that she knew she had to find apparel, something other than sweatpants, more durable than the arts and crafts project jeans. That is when she did what "any proper fashion designer would do; I [Scheier] started Googling."

Scheier began searching for fashionable apparel that would fit over Oliver's leg braces and that would also allow him to remain independent at school, managing buttons

and zippers due to his low muscle tone. However, as she began searching for apparel options for Oliver, she described feeling frustrated as she was unable to find any fashionable and trendy options, something she knew Oliver would wear and that looked like what the other kids were wearing.

**Frustration.** Scheier's frustration seemed to be a result of her inability to find appropriate, mainstream apparel options for Oliver. Even though she had been working in the fashion industry since she was 20 years old, she said she had never encountered mainstream apparel that was designed to accommodate PWD. She said that while working in the industry, it (adaptive apparel) was never discussed; it was "not a topic of conversation." In fact, she stated that it was at this point, while searching online, that she realized how little she really knew about apparel for PWD. She described not knowing how to start the internet search:

I don't even think I used the word adaptive. I think I probably did clothing for kids with disabilities that was easier to dress or something like that. I don't even think I knew what the word adaptive meant. I never heard of that word. Never, ever, ever was that a word that was used in any context in any of the different experiences that I had, ever.

Scheier described that she assumed finding fashionable options for Oliver would be relatively easy. She described thinking that a "quick Google search" would result in several options for Oliver. However, after struggling to find the right search words, she stated that she realized that her search was not going to be quick or easy. Scheier's initial search results and their lack of fashionability are supported by the literature. A content analysis study of the terms used to describe apparel for PLWD found similar results—the

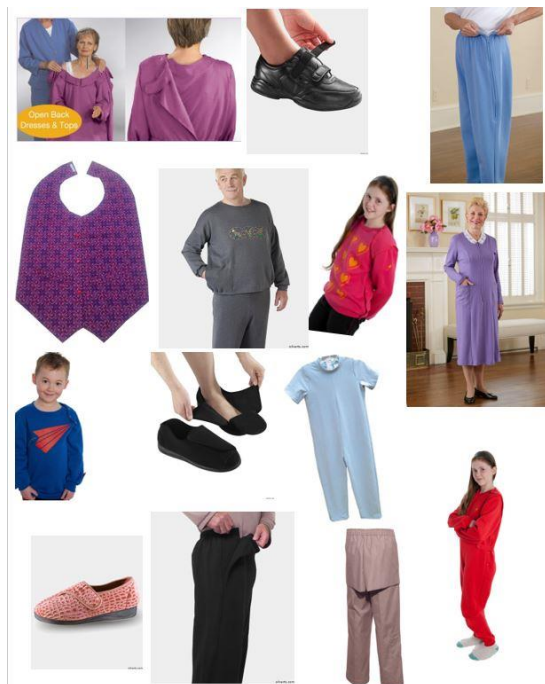


lack of apparel availability when using the terms adaptive and functional (McBee-Black and Ha-Brookshire, 2019).

Scheier shared that she became even more frustrated when her initial search results provided apparel options for the elderly, and none for children. She described being shocked by this outcome. She stated that the initial results “didn’t even look like clothing” and that they were “absolutely beyond hideous” and “absolutely unacceptable.” She described the available apparel as looking “like infant wear that they made bigger. Like onesies.” See figure 4.4 for examples of Scheier’s initial search results in 2013 while searching Google for apparel options for Oliver. Similarly, past research has supported the position that PLWD have been unable to find appropriate and fashionable apparel through mainstream options, leaving them feeling further isolated and stigmatized by society (Carroll & Kincade, 2007, 2008; Freeman, Kaiser, & Wingate, 1985; Kabel, McBee-Black, & Dimka, 2016; Kabel, Dimka, & McBee-Black, 2017; Lamb, 1993, 2001; Shannon & Reich, 1979).

**Figure 4.4**

*Scheier Google Searches for Adaptive Apparel in 2014-2015*



*Note.* This image is a compilation of apparel items Scheier described as “absolutely hideous” during her initial Google searches in 2014-2015 while trying to find fashionable mainstream apparel options for Oliver. Reprinted with permission.

As appalled as Scheier was by those initial search results, she remained undaunted in her mission to find fashionable apparel options for Oliver as she stated that with just a “bit more time,” she believed she would find something for him. However, this would prove not to be the case. After searching for “a couple of months” without finding any options she believed were suitable for Oliver, she described feeling disbelief that there were no appropriate, fashionable, or trendy apparel options for Oliver. Scheier’s description of her process in searching for apparel options demonstrates her shift from frustration to that of disbelief. One can see that Scheier remained in the disbelief phase as

she continued in her problem-solving mom mode, trying to find apparel solutions for Oliver:

[I did not have] this vision of including people [or] changing the fashion industry, [it was] more of there has to be a solution, or maybe I just haven't found the designer yet. Just because I could not believe that this didn't exist.

***For All Stage – “I was on a mission.”***

As Scheier moved from frustration to disbelief, the data suggests that she transitioned to the *for all* stage. The *for all* stage represents Scheier progressing from focusing only on finding solutions for Oliver to finding solutions for all PWD. It is during this stage that one can see Scheier progress from disbelief in the lack of available apparel options for Oliver to a determination to find solutions for Oliver and all PWD.

Determination during the *for all* stage ultimately shifts to Scheier feeling as if she needs to become Joan of Arc, feeling a strong sense of responsibility to solve this problem for all PWD, beyond Oliver.

Scheier's feelings and emotions during the *for all* stage can be explained through the two primary theories of disability: the medical model and the social model theory. As Scheier began to search for apparel options for Oliver, she believed that she would “quickly” find apparel for him, believing that an option must exist for her son. However, she discovered that the mainstream apparel industry had all but ignored PWD. This reflects the point at which Scheier is confronted with the medical model theory of disability ingrained in the apparel industry. The medical model theory of disability assumes that PLWD have a deficiency, that their disability needs to be fixed or cured in order for them to fully participate in society (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). The suggestion is

that by curing the disability, PLWD will then be able to fully participate and take advantage of all that society has to offer, that it is not the role of society to adapt to the disability as the problems facing PLWD are seen as separate from society (Blustein, 2012). In this light, it can be said that, up until this point, the apparel industry, with its inability to see the opportunity in serving a historically underrepresented and underserved consumer population, was operating within the medical model theory of disability.

A shift from Scheier's feelings of determination into the feeling that she needed to become Joan of Arc can be explained by the shift from the medical model theory of disability to the social model theory of disability that researchers argue. The social model theory of disability argues it is the society that prevents PLWD from being able to participate fully in society, not the physical impairment or disability (Oliver, 1981). In fact, the social model theory of disability suggests PLWD have historically been seen as a minority group whose needs are ignored by those who build society (i.e., architects, city planners, product designers, and others who create systems, structures, and products for PLWD) (Oliver, 1981; Shakespeare & Watson, 2015).

**Disbelief.** As stated earlier, Scheier transitioned from the *for Oliver* stage and into the *for all* stage when she progressed from feeling frustrated to feeling disbelief. As she transitioned from frustration to disbelief, she continued to search for apparel options, not giving up hope that she would find fashionable apparel options for Oliver. As she continued to conduct more Internet searches, she realized that she had a network of other parents who had children living with a disability that she could ask for guidance and help. So, it is during the disbelief phase that Scheier reached out to other families of children living with disabilities, asking them where they found apparel for their children and what

the apparel options where. Although she believed that she would eventually find someone who would say to her, “Oh, you didn’t know that *they* (emphasis added) were doing it?”, it became “very clear there were definitely no mainstream” options available. Scheier described that she discovered that other families were also purchasing sweatpants or leggings to accommodate their child’s disability, or they were sewing new apparel or adapting existing apparel to accommodate their child’s needs. It is at this point in her process that Scheier states she was “in disbelief.” She exclaimed, “How in the world was this in 2013...how could there possibly be nothing for kids with disabilities? It was just mind-blowing to me.” She explained that she realized that if all PWD were facing the same apparel dilemma, there must be a market for PWD and was confused as to why the apparel industry was not taking notice.

Armed with the knowledge that other parents were facing the same situation as she was, and remaining in disbelief that there were in fact no mainstream options, Scheier reached out to her “trusted” and “seasoned” connections in the apparel industry to “try and get a sense of how could it [lack of mainstream apparel for PWD] possibly be.” Scheier stated she believed that her “trusted” and “seasoned” industry connections would be able to provide her with the names of brands who were producing apparel for PWD or that her connections would be amazed to hear about the lack of apparel options and would be interested in providing apparel solutions for this population. Instead, however, she found an industry that was not only seemingly ignoring this consumer need, but that also seemed oblivious to the apparel needs of PWD. Scheier stated that it was as if the apparel industry did not understand the viability of the PWD consumer. This was evident when Scheier recounts hearing the same mantra over and over from each “trusted”

industry connection she spoke with regarding why the industry was not addressing the PWD market. She recalls her “trusted” industry connections saying

they [PWD] are a small market, and people with disabilities they don’t care [about clothing]. I think they [PWD] have more important things to worry about [than apparel]. Like you [Scheier], I’m sure you have more important things to worry about than what Oliver’s wearing.

For Scheier, after repeatedly hearing the same response, “it became clear [to me] that they [the apparel industry] just have no idea.” It is at this point she realized the apparel industry was uneducated about the viability of the PWD market and their apparel needs. Scheier then seemed to develop a moral sense of duty to do the right thing, solve the problem of apparel for PWD, and educate the apparel industry about their needs. Scheier’s description of her realization provided an opportunity to witness how she seemed to transition from solving a problem for her child to a realization that everyone living with a disability was facing this issue and she needed to help solve that problem for all, not just Oliver. She stated feeling as if it was then that

kind of...everything more started forming of; I was more on a mission of there is no way that this could possibly be. I was like, oh my God, I am going to educate the entire industry on this. This is preposterous. I am going to show them how to do it.

This transformation for Scheier is supported by Kant’s (1991) theory that human beings have a moral duty to do the right thing. Scheier can be heard using terms such as “mission” and “educate” when referencing her focus at this stage. These words suggest she moved from a singular focus, for Oliver, to a for all focus, a move to do the right

thing for a population of people. In fact, Stratton-Lake (2000), building on Kant's moral duty framework, posits that in specific situations where someone may be in need, one does not need to deliberate whether they should do the right thing. Instead, one realizes that they must do the right thing because of the facts presented to them demonstrating that someone needs help. Again, we see this supported by Scheier's desire to "fix" the problem when she realizes the lack of apparel for PWD is bigger than Oliver. She does not discuss taking time to deliberate her next step; she describes simply acting on these newly developed facts and moving forward.

Scheier's moral duty to do the right thing also seems to be embedded in the MRCS theory underpinning this study. MRCS theory posits that corporations can be held to the same moral standard as humans, in that they have a moral duty to do the right thing for the environment, their customers, their supply chain, and their financial stakeholders (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). Although this theory was developed after the United Nations General Assembly's call to facilitate policies that would challenge corporations to focus on social and environmental improvements as much, if not more, than their own financial gains (Ha-Brookshire, 2015), it is grounded in the moral duty framework developed by Kant (Kant & Gregor, 1996). Ha-Brookshire (2015) argued that corporations could be defined and classified as people, expanding the theory first developed decades ago, that they have the same rights and responsibilities as people do (French, 1979). Therefore, MRCS theory is used to explain how Scheier's motivation to do the right thing ultimately becomes a business decision that will eventually play a key role in the partnership between Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> when developing the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, which will be discussed later in this section.

**Determination.** As Scheier discovered the apparel industry's lack of attention to the apparel needs of PWD, she appears to transition from frustration to disbelief and eventually into the determination to solve this problem for all PWD, not just Oliver. During her description of this time period, Scheier became more animated, she sat a little taller in her seat, and her voice rose. I could see a physical transformation as she began to talk about this phase of her motivation. It was as if she was reliving her feelings and transitioning from feeling leveled by the lack of available options for Oliver to feeling empowered by the realization that she had the ability to solve this problem. The phase of determination seems to emulate the disbelief phase in that Scheier appeared to be solidly positioned within the social model theory of disability perspective and seemed to embrace her moral duty to "educate" the apparel industry about the apparel needs of PWD.

However, it is also at this determination phase that we begin to witness Scheier start to discuss how she feels she must be directly engaged with the apparel industry as she "educates" them on the apparel needs of PWD. She does not describe a passive relationship of building awareness within the apparel industry. Instead, she describes a very assertive and deliberate engagement with the apparel industry, one that allows her to utilize all of her career expertise in a way that solves a critical problem for PWD. She discusses that she won't *just* [emphasis added] "educate" them [the apparel industry], she will "show them" *how* [emphasis added] to create mainstream fashionable apparel that fits the needs of PWD. During her description of this realization, you see Scheier become even more energetic and animated, it is as if recalling this realization reenergized her moral duty. Scheier states she can "make a difference" for PWD and "help the fashion



industry understand.” Her determination seems to motivate her to make connections between her expertise in the apparel industry and her expertise as a parent of a child living with a disability. It was if she began to see these two roles merge into one common goal of developing mainstream apparel for PWD.

However, before she could move to the next phase of becoming an advocate, she was hampered by her own lack of knowledge about disability and adaptive apparel. She vocalized her concern about her lack of knowledge by stating that before she could “educate the apparel industry,” she had to “educate herself.” Scheier stated she had “zero experience with disability” beyond what she “lived and breathed” with Oliver every day. She confessed she “didn’t even know what muscular dystrophy was...beyond what she saw on the Jerry Lewis telethon” until Oliver was diagnosed. However, it seemed that her determination moved her to acquiesce into the role of educator by saying, “I guess I was smart enough, I suppose, to know that I certainly couldn’t go to the industry without really knowing what I was talking about outside of my world with Oliver.”

Thus, during her determination phase, Scheier began a year-long process of researching the “world of disability,” asking her husband for a “year” away from her career to “dedicate everything to research and understand this population.” She stated that she felt as if there was “something I need to do here, but I’m not really sure yet and I don’t have the information that I need.”

I need to understand really even from the basics of what the difference was between cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy...with muscular dystrophy, there are over 40 different strains, and each one of them affects the body differently. I needed to really go deep into not only, you know, the populations of all the

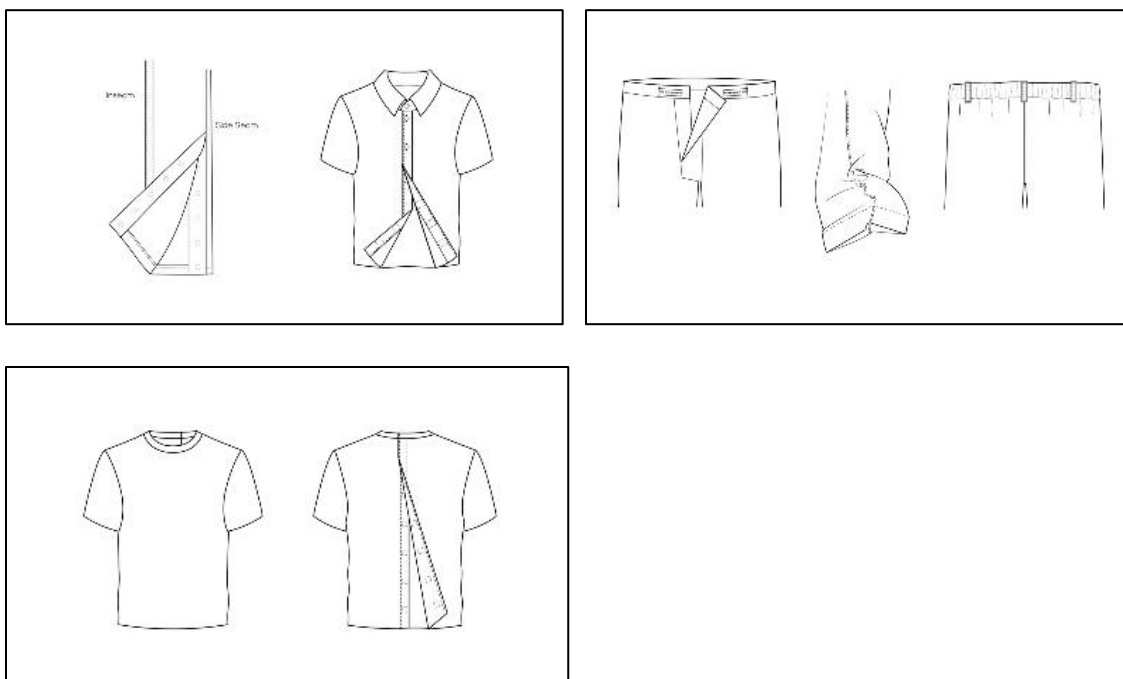
different disabilities out there, or at least the high-level categories, to how that affects the body...as it relates to clothing challenges. Kind of the very deep iteration. I did that by doing focus groups and surveys and going to schools and hospitals and utilizing the PTs that I was privy to. All of the doctors that Oliver ever went to, I started talking to the staff or the nurses when they came in and said, 'Help me out here. You are out in the front lines. What are the challenges?' I voraciously took notes. I used that information to put that into my surveys, and they got better and better over the course of the year. I garnered information but what I quickly learned was that this population couldn't wait to talk. Oh my God, did I have just boatloads of information and intel and I felt like I was learning every single minute of every day about things I'd never thought of.

During her research, Scheier was determined to reach a "cross-section" of the disability population, including both cognitive and physical disability. It was important for her to learn about all facets of disability, not just Oliver's disability. Especially, she stated, if she wanted to "justify the needs for PWD" to the apparel industry. This diversity in research participants and disability helped her "think through if there were commonalities between clothing challenges and all these different disabilities."

It was through this initial research that Scheier was able to develop a common approach to adaptive apparel that would accommodate the apparel needs of a vast majority of the PWD population. She developed three categories of design adaptations: the first centered on closures and fasteners; the second focused on the adjustability of the apparel item; and the third was ease of dress. For closures and fasteners, she focused on replacing the often hard to manipulate zippers with Velcro and magnets. For adjustability

of the apparel item, Scheier focused adding adjustable waistbands, adjustable hem and sleeve lengths, and internal hemming systems, and ensuring elastic in the back of the pants to support the variety in body shapes apparent with PWD. Finally, alternate ways to don and doff the apparel by moving openings to the shoulders, the back, or to the side seam. This allowed the wearer to have options beyond pulling a garment over the head. The main focus of these design adaptations was to ensure ease of donning and doffing of apparel so that PWD could either dress and maintain independence or make it easier for a caregiver to dress a PWD. In addition to ease of dress, the functional design adaptations had to enhance the aesthetics of the apparel item and not detract. In other words, it had to be fashionable. See Figure 4.5 for 2-D drawings of Scheier's design adaptations.

Scheier stated that it was necessary to demonstrate commonality among the apparel needs of PWD if she wanted to "sell this idea" to the industry. She discovered that the apparel industry believed, as she did initially, that there was not a common design adaptation that could accommodate a multitude of PWD. The assumption was that apparel for PWD must be customized for each disability. Therefore, after collecting her data, she described taking the time to design solutions that would be relatively easy and inexpensive to implement into the existing apparel industry supply chain network without significant changes to their [apparel industry] design and development processes.

**Figure 4.5***Initial Ideas for Adaptation Based on Scheier's Original Research*

*Note.* These images depict the initial drawings, circa 2014-2015, demonstrating the result of Scheier's year-long research sabbatical investigating the apparel needs of PWD. The first image shows the use of magnets at the side seam hem and shirt front for ease of dressing. The second image shows the use of an internal hemming system in the leg, a faux front fly using magnets, and a full elastic waist for ease of dress. The final image shows adding an ease of dress option to the back of a shirt with magnets.

It was also during her research that Scheier discovered the financial viability of the apparel market for PWD. During her focus group interviews, Scheier discovered that PWD purchase new apparel off the rack and either alter or adapt the apparel themselves or pay a seamstress to alter or adapt the apparel to fit their or their child's functional disability needs:

The amount of money they're [PWD] spending on tailoring was astronomical to me. Everybody that filled out the survey or came to the focus groups made it clear that they were spending more on tailoring than they were on the product. When you put that together, it was more than the national average of what people were spending on clothing. To me that was a great business case that if they are already spending that much money on clothing, for sure if the clothing already came that way, they would [sic] spend it.

Scheier's realization regarding the amount of money invested in apparel or apparel alterations by PWD is supported by the literature. Much of the early scholarship regarding apparel and PWD focused on how many PWD were adapting their existing clothes, purchased off the rack, to accommodate their disability. Researchers suggested that apparel brands could implement similar adaptations and generate a new consumer market. However, despite the scholarship showcasing how apparel could be adapted to support a burgeoning and viable population, the apparel industry seemed to continue ignoring the apparel needs of PWD as they deemed the design changes as too unique and therefore too expensive (Warden & Dedmon, 1975; White & Dallas, 1977).

Armed with her newly found knowledge gained through her year-long research sabbatical, Scheier determined that in order to convince the apparel industry that it made good business sense to address the apparel needs of PWD, she needed to adjust her "pitch" to focus as much on the need as the profit viability of the market. Scheier's focus from determination to solve the problem for Oliver to a determination to solve the problem for all seemed to have led her to the final stage in her progress toward becoming an advocate—the Joan of Arc stage.

**Joan of Arc.** Joan of Arc was a 15<sup>th</sup> century commoner who believed she was chosen by God for a mission of “overwhelming importance: to save France by expelling its enemies and to install Charles VII as its rightful King” (History.com Editors, 2019). Much like Joan of Arc, Scheier believed she had a mission of overwhelming importance, so much so that she stated directly that she was “going to be the Joan of Arc to fill the industry in on this atrocity.” Scheier realized that embedded in her overall journey to becoming an advocate for adaptive apparel, there was a business opportunity connected to “showing the industry how to do it.”

However, Scheier stated that although her original goal was to be a for-profit, it was not her driving goal after acquiring her new-found knowledge and awareness of the viable adaptive apparel market; instead, it was to educate the apparel industry. Despite her long-term career goal to “own an apparel line,” when faced with the opportunity to financially benefit from the adaptive apparel market and make that goal a reality, she sacrificed that goal because creating her own line “wouldn’t have been to the benefit of everybody that I just spent all that time with.” Scheier felt that she had to be “strong in her beliefs” that owning her own line was

not what the goal is for me. It’s really to have mainstream brands that [have] adaptive versions. Everybody was so personal and shared all their stories with me and whatnot. I guess I probably, at that time, felt that I would have let them down, and I would’ve let my son down. And there was no way I was doing that. I made a commitment that I was going mainstream. That’s how I was going to do it.

It is in this light that Scheier first created a for-profit business focused on creating mainstream apparel options for PWD. Her business focus was to legitimize her work with

the apparel industry in educating them about the apparel needs of PWD, while creating a successful business in this market. Her focus, it seems, was still grounded in a moral duty to do the right thing. She stated that she “knew from all the research, this was a huge business” and that she felt “very strongly that I need to go mainstream, but I also feel that I needed to be a business.” [Researcher’s note: During a follow up member-check, Scheier reiterated that it was important to her that the study would highlight the fact that she was not opposed to making money from her adaptive apparel innovations or her business. In fact, she felt strongly that the industry must see adaptive apparel and PWD as viable and profitable market. However, because she was not making headway with the industry she felt the best decision was to take the monetary risk, for the brands, off the table and give them a philanthropic reason to enter the market; believing that when they did they would immediately see the profitability.]

Scheier’s decision to “go mainstream” with adaptive apparel was based on the realization that during her journey to becoming an advocate for adaptive apparel, she developed an arsenal of knowledge that would be of great value to the apparel industry. According to Hunt (1995), RA theory suggests a socialized, embedded theory of competition, which positions various tangible and intangible assets as critical resources of value that ultimately impact competition of a firm. The knowledge Scheier gained through her research and the data she collected about the market size and viability served as critical resources of value, which could provide a competitive advantage for her business endeavors and ultimately for the apparel brands she was seeking to educate.

## **Section 2: Fighting Against All Odds: Fighting Solo and Fighting Together**

The second section, “fighting against all odds,” combines the second and fourth research questions as the data revealed a commonality in the findings related to these two research questions: How did Scheier advocate for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger®? What role did Scheier play in helping Tommy Hilfiger® manage and coordinate its existing supply chain during the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children?

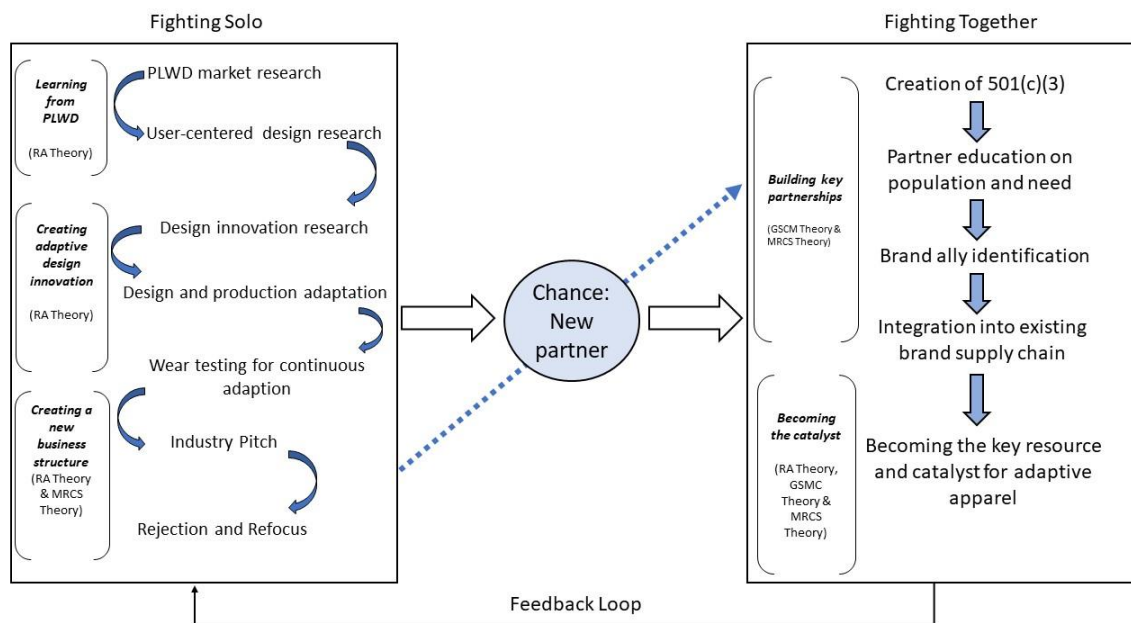
The results of the data revealed two themes: (a) fighting solo and (b) fighting together. Within each theme, additional sub-themes were realized. For the fighting solo theme, the sub-themes are (a) learning from PWD, (b) creating adaptive design innovation, (c) creating a new business structure, and (d) chance: new partners. For the fighting together theme, the sub-themes include (a) building key partnership and (b) becoming the catalyst. The two overarching themes of fighting solo and fighting together represent the data that demonstrate Scheier’s approach to advocating for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for apparel brands. Figure 4.6 shows these two overarching themes, their sub-themes, and their interrelationship.

In the fighting solo theme, we see Scheier educate herself about PWD and their clothing needs through research that was gathered to inform her adaptive design innovations. The sub-themes positioned within the fighting solo theme demonstrate how Scheier used her research and adaptive design innovations to advocate for adaptive

### **Figure 4.6**

*Fighting Solo and Fighting Together Conceptual Model*





*Note.* This is a graphical representation of the themes that emerged from the study data.

apparel as a competitive resource for apparel companies. The first sub-theme, learning from PWD, examines the PWD market research Scheier conducted and her focus on user-centered design methods to better understand the apparel needs of PWD. The second sub-theme, creating adaptive design innovation, showcases the design innovation research, production adaptations, and wear testing Scheier conducted to address the issue of mainstream fashionable apparel for PWD. The third sub-theme, creating a new business structure, discusses how Scheier determined a business restructure was needed in order to achieve adaptive apparel collaborations within the apparel industry. The final sub-theme, chance: new partners, discusses the chance opportunity Scheier experienced with a sourcing agency that was the conduit to her eventual partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®.

The arrows within the fighting solo theme demonstrate the iterative research and development process for which Scheier progressed from learning from others to chance:

new partners. Each step in her research guides the next step toward her goal to advocate for adaptive apparel as a key competitive resource in the apparel industry. For example, in the creating adaptive design innovation theme, we see Scheier undergo design innovation research, which leads to her development of the three adaptive design innovations that accommodate a diverse PWD market through the ease of dressing, adaptability, and adjustability of the garments. These adaptive design innovations are eventually used as key competitive resources when soliciting partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®.

The fighting together theme shows how Scheier was able to take the adaptive design innovations and the data collected during her market research and use these data as key competitive resources to build key relationships within the apparel industry. This is demonstrated through the two sub-themes: (a) building key relationships and (b) becoming the catalyst (see Figure 4.6). The data from the first sub-theme, building key partnership, explains how a key partnership, initiated by chance with a brand management company, led to Scheier's connection and future partnership opportunities with Tommy Hilfiger®. The chance: new partner meeting is represented by the circle between the fighting solo and fighting together themes and represents the conduit that moved Scheier from research to adaptive product development with Tommy Hilfiger®. The arrows within the fighting together theme communicate the step-by-step process Scheier managed and coordinated to include adaptive apparel into the existing supply chain for the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. The second sub-theme, becoming the catalyst, explores how Scheier used her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger® to emerge as a key competitive resource, in her own right, and the

ultimate catalyst for adaptive apparel. Finally, the dashed arrow progressing from the fighting solo to the fighting together themes shows how the restructuring of her business to a non-profit model led to her industry collaborations.

The theoretical implications present within the fighting solo and fighting together themes—GSCM, MRCS, and RA theory—help explain how Scheier moved from market research and design innovation to partnership with the apparel industry. These implications will be discussed further in this section. The feedback loop present in the conceptual model demonstrates the intersectionality between Scheier’s fighting solo and fighting together themes through continued engagement with the market population and revisiting of the design innovations.

***Fighting Solo - “... everything to research and understanding this population.”***

As was discussed previously, the fighting solo theme includes four sub-themes: (a) learning from others, (b) creating adaptive design innovation, (c) creating a new business structure, and (d) chance: new partners. These align with Scheier’s year-long research sabbatical and subsequent approach to the apparel industry to advance the inclusion of adaptive apparel.

This study intends to explore how Scheier became the catalyst for the adaptive apparel movement within the apparel industry through her collaborative relationship with Tommy Hilfiger®. The study data first demonstrated how Scheier became an advocate for adaptive apparel. The next stage for Scheier was to conduct the necessary research so she could educate herself and then ultimately educate the industry about the need for adaptive apparel for PWD. The first step in that process is “learning from PWD.”

**Learning from PWD.** Scheier explained that she lacked a clear understanding of the diversity within the disability community and, therefore, felt it was critical that she educate herself about the PWD population and how their individual needs impacted their apparel challenges. To educate herself, she determined she would need to conduct research into the market and their apparel needs. To do that, she would need time. She explained that it was necessary to take as much time as she needed to “see what she could do with adaptive apparel.” Her decision to take a year-long sabbatical from her career was described as a “journey,” and she explained that she asked her husband for his blessing to invest this kind of time by stating:

He [her husband] was so wonderful and allowed me that time. Because I couldn't have done it without that. That I really started on my journey of educating myself on the world of disability, understanding really even from the basics of what the difference was between cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy. That even within muscular dystrophy, there's 40 different strains, and each one of them affects the body differently. I needed to really go deep into not only the populations of all the different disabilities out there, or at least the high-level categories, to how that affects the body as it relates to clothing challenges.

To support her research endeavors, Scheier conducted focus groups to gain a better understanding of the apparel “challenges” PWD face. These focus groups then informed questions that she posed in a survey to PWD, which allowed her to reach a larger population of PWD to understand their apparel needs better. In organizing participants for her focus groups, Scheier utilized her connections through Oliver's physical therapy and medical interventions. Scheier went to “schools and hospitals” and

spoke to “the PTs (physical therapists) that I [Scheier] was privy to,” and to “all of the doctors that Oliver ever went to.” She also described gathering research data when she took Oliver to his doctor’s appointments by asking the “staff or the nurses when they came in [to the room]” to “help her [Scheier] out” by describing what the apparel challenges were with the patients they came into contact with.

Through this ethnographic research, Scheier shared that she was able to “educate herself” about the diversity and culture of disabilities as well as the unique challenges associated with each disability. She described her decision to engage with healthcare professionals as critically important because they “see this [disability challenges] day in and day out,” they are “out in the front lines.” Scheier describes “voraciously” taking notes every time she spoke to a nurse, a staff member, a physical therapist, or a doctor. Her initial conversations with healthcare professionals and PWD garnered “boatloads of information and intel,” and she realized that PWD “couldn’t wait to talk.” She described feeling as if she “was learning every single minute of every day about things I’d never thought of.” [Researcher’s note: During this portion of the interview Scheier became very animated, describing her research efforts. She was visibly excited while describing the amount of knowledge that she gained. She even suggested that she had never considered herself a researcher but felt as if she enjoyed the process.]

Scheier explained that she realized that she had “a lot to learn” about PWD and disability as she felt that her knowledge was focused only on Oliver and his disability. She also shared that the lack of knowledge surrounding other disabilities, beyond Oliver’s disability, was preventing her from truly understanding the apparel needs of PWD. Therefore, she was purposeful in seeking out diverse disabilities, including both

cognitive and physical disabilities, to better educate herself about their differing apparel needs. Scheier used wheelchair users as an example when discussing the new knowledge, she gained through this track of research. She stated that she learned that,

If you are sitting every day and you have a button on the back of your pants, that could lead to very serious medical issues, with what they could do to the skin. I had no idea, absolutely no idea. Or, just from a limb difference perspective that mentally they feel that they still have an arm there, but there's nothing there to use<sup>3</sup>.

She explained that this in-depth knowledge she gained allowed her to see the apparel challenges present within each disability. However, she also described realizing as she was gathering data that there had to be a way to find commonality among the disabilities in order to offer design solutions that would benefit as many PWD as possible. She describes feeling overwhelmed by each disability but realizing that there was some commonality among all PWD when it came to ease of dressing. This led her to realize that if she felt overwhelmed by the diversity within the PWD population, that the apparel industry would also and determined it was a necessity to develop common adaptive design innovations that would support as many different disabilities as possible in order to “sell” adaptive apparel to apparel brands.

With this insight, Scheier described scheduling one-on-one interviews, in addition to the focus groups she was already conducting, with PWD and their caregivers so she could observe their daily apparel challenges and how they mitigated those challenges. She described her conscious decision to include caregivers because she knew, from her

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<sup>3</sup> Scheier clarified that this sensation of feeling as if your limb is present resides with PWD who have lost a limb, not those born with a limb difference.

own experience with Oliver, that adaptive apparel needed to not only work for the person living with disability but also the caregiver who assisted the person living with disability. Scheier explained feeling as if she could use ease of dressing as the common denominator among all disabilities when “selling” her adaptive apparel idea to the apparel industry.

Scheier described going into the home of individuals who required 24-hour care and who required a caregiver to assist with their dressing. Scheier explained that it was vital for her how dressing impacted all people along the entire disability spectrum, ranging from those who were entirely independent to those who required constant daily care and assistance. She explained that it was necessary to understand the implications of donning and doffing for PWD fully. The example she provided when discussing this experience was her observation of Eric LeGrand, the Rutgers football player who was paralyzed while playing football. She explained that her experience with LeGrand demonstrated the extreme end of the spectrum when it came to the level of caregiver assistance required when donning and doffing.

Scheier explained that LeGrand is a paraplegic, and his “only movement is his head.” She described that LeGrand does everything with his head. “He uses a stylus that sticks out of his mouth.” Therefore, he requires daily assistance to get dressed. Scheier explained that her observation of LeGrand’s daily dressing practices was the most insightful for her in understanding the importance of ease of dress for PWD, especially those that required complete caregiver assistance when donning and doffing. For her, it demonstrated the extreme challenges some PWD face with apparel when they are unable to assist with their dressing practices. See Figure 4.7 for an image of Scheier with LeGrand and his mother during her visit to observe his daily dressing routine.

LeGrand and his mother, with whom he lives and who is his primary caregiver, invited Scheier into their home to observe his daily dressing routine. Scheier stated that LeGrand's caregivers used a machine that "almost looks like a forklift" and "comes across his ceiling, comes down, and literally scoops him up" so he can be lifted out of bed and be dressed. Then, Scheier describes, with the help of aides on either side of him, they would "roll him back and forth" until they can get something [apparel] over his head and on his body. While describing this observation, Scheier demonstrates empathy and amazement at the amount of effort it takes, by multiple caregivers, to get one person dressed. Scheier stated she was amazed at how difficult it was to get the items of apparel on a big guy, like Eric, who is unable to assist in his dressing.



**Figure 4.7**

*Eric LeGrand, Rutgers Football Player, and his Mother with Mindy Scheier*



*Note.* Scheier, circa 2014-2015, with LeGrand and his mother during her observation of LeGrand during his morning dressing routine. Reprinted with permission.

This observation, Scheier stated, provided her with the most insight into the type of design adaptations that were needed to make getting dressed easier for not just the person living with a disability, but also their caregiver. Her exposure to PWD who needed very little assistance in getting dressed to those who required complete assistance helped guide her knowledge of how vital ease of dress was to PWD and their caregivers. She described her amazement as:

To take, you know, an arm that has, it's literally dead weight, and have to maneuver it through armholes and the neck hole and pull pants when it is like putting it on a big football player that could not help you at all.

Scheier observed that “even with Oliver when I was helping him, he helped a little.” She stated that she did not “even have the words to express what it was like to watch this [LeGrand getting dressed] and the fact that it took almost three hours for him to get dressed. He needed to rest in between.”

For Scheier, what was equally as surprising was the fact that LeGrand willingly and happily engaged in this daily activity of dressing, despite the physical challenges and amount of time it would take because it meant so much to him to get dressed in a particular way each day. She explained that he told her that “fashion is very important to me” and, therefore, the lengthy process of getting dressed was a necessary component of his daily routine to ensure he felt good about how he presented himself to the world through dress. It was this “very, very laborious process” at which Scheier describes realizing her adaptive design innovations needed to not only ensure ease of donning and doffing but needed to include a fashion-forward approach so that PWD, like LeGrand, could feel “fashionable,” because he “cared very much about what he looked like.” She described that:

The biggest takeaway I had from that experience and others that I saw was that there had to be other ways to get product on the body. We are doing the same thing we've done for centuries; literally, we have to go back and rethink about how products can get on the body... There has [sic] to be other ways we can just

make it easier. Even if I could put 30 minutes back into his [LeGrand] life, ...you can't put a price on time.

According to Hunt (1995), fundamental to a firm's competitive advantage within the RA theory framework is the access to resources, which can ultimately deliver superior financial performance. Scheier appeared to have developed key resources as she gathered data through her consumer-driven and user-centered design research. These key resources helped Scheier position adaptive apparel as a competitive resource in the apparel industry when she demonstrated that ease of dressing is critical to the apparel needs of PWD. The data, as a key resource, supported the competitive advantage for Scheier as the data can be described as being "imperfectly mobile" (Hunt, 1995, p. 322). According to Hunt (1995), some key resources are not common or easily or readily bought and sold in the marketplace. Therefore, these resources that Scheier gathered are considered "imperfectly mobile," providing a competitive advantage to those who possess them.

**Creating Adaptive Design Innovation.** Scheier, armed with the information she gathered from her observation with LeGrand and others, continued to conduct focus groups and interviews in order to formalize her adaptive design innovations. It was through the LeGrand observation and others that she developed a three-category approach to adaptive apparel design. She explained that she "realized that there were three categories that kept coming up repeatedly from very different disability [sic], cognitive and physical. The notion of the closures that were used, buttons, snaps, almost a hundred percent across the board were the greatest challenges." That is when she "decided to...focus on those three categories." She exclaimed that "if I can find ways to just make those easier, then I think we had something."

The three categories of adaptive design innovations that Scheier created included adding magnets to zippers, which are hard for some PWD to manipulate. She also focused on the adjustability of the apparel item, meaning allowing someone with a limb difference to adjust the length of a sleeve or a pant leg through an internal hemming system or by adding an adjustable waistband and elastic. See Figure 4.8 for an image depicting the internal hemming system Scheier created. Finally, she focused on ease of dress features, adding entrance points at the shoulder or the back to make it easier for the consumer to don and doff the garment.

**Figure 4.8**

*Image of Pant Leg Internal Hemming System Innovated by Scheier*



*Note:* This image depicts the internal hemming system that Scheier developed and that was used in the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Reprinted with permission.

According to Hunt (1995), RA theory posits that key resources within a firm can be both tangible and intangible. Hunt (1995) suggests that it is just as important, in gaining a competitive advantage, to focus on knowledge, education, and stakeholder relationships as opposed to solely focusing on financial gain. For Scheier, she used research and adaptive design innovations as a key resource to build her “pitch” to the apparel industry for why adaptive apparel should be included, and ultimately to sell adaptive apparel as a competitive advantage for Tommy Hilfiger®.

The three categories of adaptive design innovations led Scheier to begin prototyping in order to conduct wear-testing to ensure these innovations would work for PWD. She describes going to retailers, like Kohl’s and Target, and buying garments off the rack so she could modify them using the three categories of design innovations she developed. To accomplish this, Scheier hired a sample maker and a technical designer. The technical designer was tasked with taking the data from Scheier’s research and developing conceptualized sketches of the three categories of adaptive design innovation. The sample maker was then responsible for using the conceptualized sketches and applying the adaptive design innovations to the off-the-rack garments. Scheier describes her three categories of adaptive design innovation as,

If buttons weren’t working and Velcro...can be difficult...if you have dexterity issues to open and close, a magnet made sense. I was just trying to get ideas down to see how we could modify what already existed. This was very much the stage of working out what the modifications were going to be, based on everything that I heard. The adjustable waistband going all the way up to adults.

To support the ease of dress through closures, Scheier described purchasing magnets to replace zippers, and “figuring it [how to incorporate the magnets into the garments] out” as she and the sample-maker worked together. Scheier describes her process with the sample maker as an iterative process. They would “find other ways to get it [the garment] on and off the body, opening up things in the back, so you’d go in arms first.” Scheier stated that this give-and-take was necessary to see how the ideas, generated from her research, would work. See Figure 4.9, for examples of the first garments Scheier purchased and modified according to her research findings.



**Figure 4.9***Off-the-rack Garment Adaptations*

*Note.* These images depict two examples—the first, a girl’s graphic long sleeve t-shirt, and the second, a girl’s pair of jeans—of modifications and adaptations Scheier conducted around 2014-2015 with her sample-maker after her research. The graphic t-shirt was modified by adding an access point at the back with magnets and ruching at the sleeve for adjustability regarding a limb difference. The jeans were modified by removing the zipper and adding magnets as closures. In addition, the jeans were modified at the leg with elastic ruching for adjustability. Reprinted with permission.



Scheier explained that after developing the prototypes with the help of the technical designer and the sample maker, she felt it was essential to take those prototypes back to the PWD community for additional feedback and wear-testing. Scheier described feeling this was necessary “because the first round [of focus groups] was more for me to...just assess what the challenges were,” and that now it was necessary to see if those adaptations would work as well as to determine if the PWD found the adaptations appealing. Her next round of focus groups and wear-testing was conducted at the Horizon School in Livingston, NJ, which specifically enrolls children with cerebral palsy and neuromuscular disease. The children at this facility had “a lot of ambulatory and wheelchair users, probably more wheelchair users than not.” During the wear-testing, Scheier had the “PTs and OTs [physical therapists and occupational therapists] or the caregivers, evaluate the product.” Scheier would show the prototypes to the participants and ask for their feedback regarding the adaptations. She would then show them a variety of technical drawings showing design adaptations and ask them to rank their favorites, using smiley-face stickers to demonstrate their favorite choice(s). See Figure 4.10 for examples of the technical drawings Scheier took to the focus groups.

**Figure 4.10**

*Scheier's Technical Design Drawings of Initial Research Findings*





*Note.* These images depict the initial conceptualized ideas generated from Scheier's first round of focus groups and surveys in 2014-2015. Note that smiley-face stickers were used by the participants to vote on their preferred design. Also note, that the three categories of design adaptations discussed in this section are represented in these design drawings. Reprinted with permission.

**Creating a New Business Structure.** Scheier, armed with several rounds of research data, including initial focus groups, various rounds of surveys, one-on-one in-home observations, and then another round of focus groups and wear-testing, determined that she had “talked to enough different PWD,” so much so that she began to hear the same challenges and issues repeated over and over. So, she explained that she felt it was time to take her adaptive design innovations to the apparel industry. When discussing when she knew she had enough information, Scheier stated that she did not “think it was ever going to be perfect because you can’t be perfect for every type of disability out there.” Scheier described taking a step back from her research and realizing,

Okay, I think it’s good enough right now for me to start thinking about going to the industry. I felt that it was tested. I had amazing statistics behind me, even the psychological, that I was now ready to start having meetings with brands. This was probably 2014-2015. That’s when I started asking people that I knew to introduce me, even just an introductory discussion [to apparel brands].

However, despite feeling as if she was conquering the apparel industry, Scheier described “finding out very quickly” that “I couldn’t even get in.” Scheier explained that she contacted about “a dozen” brands, and she could not even arrange a face-to-face meeting. Scheier described feeling “flabbergasted” that no one she contacted seemed interested in her findings. She stated that “it made no sense to me.” The only contact she did receive was a “courtesy” phone call, and she describes being able to “script every call” she was receiving. She explains that every person from the apparel industry who called her back would say,

‘Wow, that’s a great idea. But we’re not in a position right now to start anything new.’ There must be a reason if, in 2014-2015, nobody’s done this before if there are no mainstream brands in this space. There has to be a reason.

Scheier explained that every brand she did speak with would address the fact that no other brand was currently in this market. She described feeling as if that was enough for them to say no to her research and her adaptive design innovations. Scheier described how she would attempt to counter-argue their [apparel brands] rejection by “rattling off the statistics and the size of the market.” She thought they would respond to the size of the market and the viability of the market. However, she explained, that “meant nothing, I was making no progress [with the brands].” [Researchers note: During this discussion, I could see the feeling of rejection on Scheier’s face. It was if she was reliving that rejection all over again.] Scheier described that even though she heard from “a few” brands, there were many more who did not even respond—“no email, no phone call, nothing.” However, despite this level of rejection, Scheier stated she felt like this experience was part of her “journey.” She explained that because no one had done this [adaptive apparel] before, she “had nothing to lose” and needed to find another way to convince the apparel industry to say yes to adaptive apparel.

According to Scheier, that “other way” was to take the risk out of saying yes, and for Scheier, that risk meant financial risk. She described the “common denominator” among the apparel brands that said no to her “was that they were not spending money on a market that they don’t even believe exists.” She explained that hearing the brands state that they were not willing to take the financial risk made her [Scheier] “understand that I needed to show [them] that there was a market.” Scheier firmly stated, “If the money was

the problem, then the only thing I could think of is that I had to take those monetary risks off the table.” For Scheier,

The best way to do that was to become a nonprofit so that if I was dead wrong and they took a chance on this, they would get a tax deduction and, at the very least, it felt good because they were doing something good.

For Scheier, refocusing her mission was the “only way” to get the apparel brands to say yes. She explained that she could get them to say yes because they repeatedly told her that they “loved the idea,” but they did not want to be the first. So, for Scheier, her refocus became how to get them to say yes, so they can see how viable this market is and how significant the need is for this market. Scheier stated that this was a “calculated” decision she made to move her ideas forward. She believed that taking the financial risk out of the decision would give the apparel brands something they could “feel good about” and was her “calculated way to have the market show itself.”

Thus, the next step in Scheier’s journey was to establish a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. However, Scheier stated, “I knew absolutely nothing about a non-profit. I didn’t even know what a 501(c)(3) was. It wasn’t even something that sounded familiar.” Scheier described this step as her “go-mode,” stating she believes that the “best things I’ve ever done in my whole career [is] surround myself by [sic] brilliant people. I know what I know, and I know certainly what I don’t know. And I knew nothing about that.” She began to file the paperwork to establish Runway of Dreams (RoD) as a 501(c)(3) non-profit and, at the same time, began to “reconfigure my pitch” to the “fashion industry.” Her tagline was “the authority on adapting mainstream clothing for people with disabilities.” The focus of the non-profit was to assist apparel brands in modifying

their existing products for PWD. Scheier stated that “she was never more sure that that was going to get me in the door because it felt good” to brands.

According to Scheier, the RoD name was created because her original idea was that she was going to “team up with IMG<sup>4</sup>, who puts on fashion week, and we were going to do a runway show” featuring the adaptive apparel that she would work with brands to create. She described thinking that if she could use New York Fashion Week (NYFW) to convince brands to create adaptive apparel, brands would “put a toe in the water [of adaptive apparel]” and they would “modify [their existing] product for people with disabilities, and then they were going to be so amazed by it [the response they received] that they would go back” and add adaptive apparel to their product offerings. However, when she approached IMG with this vision, the “guy I met with at IMG said, ‘You’re doing it wrong. You need to go to the brands first and then do your shows.’”

This encounter with IMG led Scheier to decide to approach the brands directly and convince them of the viability of adaptive apparel. Scheier’s decision to restructure her business from for-profit to non-profit in order to remove the financial risk apparel brands associated with adaptive apparel can also be explained using RA theory. RA theory suggests that the ultimate objective of a firm is superior financial performance, which the firm pursues through the use and development of key resources that gain a competitive advantage for the firm (Hunt & Arnett, 2003). Scheier’s adaptive apparel knowledge (research and adaptive design innovations) is seen, according to RA theory, as key resources of the firm and, therefore, allow her to pursue a different objective with her

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<sup>4</sup> According to IMG, it is a global leader in sports, events, media and fashion, (*Our story*, 2020).

business to further a social cause (adaptive apparel for PWD) and establish superior financial performance (Hunt & Arnett, 2003).

**Chance: New Partners.** Guided by her refocused mission, Scheier began promoting her non-profit vision and received significant media. It was this media attention that led to Scheier's "chance" meeting with the person that would introduce her to the key partnership that ultimately led to the partnership with Tommy Hilfiger® and the creation of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Scheier explained that a family who lived in the same town read a newspaper article about RoD. They had a son the same age as Oliver, and their son and Oliver were friends. The mother of Oliver's friend read the newspaper article and told her husband, who was a managing partner at a consulting company working in the apparel industry, that he needed "to get involved in this and ...help her [Scheier]." While describing this moment in her journey, Scheier states, "I should identify both of them because if Susan<sup>5</sup> didn't do this, he [Steve<sup>6</sup>] wouldn't have done it...[and] he is the reason that I got to Tommy Hilfiger®."

Scheier described meeting Steve and giving him the "whole pitch" and "all of my data and all the research that I did, and explained to him that I know that this is an untapped market." She explained that after her pitch, Steve exclaimed that "she [Scheier] was onto something." Scheier believes that he was so quick to "get it" because "he's a businessman and something turned in his head." However, she also agrees that he was likely more motivated to help because "it feels like a good thing to do."

Scheier's "chance" meeting with Steve led to her introduction to Mark Fishman and Jimmy Rosenfeld, founders and CEO's of Fishman & Tobin (F&T), a Philadelphia

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<sup>5</sup> A pseudonym is used in place of the real name of this person Scheier describes.

<sup>6</sup> A pseudonym is used in place of the real name of this person Scheier describes.



based sourcing agency. In 2011, F&T was sold to Global Brands Group Holding Limited (GBG)<sup>7</sup>, the “world’s leading branded fashion accessories, footwear, and apparel companies” (Global Brands Group, n.d.; Our History: Global Brands Group Holding Limited, 2011). GBG held over a dozen apparel brand licenses and coordinated the production and manufacturing of the licensed brands. Scheier stated that Steve introduced her to GBG because “he felt, and rightfully so, that we need to convince the manufacturers first and have them believe in this so that they could then go to their licensees [for support].” The initial “chance” meeting with Steve, which ultimately led to Scheier’s connection to GBG, which in turn led to the introduction to Tommy Hilfiger®, demonstrates how moral duty can impact business decisions. According to Vehmas (2011), moral responsibility relates to one’s views about their “relevant capacities to evaluate reasons for acting” (p. 156). Vehmas (2011) bases this approach on the theory generated by Aristotle that states making a choice is a direct result of the person deliberating and acting on what they believe to be good (p. 157). One can see how Scheier describes the initial partnership with GBG as indicative of this moral responsibility.

Scheier’s “chance” encounter with Steve suggests that building key relationships is also vital to her goal of including adaptive apparel in mainstream fashion. RA theory can be used to explain this phenomenon. Hunt and Arnett (2003) posit that RA theory underpins a firm’s success through “social relations” and “social structures” (p. 2). Hunt (1995) suggests that it is just as important, in gaining a competitive advantage, to focus on stakeholder relationships as it is to focus on financial gain. Further, Bicen and Hunt

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<sup>7</sup> Moving forward Fishman and Tobin will be referenced as GBG to reflect the merger between Fishman and Tobin with Global Brands Group during Scheier’s partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®.

(2012) suggest that alliance market orientation or strategic business alliances provide unique ways for firms to gain competitive advantage by combining resources in ways that other competing firms may not be able or wish to do. In this data, one can see Scheier using her knowledge as a key resource to leverage the development of key business alliances in her effort to move adaptive apparel into the fashion mainstream.

***Fighting Together – “We’re in. We will make it.”***

The “fighting together” theme consists of two sub-themes: (a) building key partnerships and (b) becoming the catalyst. The “building key partnerships” sub-theme addresses the relationship Scheier formed with GBG and how they approached adaptive apparel through supply chain reconfiguration. This sub-theme also addresses how GBG coordinated the meeting between Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. The “becoming the catalyst” sub-theme addresses how Scheier utilized her key competitive resources, data, and adaptive design innovations to lead the adaptive apparel partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. This sub-theme also addresses how Scheier, as a key resource, is positioned as the catalyst that develops and launches, in coordination with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children.

In this section, GSCM, MRCS, and RA theory will be used to explain how Scheier and GBG integrated adaptive apparel into an existing supply chain network in order to introduce adaptive apparel to the industry. Further, MRCS theory will be used to explain how moral duty compelled both GBG and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> to enter the adaptive apparel market with Scheier and RoD. Moreover, within the fighting together theme, we see RA theory and MRCS theory intersect to explain how Scheier becomes the catalyst

for adaptive apparel through her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger® to launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children.

**Building Key Partnerships.** Scheier's "chance" meeting with Steve led to her relationship with GBG. Scheier described feeling as if her connection to Steve and ultimately to GBG were serendipitous. She explained that without her recent shift from for-profit to non-profit, she would have never been able to develop a relationship with Steve or GBG. Scheier states, "I had to be a non-profit. [Mark] Fishman [of GBG] is an incredibly philanthropic human being." She describes Fishman as having a "tremendous heart" as he serves on the board of the Philadelphia Children's Hospital, the same hospital where Oliver was treated. When discussing her first meeting with GBG, she described feeling as if they were most interested in the philanthropic nature of the endeavor as she described Fishman's "heartstrings were pulled." The relationship with GBG can be explained using the MRCS theory. Partners, such as GBG, are more willing to take the financial risk and work with Scheier on a social issue such as adaptive apparel because as it is seen as the "right thing to do" (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). According to MRCS theory, corporations can be defined as moral agents who wish to do the right thing for society and the environment through their business interactions (Ha-Brookshire (2015). In this light, we can use the MRCS theory to suggest that GBG felt a moral responsibility to place moral duty over financial gain in order to support a critical social issue they felt was essential to society.

However, despite the philanthropic motivation for the meeting, Scheier described the tone of that first meeting with GBG as business-focused because she felt as if she "needed to convince them that modifications [to the apparel] could help so many

different types of disability.” Scheier had brought with her to the first meeting line sheets that showed how her adaptive design innovations were incorporated into the apparel items. Figure 4.11 shows the line sheet for girls’ apparel that Scheier took with her meeting to GBG, which incorporated her adaptive design innovations. Although GBG was interested in working with Scheier and RoD, they were skeptical that Scheier’s adaptive design innovations could benefit the broader PWD market or that they could quickly or efficiently be implemented into the existing apparel manufacturing process.

It was in this light that Scheier discussed the need to “educate” GBG about PWD and her proposed adaptive design innovations. She described GBG as stating that her idea was “interesting” but that they needed more information. She stated, they [GBG] were “loving what I did, loving what I made, but they were forcing me to think bigger in terms of production.” They were specifically concerned about how magnets would be used in the manufacturing process. They did not understand how magnets could be incorporated into the clothing without additional manufacturing operations. In addition, they were concerned with how magnets would interact with the apparel production machinery, leading to increased time during production, which leads to increased costs. Therefore, these factors needed to be addressed before they were willing to donate their apparel manufacturing services to this philanthropic endeavor.

**Figure 4.11**

*Line Sheet Depicting Garment Adaptations Based on Scheier's Research*



*Note.* This line sheet was developed in 2014-2015 after Scheier's first round of surveys and focus groups and demonstrated the three categories of adaptive design innovations. Figure 4.10 demonstrates the first adaptations of apparel brought to the focus groups, and Figure 4.11 demonstrates the final adaptations, which were gathered from the initial focus groups. Scheier used this line sheet to solicit support from GBG. Reprinted with permission.

Scheier also described the gauntlet of questions and additional requests that GBG posed during that first meeting. At the time that she was meeting with GBG, Scheier was

still collecting market and design data through focus group research: “It was very much in the mix of the time that I was still doing focus groups.” Scheier described the “slew of questions” GBG proposed to her during their first meeting as “really helpful as it became a directive for fine-tuning my focus groups.” She described Fishman and his partner as “amazing mentors” who “helped me really further figure this [adaptive apparel] out.” Scheier explained that she felt that her partnership with GBG was a necessary part of her process. After her first meeting with GBG, Scheier described that “they sent me packing” with questions they had about her research findings, specifically regarding how her adaptive design innovations could serve a multitude of disabilities. Scheier said, “they...delegated...the information that they needed and then I translated [that] into more specific questions or information that I had to get out of the focus group.”

According to Scheier, her interaction with GBG was very much an extension of her need to “educate” the industry. Scheier stated that she was “talking to an audience that had never even necessarily heard the term adaptive clothing.” She felt like she was starting from “below ground zero” when she began engaging with GBG. She explained she felt she had the necessary information to educate them, but she needed to “fine-tune my pitch” in order to convince them the market was viable. The biggest issue for GBG, according to Scheier, was the commonality among the disabilities. Their questions focused on “how are we going to make it?” “How is it going to be scalable?” “I think I [GBG] need a little bit more information about how this product is going to help somebody with autism and somebody that has cerebral palsy.” She described going back to the drawing board and getting “some testimonial [sic]...some videos, showing people explaining why this [adaptive apparel] was helpful for them.” She explains that she felt

she needed to get them [GBG] “past the difference between customization and make it easier.” Scheier recalls them [GBG] saying to her, “could it be because it’s an impossibility to create something that would help...vastly different disabilities?”

Their concern, as described by Scheier, was how they [GBG] could integrate her modifications into their apparel production process without changing their entire supply chain network. Scheier explained that, after looking back at this process, if she had taken her research straight to apparel brands and not through a sourcing agency first, she would have been ill-prepared to advocate for the inclusion of adaptive apparel because she would not have had the foresight to work through the potential supply chain impacts first. GBG’s concern about how adaptive apparel could reside in their current supply chain network indicates that the complexity and fragmentation of the global apparel supply chain is a crucial consideration when introducing a new product into the apparel market. When introducing a new product into the AGSC, one must consider the impact on the entire supply chain network.

According to GSCM theory, the apparel industry is focused on intense competition built on a fragmented supply chain network, all driven by strong consumer demand to get the right product at the right price at the right time (Ha-Brookshire & Dyer, 2008). For GBG, their concern about adaptive apparel was focused on how they could fit adaptive apparel into their existing supply chain without making significant changes to their supply chain network that might cause disruption and increased time, which ultimately equates to increase costs. Although Scheier had unearthed a wealth of findings from her research and felt confident that the knowledge and data gained could demonstrate the need for adaptive apparel, she had not yet thought through the supply

chain impact. Scheier's realization led to her revelation that supply chain implications might have been what was holding apparel brands back from including adaptive apparel in their product offerings. Therefore, it became critical for her to demonstrate how her three categories of adaptive design innovations were common among all disabilities and how they could be easily integrated into the existing supply chain network.

Scheier worked with GBG for eight to ten months, continuing to conduct additional research with the PWD population and returning to GBG with her findings, gathering additional questions and concerns, and going back out to the population to gain additional knowledge and insight. In addition, during this time, Scheier brought in experts working with magnets in apparel and began to experiment with how magnets could be integrated into the apparel items as well as how to prevent the magnets from sticking to the apparel manufacturing equipment and slowing down the manufacturing process.

Scheier describes the eight to ten-month period as critical to "fine-tuning the details," but it also allowed her the opportunity to gain her 501(c)(3) status because without that, "they [GBG] were not moving forward without me being an official non-profit." While discussing this stage of her process, Scheier became excited and reflective. She described "enjoying the opportunity to revisit this time in her life" and reflecting on how important it was to her that someone was finally willing to listen and interested in taking a risk [Researcher's note: Scheier usually talks very fast and is a very energetic and dynamic person. However, while discussing her introduction to GBG and the development of a partnership with them, she became even more animated and energetic



and began to talk even faster. It was as if revisiting this time generated newfound energy; you could see the excitement on her face.]

Scheier participated in three meetings over the eight to ten months she worked with GBG. Each meeting, she described, ended with a request for more information and more research—specifically focusing on supply chain execution. It was at that third meeting that GBG reviewed their list of children’s wear licensees and thought strategically about which brand would be the best to partner with RoD. Scheier described that both Fishman and his partner agreed that “Gary Sheinbaum is where you need to go.” Gary Sheinbaum is the CEO of Tommy Hilfiger® North Americas, which worked with GBG to license and manufacture their children’s wear line (Kast, 2016; Novellino, 2016). Scheier explained that the reason for approaching Sheinbaum was because “Gary has a heart,” and “Tommy would be a great option [because] they’re so American.” Scheier’s description of how GBG determined the best business partner for partnership with RoD can be explained using the MRCS theory. GBG felt a moral duty to work with RoD to develop adaptive apparel and their decision to invite Gary Sheinbaum and Tommy Hilfiger® is based on the idea that Gary Sheinbaum would feel a moral duty to support the adaptive apparel idea. This whole conversation does seem to resonate with MRCS theory, which suggests that firms who wish to do the right thing consider how their business transactions will impact society as a whole, including social and environmental impact (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). According to MRCS theory, for firms embracing this idea, financial gain is less significant to the firm and social impact is more critical, demonstrating their moral duty to do the right thing (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

According to Scheier, GBG's decision to approach Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> was also mainly because GBG managed their children's wear license and believed that it would be a more natural "sell" to Sheinbaum and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> if they could integrate the adaptive modifications into an existing apparel line already in production. RA theory supports this realization by GBG—which is the idea that for a firm to gain a competitive advantage, they must use what is key to their firm's business tenants and capitalize on key resources that provide the firm with its unique position in the marketplace (Hunt, 1995).

Further, GBG determined that they would take on the responsibility of figuring "out how to manufacture" the adaptive apparel line and were willing to absorb the cost associated with the adaptive design innovations (i.e., magnets, ruching, Velcro, etc.) as they saw this as the best way to get Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> to agree to collaborate on the adaptive apparel line with RoD. According to Scheier, GBG felt that this would reduce the financial risk to Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> and help ensure they would say yes to the collaboration. Scheier describes that "figuring it out" included investing time in how magnets could be used in GBG's existing production process, yet maintain efficiency<sup>8</sup>.

The conversations described here are well reflected by the GSCM model. According to the GSCM model, the primary function of the clothing and textile domain is to satisfy human wants (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013). This is accomplished through the unique supply chain functions apparent in the clothing and textile supply chain network. For GBG, the supply chain function that was most critical to the success of

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<sup>8</sup> Scheier described a continued discussion with GBG about how magnets would integrate into their existing apparel production process. They needed to understand how the magnets would get sewn into the garments without shifting or posing a quality issue and as magnets stick, they were concerned how they would incorporate them into production using metal sewing machines.

adaptive apparel was the inter-functional and inter-organizational coordination surrounding the sourcing and production function of the supply chain. That is because, through inter-functional and inter-organizational coordination, in combination with industry creativity, leadership, and education, the supply chain functions ultimately support human satisfaction in clothing through social responsibility, firm and consumer economic gains, and environmental responsibility (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2013).

Specifically, Scheier stated that this was the first time GBG used magnets in a mass-production process, so they did not know the challenges they would face during production. Also, according to Scheier, the decision to use one of GBG's licensees was based on reducing the costs associated with producing the adaptive apparel line. Those costs, according to Scheier, consisted of sourcing new fabrics, trims, findings, and design and production. By using an existing line already in production, GBG could "take that [existing line] run and modify that. So, they [GBG] weren't creating anything new. They were using all the same fabrics, all the same tech packs, with modifications."


GSCM theory supports Scheier's use of an existing apparel line to introduce adaptive design innovations by suggesting that when sourcing is conducted in the global market, the coordination of the various sourcing activities becomes increasingly complicated. Therefore, sourcing agents must be able to negotiate the complex supply chain functions that exist for their products in order to get those products to the consumers. In order to achieve this goal, global sourcers must maintain key partnerships with the design and production supply chain functions. Therefore, according to Ha-Brookshire (2015), global brand management companies like GBG are critical to navigating the fragmented global supply chain that exists today. For GBG, this

negotiation consisted of using an existing line, which they already had in production, to introduce the adaptive design innovation. This decision helps reduce costs, increase efficiency, and ultimately reduces GBG's financial risk by "doing the right thing."

To accommodate the meeting between RoD and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, GBG requested a meeting with Gary Sheinbaum, the CEO of Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. Scheier recalled GBG telling Gary, when they requested the meeting, that "you need to meet with Mindy and Runway of Dreams. This is something we think is really special." In preparation for the meeting, Scheier determined she needed to use the existing Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> collection to showcase the adaptive design innovations she had developed. Thus, Scheier described buying two of "every piece of the Tommy collection," one she could modify and the other for comparison. In addition, Scheier prepared a "pitch deck" that included insight into the adaptive market as well as a model for their potential collaboration. She explained that she wanted them [Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>] "to see the magnitude of how profoundly this [adaptive apparel] will affect people." Figure 4.12 shows a few key images from this "pitch deck." [Researchers note: Scheier included children in this pitch deck because of this project with GBG And Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. RoD was never solely focused on children; they were always focused on adaptive apparel for all PWD.]

Figure 4.12

*Pitch Deck Presented to Tommy Hilfiger® at the First Meeting with Scheier and GBG*




## Runway of Dreams Story

- My son, Oliver, was born with Rigid Spine Muscular Dystrophy. He is one of 70 cases in the world. His lack of strength and leg braces create challenges with "typical" clothing.
- After spending years in the fashion industry, I decided there was an opportunity to meld my worlds to help Oliver and others who do not regard himself or herself as any different than other children.
- Inspired by Oliver, Runway of Dreams empowers children to embrace and celebrate their differences, rather than it be a source of shame, through adaptive clothing. Wearing fashionable, adaptive clothing can help being different feel "normal."

2



## The Problem

- Children with disabilities don't view themselves as different, so should not have to dress that way
- Parents struggle to find functional, fashionable clothing and spend additional money to alter "typical" clothing
- Adaptive clothing currently has no retail representation, only available online
- Adaptive clothing currently is not fashionable or typical of what their peers are wearing

53.9 million school-aged children (ages 5-17) in the U.S., about 2.8 million (5.2 percent or roughly 1 in 20 children) were reported to have a disability in 2010.\*

\* 51618 Disability Characteristics, [factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1/0/40000\\_1000100](http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1/0/40000_1000100)



## The Ask

➤ **What**

Mainstream Retailer or Designer to offer modified versions of their current clothing lines

➤ **How**

Partnership with Runway of Dreams to add approved modifications to existing lines

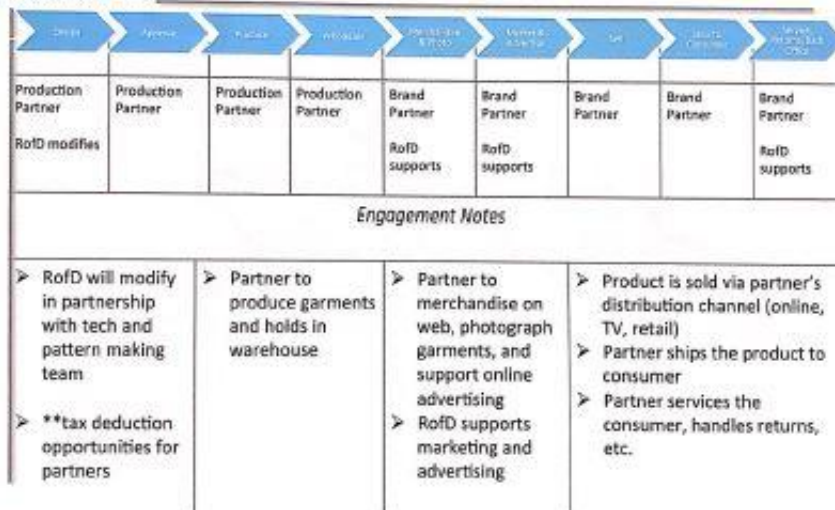
➤ **Why**

Approximately 56.7 million people living in the United States had some kind of disability. 2.8 million between ages 5-18 (roughly 1 in 20 children) were reported to have a disability in 2010.

Benefits to Brand would include new customer base, brand loyalty, multiple purchase of sku's (i.e in different colors), pioneer in the industry



## Potential Operating Model



*Note.* Scheier and GBG met with Tommy Hilfiger® in May 2015 and used this pitch deck to propose an adaptive apparel partnership between RoD and Tommy Hilfiger. This pitch

deck does include all aspects of critical points described by RA theory, the GSCM model, as well as MRCS. Reprinted with permission.

At the meeting, Scheier explains, Gary entered the room with seven people, including the children's wear product development team and the marketing team. Scheier describes that in preparation for the meeting, she knew Gary would come to the meeting with his team and that she needed her own "entourage." Her entourage included the folks from GBG and members of the RoD board, including John Kemp, a leading disability advocate and founder of the American Association of People with Disabilities. She stated that she "brought the big guns" to the meeting and that she was extremely prepared, having practiced her presentation for days. She had prepared a visual display of her modified Tommy Hilfiger® children's collection and was ready to "start the meeting."

However, Scheier described that she was "barely into my presentation" when Sheinbaum interrupted her and got up from the table, went over to the clothing Scheier had modified, and asked, "What's going on here?" She explained that Sheinbaum took the shirts off the display and began manipulating the magnets on the shirts. Scheier stated that Sheinbaum "couldn't believe that you could open a shirt with magnets, and they would immediately click like that." [Researcher's note: It is at this point in the conversation that Scheier begins to describe Sheinbaum, and she explains that Sheinbaum's reaction is related to his character. She describes him as "very hands-on" and an "incredibly charismatic and just a wonderful human being." She explains that he is a "hyper-focused" person who is "very passionate." This passion and excitement,

Scheier comments, is what prompted him to “jump up” and immediately go to the product and begin manipulating it.]

Scheier continued her presentation, and about ten minutes in, Sheinbaum, according to Scheier, “slams his hands on the table” and declares, “Hold on. You mean no mainstream brands have ever done this before? Even thought of this population?”

Scheier stated she replied with an emphatic “NO” and she details that Sheinbaum then

sits back in his chair like this [Scheier demonstrates how Sheinbaum leaned back in his chair, with his arms crossed and appeared to be dumbfounded with his eyes wide-open] and he said, ‘Thank you so much for coming to us. I can’t believe nobody’s done this before.’

She declared that he was “blown away.” At this point in the conversation, Scheier appeared to become emotional while explaining Sheinbaum’s reaction to her presentation and stated, “It was the first time I’d ever had a reaction like that, that somebody finally was ‘Oh my God’ this is a gift type of thing.” [Researcher’s note: It appeared to me that it was as if Scheier finally felt validated by the apparel industry and that all of her hard work was finally recognized. She insisted that Sheinbaum and GBG get as much credit as possible for understanding the concept and viability of adaptive apparel. She even emphasized that without them she is not sure if she would be where she is today or if adaptive apparel would be where it is.]

Scheier described that Sheinbaum then immediately began asking her questions about the line she had adapted— “tell me this, tell me this, and explain this.” Scheier stated that Fishman, from GBG, whom she describes as her “savior,” then interjected and said, “Here’s the deal Gary, we need to do this, and we’ll (GBG) manufacture it. It should



be the kids wear collection. We're going to do the Macy's thing [collection]." Scheier stated that Sheinbaum's reaction was, "Does it have to be just for kids?" and her response to him was, "Absolutely not, this from day one was for the population [of PWD], kids and grownups. [Even the] elderly."

**Becoming the Catalyst.** After Scheier's meeting with Gary Sheinbaum and his team at Tommy Hilfiger®, she began working directly with them to develop the adaptive apparel line for children (Diament, 2016; Kast, 2016; Novellino, 2016; Schmidt, 2018). Scheier described the events that followed that meeting as expedited. She explained that Sheinbaum was ready to move forward full-force but his team wanted to "slow down," as they are typically "very methodical in terms of they don't want to do anything fast." However, Sheinbaum pushed forward because they [Tommy Hilfiger®] believed "this was a lovely thing to do," and wanted to develop something for this market as quickly as they could (Indvik, 2020; Novellino, 2016).

Scheier posits that the reason they were able to move so quickly and not take the "methodical" approach that Tommy Hilfiger®'s product development was accustomed to was because of the relationship with GBG and the use of Tommy Hilfiger®'s existing children's wear line (Novellino, 2016), already in production. Scheier emphasized this by stating that,

because we [RoD] came in through Global Brands...this did happen so fast. It was really to the races from the minute we left the meeting. We got working. I primarily worked with the tech team at Global Brands and the Tommy team, who does the licensing.

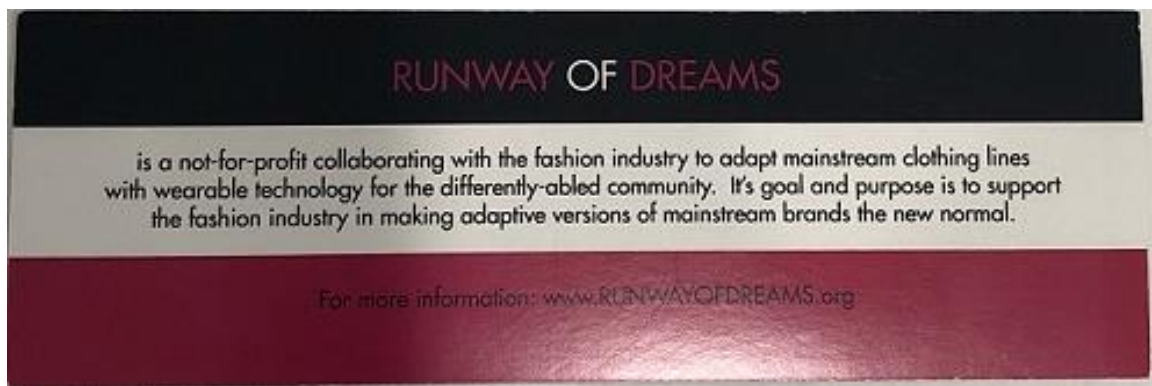
The quick to respond approach by Gary Sheinbaum and his team at Tommy Hilfiger® can be explained using GSCM theory. Due to the fragmentation of the global supply chain, using an existing supply chain framework allows brands to be more responsive to product differentiation and market needs. As Ha-Brookshire and Hawley (2013) suggest in their GSCM theory model, the supply chain functions unique to the apparel industry demonstrate the complexity involved in the apparel supply chain network. By reducing or condensing these supply chain functions, brands can be more responsive. In this study, we see this demonstrated when GBG proposed using the existing children's wear line, already in production for Tommy Hilfiger®.

The first adaptive apparel collection, for children, offered by Tommy Hilfiger® was not marketed as *Tommy Adaptive*; it was marketed as the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, a partnership between Scheier, her RoD non-profit, and Tommy Hilfiger®. Figure 4.13 shows the hangtag created for this coordinated collection and demonstrates the non-profit focus of the collection. Scheier never intended to have a partnership adaptive apparel line with apparel brands; "Runway of Dreams was never meant to be the name of the line. I always wanted it to be just another division in the fashion industry." Her focus, as she explained it, was to consult with brands to integrate adaptive apparel into their current product offerings, not to co-brand an adaptive apparel collection. However, in order to get GBG and Tommy Hilfiger® to say yes, she felt it was necessary to co-brand to demonstrate the philanthropic nature of the collaboration. Scheier explained her strategic decision to use the "right thing to do" feeling to get her foot in the door as

people have a very hard time to say no to the right thing to do and strategic or not strategic, whatever you want to call it, it was what got me in the door and hopefully is the reason that we are here today.

**Figure 4.13**

*The Back of RoD's First Collection Hangtag*



*Note.* This is the hangtag used on the first adaptive apparel collection partnership, in 2016, between RoD and Tommy Hilfiger®. The back of the hangtag promotes the RoD as a non-profit and showcases its purpose in supporting the fashion industry in introducing adaptive apparel into the mainstream. It clearly states the values discussed in MRCS.

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Scheier discussed that she felt this approach was necessary to negotiate that relationship in order to introduce adaptive apparel to the industry. Her feeling was that once she got them to say yes to adaptive apparel, they would recognize the business potential of the market.

Scheier described that after the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children hit the marketplace, the sales of the product exploded. “The first

week...everything was sold out and the product sold in every single state in the United States. [This] was the first time that had ever happened.” An article written by Binkley (2016) states that “two of the six best-selling items on Tommy.com were from the adaptive-apparel collection.” Further, the article states that “20% of the Tommy Hilfiger® children’s business was driven by the line” (Binkley, 2016). One could argue that this sale prompted Tommy Hilfiger® to expand their adaptive apparel collection to *Tommy Adaptive* in 2018, which introduced adaptive apparel for women and men. In fact, according to a Business of Fashion article, quoting Gary Sheinbaum, the CEO of Tommy Hilfiger® Americas, the *Tommy Adaptive* line has created a “halo effect for the brand” as nearly “85%” of the *Tommy Adaptive* consumers are new to Tommy Hilfiger® and “45%” of those who visit the collection online come “for the adaptive fashion collection but buy other products as well” (Lieber, 2019).

Scheier also described how she brought her data to the partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®, including the adaptive design innovations she developed. During the development and production of this adaptive apparel line for children partnership, Scheier worked primarily with GBG to produce the line. Together they focused on integrating the adaptive design innovations into the existing Tommy Hilfiger® children’s wear line, which was already in production. Scheier’s involvement also included working with the customer service team at Tommy Hilfiger® to ensure they were educated about how to reference disability when supporting the customer. In an interview with People Magazine in 2016, Scheier described training “customer service representatives on how to speak to customers looking to purchase the adaptive pieces. It’s a sensitive market, and rightfully so” (Kast, 2016).

Scheier's level of involvement with Tommy Hilfiger® can be explained using the RA theory. According to Hunt (2012), a firm's resources, tangible and intangible items that a firm uses to gain financial performance and add value to a market segment, can include human, informational, and relational. Human resources relate to skills and knowledge of employees, informational resources refer to knowledge from consumer and competitive intelligence, and relational resources suggest relationships with suppliers and customers (Hunt, 2012). During her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger®, Scheier can be categorized as a key competitive resource (human) for the brand by utilizing her research (knowledge) and adaptive design innovations (skills). Further, Scheier's research is also a key competitive resource (informational) as she provides consumer intelligence to the Tommy Hilfiger® brand. Finally, Scheier's relationship with the PWD consumer market and the trust and authority she developed regarding her adaptive design innovations, provides another key competitive resource (relational) to the Tommy Hilfiger® brand.

With the support of Scheier as the catalyst for adaptive apparel, Tommy Hilfiger® did not stop with the adaptive apparel line partnership with Scheier. Scheier explains that for Tommy Hilfiger®, adaptive apparel, was never a "one-off, that they were just going to do this one line and then stop." According to Scheier, Tommy Hilfiger® was committed to adaptive apparel long-term. However, Scheier discussed that although she knew the viability of the PWD market, she did not think that Tommy Hilfiger® fully understood how impactful the introduction of a mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel line would be because they seemed taken off-guard by how successful the first mainstream adaptive apparel line for children was for their business. Scheier explained that after the

launch of the first adaptive apparel line for children with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, “it went bananas. So, even back then, they were like, wait, hold on. This is a big opportunity.”

The success of the first line motivated Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> to invest in additional adaptive apparel lines with RoD. A summer and fall line quickly followed the spring 2016 line, and Scheier continued to work with GBG to implement the adaptive design innovations into their existing supply chain. Scheier stated that Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> no longer needed the 501(c)(3) designation as a motivation to embrace adaptive apparel, as was originally the case.

This shift for Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> from adaptive apparel as a moral duty to adaptive apparel as a key business strategy can be explained using RA theory. Theoni, Marshall, and Campbell (2016) use RA theory to support the idea that market segmentation can be seen as a way to gain a competitive advantage as a key resource of the firm. According to Theoni, Marshall, and Campbell (2016), market segmentation supports identifying smaller, more niche markets within a much larger, more common market. The implication for this study is that smaller market segmentation (i.e., adaptive apparel) creates a higher number of market segments, therefore providing the opportunity for a firm to gain competitive advantage.

One could argue that Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, through the success of co-branding with RoD, realized that the adaptive apparel market is one such market segmentation. However, without the moral duty that drove Scheier, GBG, and ultimately Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> into the adaptive apparel market, this market segmentation and competitive advantage may not have been realized. Further, without Scheier’s key resources of research and adaptive design innovations, and her moral duty to share these key resources

with GBG and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children may not have happened, or if it did, would have been much later in its realization.

After the success of the first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line for children, Scheier's team was now involved with the decision to include adaptive apparel as a division within the Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> brand. Scheier states that Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> "brought me [Scheier] in" and felt strongly that adaptive apparel was a "business opportunity" (Lieber, 2019). It was also at this point that GBG was no longer involved in the adaptive apparel line, and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> "brought it [design and production of the adaptive apparel line] in house" (*PVH Annual Report, 2017*). GBG had demonstrated how to introduce adaptive design innovations into an existing supply chain through the successful first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children with RoD and Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. It appears that this success ultimately led to Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> replicating their supply chain reconfiguration from the children's line into the men's and women's line, allowing them the opportunity to bring adaptive apparel in-house and serve as a key competitive resource for the brand.

RA theory supports this decision by suggesting that when firms have rare or "a specific assortment of resources" (Hunt, 1995, p. 323), they have the potential to produce a competitive advantage with those resources (Hunt, 1995). The competitive advantage for the firm exists when the firm's resources can provide a product to the market that is uniquely different from any other product being offered by competing firms (Hunt, 1995). For Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, the ability to work with GBG to reconfigure their supply

chain production allowed them the opportunity to invest deeper into adaptive apparel and allowed adaptive apparel to serve as a competitive advantage for them.

Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, in 2017, launched their adaptive apparel division, *Tommy Adaptive*, and subsequently their first mainstream, fashion-forward adaptive apparel collection for men and women (Davidson, 2018; Franklin, 2018; Johns, 2018; Lubitz, 2018; Leaper, 2018; Meyersohn, 2018; Schmidt, 2018). Using both MRCS and RA theory, one can posit that Scheier served as a key competitive resource for the launch of first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children as well as the catalyst for the introduction of adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion. Whereas, RA theory posits that a firm can gain a competitive advantage by capitalizing on its unique resources, which can be both tangible and intangible (Hunt, 1995). RA theory suggests that social structures, relationships, and key external stakeholders can also be categorized as key competitive resources of a firm (Hunt, 1995). The decision, by Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, to utilize Scheier's expertise as they launched *Tommy Adaptive* as a division within the brand, demonstrates Scheier's role as a competitive resource for the brand.

Scheier describes the introduction of *Tommy Adaptive* as the time that "everything changed." She continued to be involved in the development of the *Tommy Adaptive* line, but she explains that,

Suddenly their [Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>] PR team was involved, and their marketing team was involved. So, suddenly it wasn't Runway of Dreams anymore. I actually agreed that it shouldn't be called Runway of Dreams. So, we started talking about the fact that it would be *Tommy Adaptive*. I was absolutely in support of that.



Scheier explained that the goal of Tommy Hilfiger® was to have a “different division within the Tommy portfolio” that included adaptive apparel. According to media reports of this expansion within the Tommy Hilfiger® brand, the brand was “making history with its clothing collection for adults with disabilities” (Lubitz, 2017). The new collection was no longer a partnership with RoD, which was what Scheier intended. Instead, the new division was called *Tommy Adaptive*. The first collection consisted of 37 men’s and 34 women’s styles, which were all exactly like the existing Tommy Hilfiger® collections (Davidson, 2018; Franklin, 2018; Johns, 2018; Lubitz, 2018; Leaper, 2018; Meyersohn, 2018; Schmidt, 2018). See Figure 4.14 for examples of the original *Tommy Adaptive* line.

The decision, by Tommy Hilfiger® to use their existing men’s and women’s lines for the new *Tommy Adaptive* line can be explained using GSCM theory. Just as they had done when collaborating with GBG and RoD on the children’s line, Tommy Hilfiger® determined that the best decision for the business was to use the product already in production and incorporate the adaptive design innovations into that supply chain network. Tommy Hilfiger® had already worked through the challenges (i.e., using magnets, shifting access points to the neck and back, and adding adjustability to the waist, arms, and legs of garments) when producing the children’s wear line with GBG. So, for Tommy Hilfiger® to replicate the process for the men’s and women’s lines allowed the brand to maintain efficient and consistent supply chain functions without increased costs, as the *Tommy Adaptive* line would be offered at the same price points as their traditional men and women’s lines (Davidson, 2018; Franklin, 2018; Johns, 2018; Lubitz, 2018; Leaper, 2018; Meyersohn, 2018; Schmidt, 2018).

According to Scheier, during the transition to the *Tommy Adaptive* line, she began working with the Tommy Hilfiger® “internal teams, the design teams, the tech teams, the marketing teams, and whatnot. I was very involved in every meeting because they were unaware [of the details and insight of the PWD population and market].” However, at the same time that Tommy Hilfiger® was utilizing Scheier’s expertise, they were also doing their “own due diligence” and bringing in a [consulting firm] to double-check everything that I [Scheier] was saying” and “doing their own focus groups.” This was supported by a statement Gary Sheinbaum made in a *Business of Fashion* article where he stated that “to get *Tommy Adaptive* off the ground, the company had to invest in focus groups and modifications for manufacturing.” Sheinbaum also stated that the brand sent “several rounds of free products to customers in exchange for feedback” (Lieber, 2019).

**Figure 4.14**

*Runway of Dreams Adaptive Fashion Show from 2017*



*Note.* This image shows the RoD Foundation Annual Gala held during New York Fashion Week 2017, featuring the *Tommy Adaptive*. Reprinted with permission.

As Scheier describes it, she worked directly with the consulting firms during this time, and she explains that the consulting firm that Tommy Hilfiger® hired was able to confirm all of the findings from her research. “I am excited saying that everything that came back from that consulting company was spot on [meaning it validated her research findings].” Scheier explains that,

probably from that point, I educated really all the divisions. I was there for all the beginning working with the customer service people to explain to them...how to speak to the customers. The very first photo shoot I had to go in there, and they didn’t know where to begin. How to even find people with disabilities. How to

make sure that this set was [accessible]. I worked with them with understanding the copy of what had to go on the website. I worked with the creative team with [sic] how to not only market it [adaptive apparel] but how to do the photoshoots. So, that was really exciting that I got to go across the entire value chain from beginning to end because nobody knew anything. I went to actually all the meetings and explained the population and all of the nuances and whatnot and I educated them on this (Davidson, 2018; Franklin, 2018; Johns, 2018; Lubitz, 2018; Leaper, 2018; Meyersohn, 2018; Schmidt, 2018).

Scheier's initial involvement with *Tommy Adaptive* further demonstrates her position as a key competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger®, as well as her position as the adaptive apparel catalyst for the apparel industry.

### **Section 3: Sacrificing for PWD and Adaptive Apparel**

The third and final section, sacrificing for PWD and adaptive apparel, explores the third research question: What did the negotiation between the advocate and the innovator look like from the advocate's perspective?

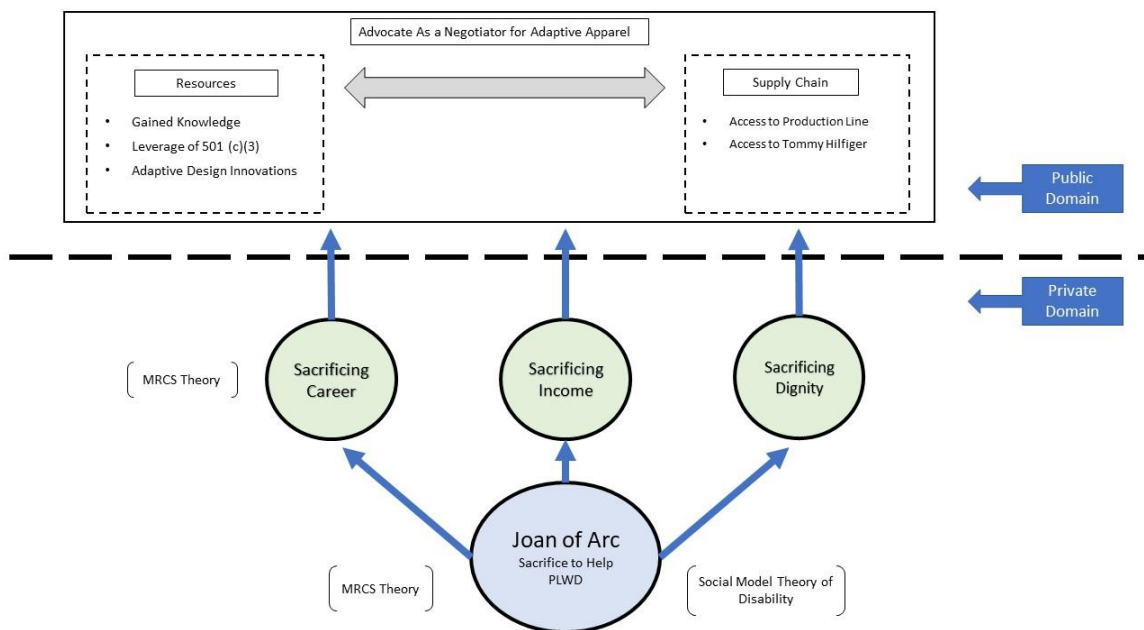
Figure 4.15 illustrates two separate domains: the private and the public domain. The public domain illustrated in Figure 4.15 was explained in Section 1 of this chapter and will not be detailed again in this chapter. However, it is necessary to include the public domain in this conceptual model and discussion so as to demonstrate how the private domain influenced the public domain. As was discussed in Section 1 of this chapter, Scheier engaged in a variety of activities on her journey to become an advocate for adaptive apparel. These activities led to the development of the adaptive design innovations and knowledge about PWD that Scheier used as leverage in her key

partnerships with GBG and ultimately her adaptive apparel line for children partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. These activities took place within the public domain as she engaged with PWD and worked to influence the apparel industry. However, what was not part of the Scheier-as-adaptive-apparel-advocate story was what took place in the private domain.

The results of the data revealed, within the private domain, the main theme of *Joan of Arc – sacrifice to help PWD*, and three themes of sacrifice for Scheier: (a) sacrificing dignity, (b) sacrificing career, and (c) sacrificing finances. The private domain details the realization that Scheier must take on the role of Joan of Arc to “educate the industry” about the dearth in fashion-forward adaptive apparel in the marketplace. Subsequently, Scheier determined she must make sacrifices so she could advocate and negotiate for the inclusion of adaptive apparel in mainstream fashion. The first sacrifice made is in her career. It is with this sacrifice that Scheier described giving up her career goal of owning her own apparel line to ensure adaptive apparel.

**Figure 4.15**

*Conceptual Model Depicting RQ 3*



*Note.* Figure 4.15 is a graphical representation of RQ3.

reached the mainstream for PWD. Her second sacrifice is financial. Scheier explained that she relinquished control of her intellectual property by not patenting her adaptive design innovations, thus leaving potential profitmaking opportunities for the apparel brands she solicited and not her own business. Finally, Scheier described sacrificing her dignity and that of her son Oliver when engaging with the apparel brands to introduce adaptive apparel.

The MRCS and social model of disability theories support the Joan of Arc theme, as MRCS theory is shown to influence the three sacrificing themes of (a) dignity, (b) career, and (c) finances. Finally, RA and GSCM theory support the *advocate as a*

*negotiator for adaptive apparel* theme and the resources and supply chain negotiation that takes place. These theoretical frameworks will be discussed in Section 3.

***Joan of Arc – “Sacrifice to help PWD.”***

As was discussed in Section 1, the *for all* stage, as Scheier was investigating the apparel options available for PWD after Oliver declared he no longer wanted to wear sweatpants to school and wanted to wear jeans like his friends, she began to realize that her destiny was to ensure there were mainstream fashion-forward apparel options available for PWD. She referenced this as her Joan of Arc moment. It was at this point that Scheier discussed and explained that she was “in flux of what I was going to do, my next step, so to speak, that I was going to dig into this [adaptive apparel].” Before Oliver’s declaration of wanting to wear jeans like his friends, Scheier had been working toward her career goal of owning her own apparel line. She had a store and filled it with designer clothing that she negotiated on consignment. She began with “pop-up stores” and would “take over vacant rental places” and “go to all the shows in New York and would say to the designers, ‘If you have any leftover product, I will take it on consignment, I’m going to do these week-long pop-up stores. We’ll split 50/50.’” In addition, she had a space in the back of her retail store that was empty, so she partnered with a friend and started “Future Fashionistas” and held

classes for kids...ages six to 18... that wanted to learn about fashion design and retail. We taught them everything from sketching and illustration to patternmaking to draping. They made all of their own designs from scratch, and at the end of each session, we did a big runway show.

*Future Fashionistas* was so successful Scheier “wanted to franchise it” and opened another location in town and began running both locations.

However, it was at this time that Oliver’s health took a “complete nosedive,” and Scheier explained that she could no longer manage “him and the whole franchising and whatnot, so I needed to take a minute to figure out what was wrong with my son.” This was the “exact time” that Oliver began experiencing difficulty dressing. So, Scheier shared that she sold her business to focus solely on Oliver and his care. To overcome Oliver’s inability to get dressed, yet maintain his independence, Scheier stated she began to dress Oliver in sweatpants every day. This was her solution until Oliver demanded that he be able to dress like his friends. That declaration by Oliver is what led Scheier to her next endeavor, adaptive apparel. Her mission to find adaptive apparel options for Oliver led her to realize that there was a gap in the apparel industry for mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel and Scheier set out to fill that gap for all PWD. Scheier stated that “I couldn’t imagine that it was just Oliver that had this unbelievable world-changing moment from how he felt about how he dressed.”

Scheier explained feeling as if “everything more started forming of, I was more on a mission of there is no way that this could possibly be [no fashion-forward adaptive apparel options].” Scheier described the moment as, “It was probably at that point, I think, I was more of the I’m going to be the Joan of Arc to fill the industry in on this atrocity.” She even described her journey to educate herself and the industry about adaptive apparel as her “Joan of Arc mission.” Scheier also explained that when she realized this was her “mission,” she felt she needed to get approval from her husband. She described “asking [him] for a year” to “dedicate everything to research and



understanding this population.” She went on to state that she told her husband, “I know that there’s something I need to do here, but I’m not really sure yet and I don’t have the information that I need yet.” [Researcher’s note: During Scheier’s description of her Joan of Arc moment, I could see the pure determination in her demeanor and in the way she described this time period. She was adamant in her statements and forceful about how upset she was that there were no fashion-forward apparel options for Oliver. You could see the determination on her face when she discussed it, and it felt like she believed that she was the only one who could solve this problem for her son and all PWD. When discussing the need to “get approval from my husband,” Scheier explained that she knew taking the time to research would also be a sacrifice and he needed to “buy into” her goal.]

Much like the historical icon, Joan of Arc, Scheier felt a deep compulsion to solve a problem that she felt was a detriment to society. She was willing to go to battle, just as Joan of Arc had done, to remove the apparel obstacles facing PWD. Scheier’s compulsion to focus on solving the apparel issue for all PWD and not just her son can be explained using the MRCS theory posited by Ha-Brookshire (2015). MRCS theory suggests that for a corporation to be truly sustainable, it must embrace the ethos of sustainability throughout every facet of the organization, including policies, organizational structure, and employee focus and goals. Ha-Brookshire (2015) suggests these behaviors and practices are duties, either perfect or imperfect, with perfect being that the corporation from top-down and across all facets embraces sustainable efforts in the broadest form. Further, perfect duty suggests that the corporation cannot waiver in their support of sustainability; they must be true believers.

Whereas, imperfect duties suggest that the corporation is much less rigid in its sustainability practices and, therefore, are not fully committed to the ethos of sustainability and, according to Ha-Brookshire (2015), cannot claim corporate sustainability. It is in this light that MRCS theory is being used to explain why Scheier felt such a deep commitment to solving the apparel issues facing PWD. It seems apparent that Scheier felt and still feels a moral duty toward the social issue of disability and adaptive apparel. Further, attributing Scheier's behavior to MRCS theory, one could argue that Scheier's willingness to sacrifice many personal and professional goals is also indicative of her values as described in the MRCS theory. Meaning, for a corporation to be truly sustainable, according to MRCS theory, it must be willing to embrace policies and structures that support sustainable practices regardless of whether those policies and structures contribute to their overall financial performance (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). One can see that Scheier was willing to make that sacrifice for the opportunity to introduce adaptive apparel to mainstream fashion.

Further, it is posited that the social model theory of disability, introduced by disability scholar Oliver (1981), can also be used to buoy Scheier's dedication to disability and adaptive apparel. Oliver (1981) states that society creates barriers that prevent PWLD from participating fully in society. For many PLWD, apparel has served as a barrier to full societal participation, preventing them from occupational and social opportunities (Kabel, Dimka, & McBee-Black, 2017; Kabel, McBee-Black, & Dimka, 2016). Therefore, if through design and adaptation, we can create products that provide PLWD the ability to fully navigate and engage with society, we may eliminate barriers to social participation for PLWD. Thus, Scheier's realization that there was a dearth of

fashion-forward apparel for PWD operated within the social model theory of disability as she began to advocate and negotiate for the inclusion of adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion.

***Sacrificing Career – “You should do this. Why are you giving away your ideas and hard work?”***

The first sacrifice Scheier discussed was her career goals so she could take on the role of adaptive apparel advocate. During her research into adaptive apparel, Scheier explained that she was dumbfounded by the fact that no one in the industry was addressing this issue and she began to realize that adaptive apparel could be a “huge opportunity.” She explained that she could not believe that “nobody else has figured this [adaptive apparel] out before, there’s no way that somebody hasn’t realized that this is an unbelievable opportunity.” So, Scheier went to the apparel industry to discover why and was faced with the reality that the apparel industry was not willing to take the risk on a market they felt was too complicated and not profitable. It was at this point that Scheier determined that she had to “educate the entire industry” about adaptive apparel.

As Scheier set out to educate herself and the industry about adaptive apparel, she began to collect data that provided her with insight into the size of the PWD consumer market as well as the potential profitability of the market. Armed with this knowledge, Scheier went back to the apparel industry to highlight the viability of the market, believing that this time the industry leaders she spoke with would see the error of their ways and embrace the opportunity to enter the adaptive apparel market. However, again, Scheier was rejected and was told that she “should do this [start your own adaptive apparel line], why are you giving your ideas away and all your hard work?”

Scheier explained feeling honored, yet disappointed, when she was told by the apparel brands that they did not see viability in the PWD market, but that she should create the adaptive apparel line as her own because she “understood the needs better.” Scheier explained that she felt conflicted. Her career goal had been to own her own apparel line, but she was disappointed that the apparel brands had not seen the potential opportunity available to them regarding the adaptive apparel market. Therefore, despite her career goal of owning her own apparel line, it was “always [what I] wanted to do,” Scheier determined it was not the right thing to do for her to establish an adaptive apparel line because it was the

absolute opposite of what Oliver would have wanted. He doesn’t want to wear a brand that I made. He wants to wear Levi’s®. He wants to wear Under Armour®. He wanted to wear what everybody else was wearing. So, I definitely had to be a little strong in my beliefs that that is not what the goal is for me. It’s really to have mainstream brands have adaptive versions.

As Scheier was describing these events, the researcher said to her, “One of the first things you said to me when we started talking about your experience in the industry was, ‘My goal from the beginning was to have my own line.’ You got to this point, where that was offered up to you in a way that you had unbelievable access in front of you, and you said no. Why?” Scheier’s response to that was,

That’s such a great point that it was everything I always wanted. I could have been the first, but it wouldn’t have been to the benefit of everybody that I just spent all that time with. Everybody was so personal and shared all their stories with me. I guess I probably, at that time, felt that I would have let them down, and

I would've let my son down. And, there was no way I was doing that. I made a commitment that I was going mainstream. This world that I was exposed to [adaptive apparel], I didn't want to necessarily be waylaid, but I do want to also make sure that I get this out because it was so important, I think, that I was a for-profit at this time.

For Scheier, she believed that she could run a for-profit business and focus on assisting apparel brands in adapting or modifying their existing products. She believed that adaptive apparel was “a business and I knew from all the research [I had done, that] this was a huge business.” She described understanding that she needed to “go after mainstream [fashion],” but “I also felt that I needed to be a business.” However, after she went back to the apparel industry the second time around with her statistics of the PWD market and was rejected again, she realized that she needed to change her approach in order to ensure that her goal of mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel was fulfilled.

Scheier's sacrifice of her long-time career goal, to own her own apparel line, demonstrates a level of commitment to adaptive apparel that goes beyond a business opportunity. MRCS theory, again, can be used to explain Scheier's willingness to sacrifice her career goals to see adaptive apparel enter mainstream fashion. One's duty is their ability or willingness to help others (Stratton-Lake, 2000). Stratton-Lake (2000), while discussing Kant's theory of moral duty, suggests that we act on moral duty when we feel the compulsion to help others. In fact, Stratton-Lake (2000) posits that “the content of the motivating thoughts of good agents will be either the normative reasons why the obligatory action ought to be done or what the agent believes are the normative

reasons why she should act” (p. 126). For Scheier, she believed that she should act and felt a moral duty to act. This was what she called her “Joan of Arc” moment.

***Sacrificing Income – “I didn’t think you could make money in a nonprofit.”***

As Scheier realized that adaptive apparel was a “huge opportunity,” she began to use her research to develop adaptive design innovations, which are discussed in Section 2. It was at this point that Scheier hired a technical designer and a sample maker and began applying her adaptive design innovations to apparel she purchased off the rack from different apparel brands including Target and Kohls. Armed with prototypes of her adaptive design innovations, Scheier approached the apparel industry with these samples and began to pitch her designs and idea of adaptive apparel to the industry. However, she was rejected and her vision for adaptive apparel in the mainstream began to diminish, as did her belief that she could make this into a profitable business venture.

It was in this light that Scheier realized she had to make a decision if she did not want her hard work to be lost. She described that she was not willing to give up and “that maybe it was because of my journey or maybe because I had nothing to lose, and I had put so much time and effort into it, that I was absolutely not stopping there.” Scheier described feeling as if she needed to

find another path because this one wasn’t working. If the money was the problem [for the apparel brands], then the only thing I could think of is that I had to take those monetary risks off the table and the best way to do that was to become a nonprofit so that if I was dead wrong and they [apparel brands] took a chance on this, they would get a tax deduction.

Scheier explained that she “started reconfiguring my pitch, that we were a nonprofit working with the fashion industry to enable them to modify mainstream clothing for people with disabilities.”

Scheier’s decision to sacrifice her for-profit business to ensure adaptive apparel continued in the mainstream suggests a moral duty to do the right thing. MRCS theory can explain this willingness to sacrifice her potential long-term profit when the prospect of working as a for-profit with the apparel industry diminished. She did not forego her continued advocacy for adaptive apparel; instead, she doubled-down, shifted from a for-profit focus to a non-profit focus and continued to advocate for adaptive apparel. It seems that her motivation is driven from a moral responsibility to do what is right to support the PLWD population (Ha-Brookshire, 2015).

One can see that Scheier’s decision to restructure her business model from a for-profit to a non-profit was a sacrifice she made in order to fulfill her goal to move adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion. As she stated, she knew adaptive apparel was a “huge business opportunity,” and it could be profitable to provide mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel for PWD that utilized the adaptive design innovations she had created. However, the rejection of the apparel brands forced Scheier to change her path and forego her business opportunity and stay true to the idea of getting adaptive apparel into the mainstream. Further, it is worth noting that Scheier’s financial sacrifice extended beyond the movement from for-profit to non-profit; Scheier detailed that she did not patent her adaptive design innovations and, therefore, lost out on the potential income that would have resulted if she had protected her intellectual property. She described

feeling that “certainly in hindsight, I probably could have spent more time thinking about patents.”

MRCS theory can be used to explain this sacrifice as well. Not only did Scheier lose potential profit by shifting her business model from for-profit to non-profit to ensure adaptive apparel entered the mainstream, but she also forfeited her intellectual property rights by providing free access to her research and adaptive design innovations to the brands she solicited. Her “all-in” approach to advocating for adaptive apparel demonstrates a willingness to negotiate to ensure adaptive apparel entered the mainstream. MRCS theory suggests that for one to embrace a true moral responsibility to corporate sustainability, one must buy-in to that belief at all levels and at whatever costs are needed (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). It appears Scheier bought into the idea of adaptive apparel and was willing to sacrifice, in whatever way possible, to make that happen, including sacrificing future income potential and protection of her intellectual property.

Further, Scheier’s internal negotiation that led to her sacrifice can be described as a problem-solving level of negotiation. Hopmann (1995) posits that the goal of problem-solving negotiation is to solve problems that are facing the parties involved and to find beneficial solutions to those problems that work for everyone. The author suggests that obstacles may arise in problem-solving negotiations when the parties involved perceive the negotiation may harm their interests. One can see that when Scheier approached the apparel brands about adopting adaptive apparel, they seemed to have an adverse reaction to taking a financial risk with an unknown market, despite Scheier’s in-depth research and data supporting the profitability of the market. Therefore, Scheier recognized the



intention of the apparel brands to protect their interests, profitability, and negotiated a shift in business structure to remove the financial risk from the equation.

***Sacrificing Dignity – “I gave up everything.”***

In addition to sacrificing her career goals and financial profits, the data revealed that Scheier also sacrificed her dignity as she negotiated the inclusion of adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion. Scheier described feeling an internal struggle with how the apparel industry viewed PWD and how she wanted PWD to be referenced. When discussing how the apparel industry addressed the issue of adaptive apparel, she consistently used terms like “something special” or “feel good,” “the right thing to do,” and “lovely thing to do” when highlighting how apparel brands spoke when she would present the idea of adaptive apparel to them. One such instance, described by Scheier, was when she was introduced to Gary Sheinbaum at Tommy Hilfiger®. Scheier referenced how GBG introduced the idea of adaptive apparel as “you need to meet with Mindy Scheier and Runway of Dreams. This is something we think is really special.” Scheier explained that,

It was always categorized as that, special, the right thing to do, which, of course, was a thorn in my side. Anytime anybody said that I wanted to vomit, but again, it was a sacrifice, ...that this is how I knew I was getting in the door.

Further, Scheier described why these terms were a “thorn in my side” by discussing the context behind such statements. She stated,

I was never more sure that [non-profit] was going to get me in the door because it felt good [to the brands]. Good, bad, indifferent, people talk to you when they think that [it] is for a good cause. Even though....and I definitely want to

underscore this, I never wanted Oliver to feel like he was a good cause, or [that someone] feels sorry for him or feels sorry for us. But it was also a personal sacrifice that I needed to make to show that this market existed. I don't know. Still to this day, I believe it was the right path, but maybe I could've stuck with it and stayed for-profit. I don't know. But it's what I did.

One can see that Scheier sacrificed her dignity and that of her son Oliver to bring adaptive apparel to the mainstream. She appeared to feel conflicted about how apparel brands viewed the inclusion of adaptive apparel as a “feel good” thing to do versus Scheier's efforts to showcase the viability and profitability of the PWD market. Scheier explained that she wanted the apparel industry to see adaptive apparel as a “good business decision” and not a philanthropic decision to “feel good” about helping PWD. [Researchers note: While discussing these feelings, Scheier appeared very emotional. She became almost agitated when detailing how people would say that her ideas were “special” or “felt good.” She explained that she wanted the brands to see adaptive apparel as a viable market and not as only a way to fulfill their philanthropic goals.]

Scheier discussed feeling guilty about how people in the apparel industry seemed to view the business proposition of adaptive apparel. She explained that she repeatedly heard brands say things like, “It seems like the right thing to do” or, “What a lovely thing to do.” But, when faced with statistics that detailed the size of the PWD market, the realization that no other brands were entering the adaptive apparel market, and that the PWD market was “hungry” for fashion-forward mainstream apparel, the brands were not willing, according to Scheier, to move beyond the “feel good” approach and embrace adaptive apparel as a business strategy. It became apparent that Scheier sacrificed much

on her adaptive apparel “journey.” She discussed sacrificing her career, her immediate and long-term financial gain, her ideas, and hard work, and her and her son’s dignity. When asked directly what she gave up when she began advocating for adaptive apparel in mainstream fashion, she answered, “I gave up everything!”

Scheier’s sacrifice of dignity to move adaptive apparel forward in mainstream fashion can be explained by using MRCS theory and can be discussed in the context of the negotiation strategy. While advocating for adaptive apparel, Scheier realized that apparel brands were not willing to accept adaptive apparel as a viable business strategy. Instead, they saw adaptive apparel and the PWD market as a philanthropic decision, one that “felt good” and was “the right thing to do” to help a marginalized consumer market. Scheier described sacrificing her dignity and that of her son Oliver when engaging in adaptive apparel negotiations with apparel brands. Scheier described apparel brands as demoralizing to the population of PWD when they stated that the PWD was too risky of an investment.

Therefore, Scheier, in her negotiations, sacrificed her dignity to bargain with apparel brands. Her bargaining tactics were more far-reaching than that of the apparel brands, with Scheier sacrificing much more than the apparel brands were willing to sacrifice (Hoppmann, 1995). One can argue that MRCS theory supports Scheier’s negotiation tactics in bargaining with apparel brands to adopt adaptive apparel. MRCS theory suggests that to claim total investment in a social issue, like sustainability, the corporation, or in this case the individual (Scheier), must commit fully to the issue. Committing includes all business functions and organizational structures as well as the willingness to sacrifice financial gain and business performance in order to claim perfect

duty (Ha-Brookshire, 2015). It appears that Scheier committed to adaptive apparel as a perfect duty as she sacrificed by “giving up everything” to fight for adaptive apparel in mainstream fashion.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

Chapter 5 contains the following sections: (a) research goals, objectives, and gaps; (b) summary of findings; (c) contributions and implications; (d) limitations and future research; and (e) research reflection.

### **Research Goals, Objectives, and Gaps**

The goal of this study was to gain an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how Mindy Scheier catalyzed the recent adaptive apparel market by exploring her role as an adaptive apparel advocate throughout her partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, which launched a first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line for children, in 2016. To achieve the objective of this study, a case study was deployed to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in-depth and holistically, within its real-world context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). The research questions used for this case study investigated the gap in the apparel research literature, specifically to uncover the complexity of apparel supply chains and their impact on the ability of apparel brands to launch a new adaptive apparel in the marketplace. The previous literature suggested that, because of this gap, PWD have been unable to find appropriate and adequate apparel to fit their needs, have continued to face societal barriers due to the lack of apparel availability, and have continued to be ignored in the apparel industry by mainstream apparel brands (Kabel, McBee-Black, & Dimka, 2016; Kabel, Dimka, & McBee-Black, 2017; McBee-Black & Ha-Brookshire, 2018).

## Summary of Findings

To fill the aforementioned gap in the literature, this study explored how Mindy Scheier, a mother of a child living with a disability and former fashion designer, catalyzed the adaptive apparel market by collaborating with Tommy Hilfiger® to launch a first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. The data revealed several dominant themes and sub-themes that illuminated our understanding of the events that led to Scheier's partnership on the first mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. The first theme, *becoming an advocate*, emerged for the first research question of this study: What motivated Scheier (the advocate) to create a new adaptive apparel line with mainstream apparel companies, and how did the advocacy process play out? This theme revealed that Scheier was motivated by the apparel needs and challenges of not only her son Oliver, but all PWD. Moreover, Scheier's discovery of the dearth of apparel available to PWD motivated her to become an advocate. More specifically, her initial stage started with the guilt associated with not understanding the significance of the meaning of apparel to her son Oliver's identity, and then the frustration of being unable to find apparel options for Oliver when exploring the apparel marketplace and realizing there were not acceptable, fashion-forward options available. Scheier's frustration eventually led to her self-declaration as Joan of Arc [in this marketplace], and she set out on a mission to educate the apparel industry about the need and viability of the adaptive apparel market for PWD.

The second main theme, *fighting against all odds*, emerged for the second and fourth research questions as the data revealed a commonality in the findings related to these two research questions: How did Scheier advocate for adaptive apparel as a

competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger®? and What role did Scheier play in helping Tommy Hilfiger® manage and coordinate its existing supply chain during the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children? Within this theme, the data revealed that Scheier positioned adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for apparel brands, and she herself became an adaptive apparel advocate by conducting in-depth research and developing key adaptive design innovations. Scheier's advocacy for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource also led to the restructuring of her business from a for-profit to a non-profit. This change of her business format allowed apparel brands to reduce their financial risk when introducing adaptive apparel into their product offerings. Moreover, Scheier's research, adaptive design innovations, and non-profit business restructure allowed her to develop key partnerships with an apparel sourcing firm that helped Scheier negotiate various adaptive apparel production and supply chain challenges. The study's findings support the idea that the apparel production and supply chain negotiations for which Scheier engaged before collaborating with Tommy Hilfiger® did not require significant supply chain network restructuring.

The third theme, *sacrificing to negotiate*, emerged for the third research question: What did the negotiation between the advocate and the innovator look like from the advocate's perspective? The study's findings discovered that Scheier's negotiations were a direct result of the many sacrifices she personally had to make to ensure adaptive apparel would be included in mainstream fashion. Her own career, income, and dignity were all facets of sacrifice that Scheier detailed as part of her journey toward catalyzing the adaptive apparel market. Scheier sacrificed her long-held career goal of owning her own apparel line to ensure adaptive apparel was embraced by the apparel industry at-

large. Her justification for this sacrifice was steeped in the idea that her son Oliver did not want to wear his mother's unknown apparel brand, rather he wanted to wear apparel from the well-known apparel brands, like all of his other friends do. She could not let him down by selfishly embracing her own career goal after realizing how marginalized her son and other PWD feel by the apparel industry. Scheier's sacrifice of income was a direct result of her decision to restructure her business from a for-profit, which was focused on selling her adaptive apparel research and ideas to the apparel industry, to a non-profit, which focused on providing tax deduction opportunities to apparel brands with adaptive apparel lines. Further, Scheier willingly gave her adaptive design innovations to apparel brands to ensure the inclusion of adaptive apparel in their product lines. Sacrificing her intellectual property further demonstrates her loss of income to ensure adaptive apparel was available in the mainstream.

### **Contributions and Implications**

The study's findings contribute to the broader apparel research literature by demonstrating the support of or deviation from the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Further, the study's findings provide implications for apparel brands wishing to include adaptive apparel in their product offerings, entrepreneurs entering the adaptive apparel market, policymakers advocating for increased accessibility and social participation for PLWD, and apparel industry academic researchers. Specific contributions and implications are discussed in the next section per theory that informed this study.



### *Social Model Theory of Disability*

**Theoretical Contributions.** This study's findings support the underlying argument of the social model theory of disability—which suggests that it is not the disability that prohibits PLWD from fully participating in society, but society's inability to normalize disability (Oliver, 1981)—by demonstrating that the lack of access to mainstream fashion-forward apparel was identified and discussed as a key social barrier faced by PLWD, in this case, an 8-year-old boy named Oliver. The results indicate that the barriers facing PLWD are not a result of their disability but are a result of the barriers placed within society, preventing PLWD from full participation, like those that exist within apparel. One can see this when Scheier was unable to find mainstream fashion-forward jeans that would meet the needs of her son Oliver. She had to modify an existing pair of jeans and create what she referenced as her “arts and crafts project” to ensure Oliver could overcome this societal barrier.

This study also demonstrated, using the social model theory of disability, that we could take the role and meaning of apparel and place it within the context of society as a critical component of overall participation for PLWD, offering additional research opportunities exploring the barriers facing social participation among PLWD. This is evident when Scheier describes how Oliver reacted to the modifications she made to his jeans so he could wear them to school and be independent. She describes Oliver as “so proud. He...held his head up a little higher. He felt accomplished that he could dress himself.”

The social model theory of disability also supports the study's findings that an advocate, like Scheier, can help potentially shift the mindset of a few key leaders in the

apparel industry from the medical model theory of disability to the social model theory of disability while they continue to pursue their companies' financial and/or reputational goals. We see this play out, first, when GBG saw the potential of this market and then when Tommy Hilfiger® recognized the reputational and financial opportunities after their first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children partnership with Runway of Dreams. As a that first-of-its kind adaptive apparel line for children, it is now common to see PLWD featured in advertisements and signage associated with mainstream fashion retailers and brands, reflecting the shift from a medical view to a social view within society.

**Implications.** Contextualizing apparel within the social model theory of disability provides implications for policymakers and apparel industry professionals. For policymakers, the study findings show that the lack of apparel options is a legitimate and critical societal barrier for PLWD, and therefore provides sound argument for an expansion of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA currently focuses primarily on increasing accessibility and providing accommodations within the built-environment for PLWD (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). This study highlights how significant apparel is to overall social participation for PLWD, even for a child, and therefore it could be argued that adding increased accessibility and accommodations for everyday products, like apparel, for PLWD could be a socially responsible approach for disability advocacy-related policies.

The potential inclusion of apparel into the ADA realm could also provide apparel brands the opportunity to create a more inclusive and diverse product offering, thereby becoming a more socially responsible business. The inclusion of adaptive apparel would

provide them an opportunity to reach a new consumer market segment, possibly strengthening their brand trust and/or loyalty, and could have the potential to improve their revenue. In fact, when Scheier brought her adaptive design innovations to Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>, she described the brand as having had no prior awareness of this market, as illustrated when Gary Sheinbaum stated, “Hold on. You mean no mainstream brands have ever done this before? Even thought of this population?” The study also reveals that Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> realized the revenue potential of adaptive apparel after launching the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children in 2016 and then subsequently launching *Tommy Adaptive*, expanding to the women and men’s markets, in 2017. Prior to that, fashion-forward apparel markets did not exist for PLWD.

Further, the inclusion of adaptive apparel and PLWD could provide apparel brands the opportunity to become certified as a B Corporation, which evaluates how a business’s operations and business model impact its workers, its community, the environment, and its customers (Certified B Corporation, n.d.). Having a B Corporation certification could build additional brand trust and/or loyalty among consumer markets who are more socially aware and philanthropic with their purchases (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011).

### ***RA Theory***

**Theoretical Contributions.** The study’s findings apply RA theory to the collaborative partnership between an advocate and an apparel firm and demonstrate how the key resources acquired and utilized by the advocate support competitive advantage for not only the advocate but also the apparel firm. In this study, Scheier’s experiences and knowledge became the key resources for Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>’s competitive advantage

and eventually led to superior financial performance through the launch of *Tommy Adaptive*. The study revealed that using key resources, that include financial, physical, as well as legal, human, organizational, informational, and relational (Hunt and Morgan , 1996), which were unique, rare, and difficult to imitate (Hunt, 2002), allowed Tommy Hilfiger® to gain a first-mover advantage that created a competitive advantage for the apparel brand, as they were the first apparel brand to introduce mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel for children to the market. This first-of-its-kind product allowed Tommy Hilfiger® to gain enough financial growth that they eventually removed Runway of Dreams from their partnership and launched *Tommy Adaptive* in 2017.

**Implications.** The study findings related to RA theory have implications for apparel firms that may be considering how to engage in the adaptive apparel market, or any other underserved markets. First, when apparel firms are considering entering underserved consumer markets, the findings suggest that building key partnerships with social advocacy allies with critical resources can provide apparel brands with a competitive advantage. Apparel firms engaged in such unique collaborations can gain a competitive advantage by being the first mover, gaining the trust from consumers, or enhancing their reputation. The fighting together theme demonstrates how Scheier's key partnership with both GBG and Tommy Hilfiger® provided the necessary research and knowledge to introduce the first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line for children to mainstream fashion.

Second, for entrepreneurs, as well as existing apparel brands who are considering entering into the adaptive apparel marketplace and other underserved markets, this study showed the need for user-centered, in-depth consumer and design innovation research.

The adaptive apparel market focuses on a unique and underserved consumer, PLWD. It can be difficult to understand the needs and challenges of a unique consumer such as PLWD. Therefore, investing the time and money into consumer and product research would be necessary to help apparel brands mitigate the financial risk associated with unique and unknown consumer markets. Scheier's fighting solo theme highlights how conducting extensive research into the PLWD market helped her develop the three categories of adaptive design innovations that were ultimately used as the foundation for the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children in 2016. Her research provided both GBG and Tommy Hilfiger® with a clearer picture of the viability of the consumer market and the supply chain implications related to the adaptive design innovations.

### ***MRCS Theory***

**Theoretical Contributions.** The findings from this study support MRCS theory by expanding the concept of corporate sustainability beyond the environment and focusing on the social aspects of corporate sustainability. Ha-Brookshire (2015) suggests that to meet the grand challenges of sustainability set forth by the United Nations, corporations have a moral responsibility to do the right thing, beyond financial gain, to support social improvement and environmental protection. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that MRCS theory can be expanded to investigate the perfect and imperfect duties, within an apparel firm, as they relate to social inclusivity and diversity. Thus, this allows researchers to move beyond environmental protection to define sustainability more globally to include social improvements such as inclusivity and diversity within the apparel industry. The study suggests that both GBG and Tommy Hilfiger® engaged in

the adaptive apparel market because they felt a moral duty to do so. This duty was indeed found to be the catalyst toward this new movement. Scheier explained that GBG engaged with her because the firm felt it was “the right thing to do.” She also explained that GBG suggested a partnership with Tommy Hilfiger® because the CEO, Gary Sheinbaum, “had a heart” and would want to support adaptive apparel because it was the “right thing to do.”

**Implications.** The study findings related to MRCS theory have implications for researchers as they can use the findings from this study to investigate how other apparel firms act as moral agents, or not, when expanding their involvement in social improvements. As more apparel brands attempt to include PLWD and adaptive apparel into their product offerings, understanding their motivation and goals would be beneficial to apparel researchers so as to track whether apparel brands are motivated by their moral duty or by financial gain and/or both. This would help expand the implication of MRCS theory in the apparel industry as apparel firms struggle to maintain their position in the marketplace in an ever-changing retail environment.

Further, the findings of this study suggest that Scheier sacrificed her career, potential income, and her and her son’s dignity to ensure adaptive apparel entered mainstream fashion. Researchers can use the study’s findings to explore how moral duty is impacted by personal and corporate sacrifices when attempting to support social improvements as moral agents. One can see that, for Scheier, her sacrifices felt necessary to ensure adaptive apparel was included. However, she discusses feeling as if she “gave up everything” to bring adaptive apparel into the mainstream. How one reconciles that level of sacrifice to ensure that they would remain moral agents is important to

understand so that we can better facilitate various advocacy for the ever-evolving apparel marketplace.

### ***GSCM Theory***

**Theoretical Contributions.** The findings from this study suggest that, for Scheier, an obstacle in introducing adaptive apparel into mainstream fashion was ensuring that the existing supply chain network could incorporate the adaptive design innovations she created without the need to completely restructure the supply chain functions. Yet, all members of the supply chain had to work together to solve problems creatively. Specifically, Scheier, as the design innovator, had to create the prototypes and understand the needs for modification to solve the needs of the specific targeted consumer market. She introduced the replacement of zippers and buttons with magnets. This change then resulted in Scheier needing to work directly with GBG to ensure that magnets could be incorporated into the production process.

For GBG, the apparel producer, the concern was how these modifications would impact the apparel production process. Therefore, they needed to work directly with Scheier, their magnet vendors, their sample makers, and their quality control units to ensure that the introduction of magnets into the production process was viable. Therefore, the study demonstrates how GBG's supply chain network required unique adaptations to their existing manufacturing processes to ensure Scheier's design innovation was viable. Moreover, the study supports the need for interorganizational and interfunctional coordination within a global supply chain network.

Further, GSCM theory is supported in this study in how Scheier incorporates her adaptive design innovations into an existing apparel line when working with GBG and

Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. This decision suggests that when sourcing is conducted in the global market, the coordination of the various sourcing activities becomes increasingly complicated. Thus, the study supports the notion that brand management firms and sourcing agents must be able to negotiate the complex supply chain functions that exist for their products in order to get those products to the consumers. By using an existing apparel line, the brand management company, GBG, and the apparel brand were able to maintain control, support the reduction of costs associated with labor and materials, and guide a more efficient production process. This was documented in Section 2, when Scheier cites the reduction of material costs when stating that GBG supported using an existing apparel line when approaching Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup> for the adaptive apparel collaboration.

**Implications.** Thus, the findings from this study provide implications for apparel brands and entrepreneurs wishing to enter the adaptive apparel market, as they should consider the importance of partnering with apparel supply chain sourcers to negotiate apparel production challenges before bringing new product ideas to the marketplace. As the findings from this study suggest, Scheier believed that her own research and adaptive design innovations were enough to warrant a new product line. However, her partnership with GBG made her realize that negotiating the supply chain impact of her adaptive design innovations on the apparel production process was necessary to strengthen her ability to finalize the partnership with Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. Thus, her partnership with GBG provided much needed adaptations to the prototype process so that when approaching the apparel brand, Scheier was able to provide clear indications of how the product would impact apparel production process and costs. However, Scheier was able to demonstrate



that incorporating underserved markets, like PLWD, into your product offering does not require a complete reconfiguration of the supply chain functions. This suggests that brands who once thought that incorporating underserved markets, like PLWD, would require significant modifications to their supply chain function may not need to make such significant changes.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As is the case with most research, this study has areas that could be improved. First, this is a single case study exploring the perspective of the advocate in the launch of the first-of-its-kind adaptive apparel line for children in mainstream fashion. The findings of the study would have benefited from a multiple case perspective, including the apparel sourcing firm, GBG, and the adaptive apparel innovator, Tommy Hilfiger<sup>®</sup>. Therefore, future research could include a multiple case study that includes the apparel sourcing firm and the adaptive apparel innovator to understand better how the theories underpinning the study would have impacted their understanding and perspective of adaptive apparel and PLWD. Also, a multiple case study would allow for analysis within and across cases, providing a more robust interpretation of the data.

Second, with the inclusion of the apparel sourcing firm, the research could have provided a more in-depth perspective into the implications to the global apparel supply chain, as well as to GSCM theory. The researcher did not anticipate such significant involvement from the apparel sourcing firm in the development and launch of adaptive apparel. Therefore, future researchers could benefit by expanding the study to include their perspective, which could provide key insight into how the introduction of adaptive apparel into the global apparel supply chain impacts the restructuring of that network and

the engagement of apparel supply chain function. Further, future research could build upon this study's findings regarding how GBG incorporated Scheier's adaptive apparel design innovations into an existing supply chain network by exploring how to build AGSC that is more resilient to the new products and markets, like the adaptive apparel market. Moreover, future research could explore how using an existing apparel line, as well as, the same apparel designers impacted the need, or not, to restructure the existing AGSC.

Third, future research could include the perspective of PLWD regarding the first-of-its-kind launch to determine if the adaptive apparel line satisfied their needs and wants. Including PLWD into research that would impact their outcomes is critical to supporting the social model theory of disability and is advocated by the global disability scholar's community. This also supports the user-centered or human-centered design perspective that was utilized by Scheier during her research and development.

Fourth, future research could expand upon MRCS theory to show the implications to apparel firms when focusing solely on social improvements or broader social movements. For example, with the launch of the first mainstream adaptive apparel line for children, there has been an increased interest in the apparel industry regarding a more inclusive and diverse consumer market and product offering. This has included brands that are expanding their size offerings, reaching out to a more diverse consumer, ethically and culturally, as well as embracing PLWD more extensively. This new focus by apparel brands can be studied through the lens of MRCS theory to track the implications for the apparel industry, entrepreneurs entering these inclusive and diverse marketplaces, as well as the diverse consumer markets.

Fifth, the ADA has expanded much access for PLWD within the built environment, allowing PLWD to access the environment at-large better. However, products that are designed inclusively to support PLWD, including apparel, have been mainly ignored by retailers and brands. Future research could explore the possibility of expanding the ADA to require retailers and brands to accommodate PLWD when developing new products for the marketplace. This could include apparel as well as other products.

Sixth, this study exposed significant sacrifices made by Scheier to ensure adaptive apparel was brought into mainstream fashion. Further research could provide great insight into sacrifice as a negotiation tool when advocating for social improvements within the apparel industry or other industries. As the social implications of doing business in the apparel industry gains increased scrutiny, researching the impact of sacrifice when negotiating the introduction of a new product into the marketplace could help existing brands and entrepreneurs when entering a new consumer or product market.

Finally, the study findings must be reviewed with caution given the contextual nature of the study background. That adaptive apparel rose in popularity in the mid-2010s and gained significance in 2020 reflects the time-specific context of this study. One must consider the social constructs that were evident during this time, which contributed to the increased exposure of adaptive apparel. Therefore, this study may not have significant implications far in the future as the adaptive apparel movement changes the apparel industry.

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## Appendix A<sup>9</sup>

### Oral Consent Script

Project Title: A Case Study Exploring How Mindy Scheier Catalyzed the Adaptive Apparel Market

Project Director: Kerri McBee-Black

Advisor: Dr. Jung Ha-Brookshire

**Script:** Hello, you are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to explore how you (Mindy Scheier) and collaborated with Tommy Hilfiger to catalyze the adaptive apparel market. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to be. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will take part in one or more observations at an agreed upon location (i.e., workplace, shared location, home, etc.), which may include an informal interview. These interviews will vary in length but should take no longer than 60-90 minutes. Photographs may be taken in the space, but only if you allow them to be taken. In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years old. Your names and the names of your organizations will be identified in this study and in future publications related to this research study. If you have any questions concerning

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<sup>9</sup> University of Missouri Institutional Review Board guided the researcher to use an oral consent for this study as the participants would be identified in the study findings and in future publications. Therefore, per their request, a consent script has been developed to demonstrate what will be communicated to each participant (email communication, October 11, 2019).

your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board at 573-882-9585. If you have any questions regarding the research itself, you may contact Kerri McBee-Black at [mcbeeblackk@missouri.edu](mailto:mcbeeblackk@missouri.edu) or Dr. Jung Ha-Brookshire at [habrookshirej@missouri.edu](mailto:habrookshirej@missouri.edu). Do you agree to participate in this study?

## Appendix B

### Fieldnote Template

Participant Observation

Fieldnote Template

Researcher: Kerri McBee-Black

*Mindy Scheier – Case Study*

*Location details:*

- a. day of the week
- b. time of day

*Description of location:*

- a. visual
- b. auditory
- c. olfactory
- d. what happens at the location?

*Nature of observation:*

- a. home or business?
- b. what was reason for observing?

*Description of individuals during the observation time:*

- a. facial expressions, tone of voice
- b. how they interact with others?
  - a. note whether Mindy is interacting as advocate or mother.
  - b. Note Mindy's change in demeanor when discussing adaptive apparel, her son and family, and her role as collaborator with TH.

*Analysis of what occurred:*

- a. what did I learn about Mindy Scheier and her actions?
- b. what strategies and meanings did I see or hear that relate to social model of disability, R-A, MRCS, and GSCM theory?

*Personal responses to the experience:*

- a. what were my personal reactions during the observation?
- b. did I ever have a personal connection with others in the spaces for which I observed?
- c. what are my personal thoughts now that I have left the observations?
- d. how might these overall thoughts or analyses inform future observations and interviews?



## Appendix C

### Case Study Protocol

1. Background
  - a. Overarching research question – “Why adaptive apparel? Why now? What impact is adaptive apparel having on the apparel supply chain?”
  - b. Identify any additional research questions that will be addressed
    - i. RQ1: What motivated Scheier (the advocate) to create a new adaptive apparel line with major apparel companies? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the advocate’s motivation? How did the advocacy process play out?
    - ii. RQ2: How did Scheier advocate for adaptive apparel as a competitive resource for Tommy Hilfiger®? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence her advocacy?
    - iii. RQ3: What did the negotiation between the advocate and the innovator look like from the advocate’s perspective? How did or did not MRCS and the social model theory of disability influence the negotiations?
    - iv. RQ4: What role did Scheier play in helping Tommy Hilfiger® manage and coordinate its existing supply chain during the launch of the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children?
2. Design
  - a. A single case study design will be used.
  - b. Using a single case study approach should allow for literal replication or theoretical replication (Yin, 2014).
  - c. The case study will explore the catalyzing relationship between Mindy Scheier and Tommy Hilfiger® that led to the launch of the first mainstream fashion-forward adaptive apparel line.
3. Case Selection
  - a. Using a purposive sampling method, Mindy Scheier was chosen for this study as she represents the catalyzing event being studied.
  - b. The case will investigate the events and processes that took place between 2014-2016 when Mindy Scheier became an advocate for the adaptive apparel movement and begin a partnership with Tommy Hilfiger® to launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children.
  - c. The case will focus on the home and work environment of Mindy Scheier, located in New Jersey.
4. Case Study Procedures and Roles
  - a. The researcher will use field notes, memos, photos, and research journals to gather insight from the interviews and observations.

- b. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed after completion.
- c. The data collection will be undertaken by the researcher and no other team members will be involved.

#### 5. Data Collection

- a. Using semi-structured interviews, observation and archival records the researcher will interview Mindy Scheier to investigate their role as an adaptive apparel advocate and collaborator with Tommy Hilfiger® to launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children in 2016.
- b. It is proposed that the data will be collected in early December and will involve the researcher traveling to New Jersey to interview Mindy. Observations will take place throughout the interview process and while interacting with the participants in the case.
- c. Data will be stored on a University password protected computer.

#### 6. Analysis

- a. The analysis will take place as the study progresses.
- b. Using inductive qualitative case study approaches, the researcher will build patterns, categories, and themes from each transcribed interview, field notes, and research journals. Moving to a deductive approach, the researcher will look back at the data from the perspective of the themes developed during the inductive phase to determine if more evidence is needed to support theme categorization or if the themes are sufficient to elucidate the data. A within-case analysis will be utilized as a part of the case study approach. A within-case study approach will allow the researcher to analyze the data as it relates to each RQ and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.
- c. Reference the RQ questions and connection to theory in Table 3.1 Possible outcomes can include findings that support the idea that Mindy and TH felt a sense of moral responsibility when advocating and innovating for the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. However, the study could also find that moral responsibility was not a factor for TH, but profit maximization was. Mindy, however, could have had a moral responsibility to advocate for adaptive apparel, but compromised when negotiating with TH to launch the first-of-its-kind mainstream adaptive apparel line for children. Further, TH could indicate that they saw adaptive apparel as a resource advantage to their firm, therefore serving as a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Mindy could have supported this conclusion through her collaborative role with TH. Finally, TH could indicate that they needed to renegotiate their supply chain to accommodate adaptive apparel and that this renegotiation became a competitive advantage for the firm.

#### 7. Plan Validity

- a. Construct validity – All concepts for this study have been identified and defined and are established, according to prior research, in the literature review of this study. Further, multiple sources of evidence will be used in

this study, as well as establishing a chain of evidence during data collection and using member check.

- b. Internal validity – For this study, the researcher proposes the use of explanation building to support the internal validity of the study. Through explanation building, the researcher will use theoretical frameworks to explain the social phenomenon of the study. The case will be explained according to Mindy Scheier’s advocacy and her partnership with Tommy Hilifiger®. Explanation building can also be accomplished through robust descriptions of the coding process, allowing the reader to follow the researcher’s process in arriving at the final theme outcome (Yin, 2014).

#### 8. Reporting

Findings will be reported as they relate to the apparel industry, apparel discipline researchers, other discipline researchers such as marketing, supply chain, business general, as well as with educators in the apparel discipline.

#### 9. Schedule

- a. Oct-Nov 2019: Recruit and Confirm Case Involvement  
Dissertation Proposal
- b. Nov-Dec 2019: Create Data Collection Protocol  
IRB Approval
- c. Jan-Feb 2020: Collect Data in NYC and New Jersey
- d. Jan-April 2020: Conduct Data Analysis
- e. April-May 2020: Finalize Dissertation Write-up
- f. May 2020: Defend Dissertation

### **Vita**

Kerri was born in Jefferson City, Missouri and grew up in Harrisburg, Missouri. She attended Harrisburg High School in Harrisburg, Missouri and studied at Columbia College in Columbia, Missouri. There she studied Fashion Design and minored in English, earning her B.S. After graduation she worked for The William Carter Co. in Clayton, Georgia as an assistant merchandiser for the boy's sleepwear division. She returned to Columbia, Missouri to earn her M.S. in textile and apparel management from the University of Missouri. She worked in the apparel industry as a production manager for the hunting and shooting industry before leaving the industry to work in social services as a lobbyist and community advocate for a variety of social service organizations including Planned Parenthood and the Missouri Budget Project. She returned to academia to teach part-time before returning to earn her Ph.D. in textile and apparel management. Her research interest has centered around the intersection of apparel and social participation for people living with disability (PLWD). She is dedicated to teaching the next generation of fashion students the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the apparel industry, ensuring that marginalized populations, like PLWD, are not ignored.

The research conducted for this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board with the following IRB # 20179024MU .

This page is an addendum 2023/08/18  
(added by pryors w/MU Graduate School approval)