# B: Personal Reflection

In this project my main development goals related to the competencies Technology & Realization and User & Society. Furthermore, I aimed to develop my Vision and Identity and find a client for collaboration in the FMP semester.
During the process my focus shifted from user-focused design for a physically disabled user group to approaching the larger social context of health-related stigma and the role of designers, which changed my goals and priorities in this semester. This also created new learning opportunities such as the engagement of designers and material explorations.

The initial brief for my Pre-FMP semester was to design a concept that contributed to social engagement and autonomy of a physically disabled user group, related to an industry contact that could fulfill a client role. This required a user-focused design project for one target group, but in the process it became clear to me that the designer perspective could be more valuable to enact meaningful change for a larger user group. I was reminded of the value of investigating the broader social context, and identied how current design contributed to or challenged stigma. Rather than solving one user group's problem through the design of a product or service, this project refocused on enabling a needed change that could address the underlying contributions from design to greater problem.

The shifting focus from users to designers was an interesting challenge. I usually take a very user-centered approach to design, but it was preferable to employ a different approach for the Pre-FMP project. Although I have focused previously on evaluating and changing the designer perspective, especially in my M1.2 project, this was a follow-up from insights from contextual user studies with a narrow target group. In this project the shift was motivated by broader contextual research of the user group, which indicated the possible influences of designers as a more interesting challenge. It was therefore necessary to focus on the broader context rather than specific user groups, and indirect research about multiple segments of the user group. I decided to approach design for these segments by translating normalization strategies into design opportunities. Furthermore, I aimed to find methods to engage designers into provoke discussions and critical evaluation of current practices.

Because achieving necessary insights in this challenge prioritized evaluations with designers, no user evaluations were done. Originally a short-term user evaluation was planned as an addition to the designer evaluations, but it was estimated to contribute too little value to the project as it developed further. However, my approach will shift back to user-centered in the FMP project, which will focus on a narrower context, and requires gaining a thorough understanding of the target group through direct methods. It will be crucial to conduct contextual user studies and involve users in the design process through participatory design methods balance their needs with, client(s), designers, and eventual other stakeholders.

An unexpected drawback this semester was my difficulty in finding a client for my FMP project. I researched the department's industry contacts and met with the ID network coordinator to discuss possible clients in reltion to my Vision and Identity. Although I contacted and negotiated with a couple of interesting parties, I have not yet secured a client. I believe this is in part because of the project's niche topic, in which they often expressed personal interest but hesitated to collaborate professionally. The project and approach was still taking shape during most contact with clients, which may have hindered clear communication about its value. In the next few weeks I will resume my search and initiate contact with possible clients again, in which I will communicate more directly about my current project and my plans for next semester.

A personal goal in this project was to gain basic proficiency creating models in Solidworks, with which I had no previous experience. I devoted a fixed amount of time over the course of a few weeks to practice tutorials and work in the program to develop this skill to a sufficient level to apply in my project. This structured approach proved quite useful due to the steep learning curve that I experienced. I was able to apply what I learnt by creating a model and render for one of the concepts. I wish to continue developing this skill in this manner, because I believe it can be useful in future projects and a great asset to my professional skills. This will allow me to create more ambitious models in future projects for sketching, rendering, or 3D printing.

A new learning opportunity presented itself when the direction of the project changed, and addressed the relationship between aesthetic properties and stigmatizing design. I explored material and visual properties that could aid in creating a aesthetic qualities and for a different user and bystander experience. This led to new choices for materials that I had not previously

worked with and new insights about their application possibilities, like the use of laser cut felt to translate the physical qualities of paper origami to a wearable concept and provide both a functionality and a look and feel. These insights can prove useful for future applications, not only because of what I learnt specifically, but also because I gained a more open mindset to explore unfamiliar materials and applications.

In this project I also worked with unfamiliar technological components such as the e-ink display module. I noticed that although working with unfamiliar components was an obstacle in the past, it has become almost second nature to seek them out and learn to use them during my design process. I believe that my previous technical and programming experience contributed to overcoming this obstacle, as well as the knowledge that new components can bring value to the design through function and interaction possibilities. For further development I will aim to continue seeking out new technological challenges in the future.

*Development of Vision and Identity*
In this semester I evaluated my Vision and Identity in a broader context, by relating this to the work of other designers and professionals, literature about the role of design and technology in society, and my own project. Furthermore, I reflected on my journey as a design student to understand how my current Vision and Identity developed and related to my earlier work. I realized that in my Bachelor I first gained the impression that some designers for target groups with disabilities focus on changing users' behavior to the demands of their environment, instead of aiming to create an environment that better accommodates their needs. This had struck me, as I found it essential to design for any target group from a perspective of respect for the users' agency and capabilities. My experiences in the Master made me realize that this is a very complicated task, but I was still eager to approach this challenge. I was therefore motivated to focus on exploring the role the designer plays and can play to shape this context to make meaningful change possible in the next phase.
The insights gained from these evaluations contributed to a more complete and grounded revision of my Vision and Identity, which I will discuss with my coach in my M2.2 PDP for further feedback.