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# Sizing up the Wardrobe — Why We Keep Clothes That Do Not Fit

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## **Abstract**

A wardrobe is the sum of clothing, both worn and unworn, that women consider each day to construct their visual self. While there is little practical reason to keep clothes that are physically impossible to wear, there may be other connections that prevent their discard. This study investigated reasons for keeping clothes that do not fit the current body and women's feelings about these clothes. Responses from forty-six women, 35 to 65 years in age, were collected using a web-based questionnaire. The women were clients of image consultants and contacted because of their interest in clothing and appearance.

Participants described up to four garments in their closets that no longer fit, the reasons they did not fit, and their reasons for keeping them. Open coding was used to examine the responses, and generated four themes for keeping clothing that do not fit: Weight Management, Investment Value, Sentimental Value, and Aesthetic Object. The results suggest a process for separating the self from the garment and the garment from the closet. This process occurs over a variable period, may not be linear, and may skip stages. A model for the separation process from garments that no longer fit is proposed.

**KEYWORDS:** wardrobe, fit, divestment, identity

A well-organized closet is the new status symbol in the home. Media mavens on shows such as *Clean Sweep* and *What Not to Wear* provide a weekly flow of advice to "Give your old wardrobe new life by purging the clothes you no longer look and feel great wearing" (*Clean Sweep* 2006). Could the dream of more closet space be realized by releasing our grip on what is in our closets? Or do women have good reasons for keeping clothes they can no longer wear? According to Cwerner, "The wardrobe articulates, both spatially and temporally, a set of material and symbolic practices that are fundamental for the constitution of selfhood, identity, and well-being" (2001: 1).

Through a daily process of wardrobe selection, we control presentation of our identity (Kaiser 1990). Although most fashion theories concentrate on worn clothes in the identity-formation process, it is important to recognize the role of stored clothes in self-definition (Cwerner 2001). From the garments in their closets, women piece together their visual self-representation to the world while meeting their functional, emotional, and aesthetic needs (Lamb and Kallal 1992). Cwerner (2001) envisions the closet as a library, depository, or stockpile of the symbols individuals have to select from to create their presentation to the world. Depending on its contents, the wardrobe may serve as a limiter or enabler in creative self-presentation. Furthermore, the wardrobe may serve as an archive of past selves or a hope chest for future selves.

For clothes to be part of the active wardrobe, they must fit the physical dimensions of the body and be in good repair. While this may seem like a common-sense statement, the abundance of popular culture magazines and television shows that direct women to discard garments that are worn, out-of-style, or do not fit (Beating Clutter 2005; Dunleavy 2005) might reveal that it is not commonly followed. Popular culture advises women that there is little practical reason to keep clothing that is physically impossible to wear. However, many women find this advice difficult to follow. It seems that discarding unwearable garments is not a completely logical process. Perhaps, sentimental or emotional reasons may lead women to keep clothing that does not fit. The personal connections to the clothing or the bodies that once wore

them may guide their wardrobe behaviors. This study took a deeper look at why women choose to keep clothing that cannot be part of their self-presentation, because it does not fit their current bodies.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

Wardrobe management behaviors are related to the larger theoretical realms of consumer consumption models and clothing as a communication tool. Consumer behavior related to how garments are used, stored, and eventually discarded after purchase is little studied. However, as the wardrobe is a basis for self-presentation, it is important to understand the individual connection between self and the pieces stored in the closet. Deeper examination of this connection may lead to greater understanding of this seemingly illogical behavior of keeping currently unwearable clothing.

#### **Clothing as Objects of Consumption**

The consumption process requires multiple decisions by individuals based on both logic and emotion. These include: (1) Need Recognition, (2) Search for Information, (3) Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives, (4) Purchase, (5) Consumption, (6) Post-Consumption Evaluation, and (7) Divestment (Blackwell *et al.* 2001). Most apparel consumption research has focused on purchasing (May-Plumlee and Little 2001; Seo *et al.* 2001) and post-purchase evaluation of clothing (Chen-Yu and Kincade 2001; Kincade *et al.* 1998) with the goal of increasing consumer satisfaction and repurchase behavior. Clothing fit and sizing are critical to the consumer purchasing process (Eckman *et al.* 1990) and have been shown to be one of the top three evaluative criteria for both US and Asian consumers (DeLong *et al.* 2002; Hsu and Burns 2002). Women have reported difficulty in finding clothing that fits to purchase (Langer 2004). In the dressing room, women often blame themselves when garments do not fit (LaBat and DeLong 1990). The blaming behavior points to an emotional connection between the individual and garment before the garment even is purchased. We believe that sentimental connections between the self and wardrobe can deepen over time. This creates an emotional conflict when the garment needs to be discarded because it no longer fits or is beyond repair. However, there has been little research regarding the motivation and process of divestment decisions for this unwearable clothing. This study focused on the reasons women keep clothing that does not fit. Understanding the role of fit in the process of divestment expands our understanding of the consumption process.

### **Clothing as a Carrier of Personal Meaning**

McCracken (1986) briefly addresses separation from self as a ritual process in his study of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. He believes that meaning is transferred from objects to individuals. In order for separation from self to occur, an individual must remove the meaning attached to the clothing before it can be passed along. McCracken gives little insight as to how this process occurs or how individuals erase meaning contained in goods that are no longer useful. Banim and Guy (2001) explored the reasons women keep clothing they are not actively wearing. These included reminders of past feelings and ties to identity. In their interviews with fifteen women, they categorized the functions and roles that kept clothes play for their owners in terms of the self. These included (1) Continuing Identities, (2) Discontinued Identities, and (3) Transitional Identities. They found that clothing was not kept solely for positive associations but garments with problematic connections were also kept as part of their wardrobe. These women acknowledged that though irrational, they wanted their wardrobe to extend beyond what was currently wearable as a means of maintaining identity. One problematic connection they identified was clothing that no longer fit. This study focused on kept clothing that do not fit in contrast to the broader view taken by Banim and Guy (2001) of any kept garment that was not actively being worn.

### **Clothing as a Storage Unit of Self**

Cwerner (2001) defines the wardrobe not only as the set of clothes that one has, but also the space where clothes are stored and the complex set of practices surrounding the use, care, and storage of these clothes. Cwerner (2001) criticizes the lack of research on stored clothes and proposes five categories of wardrobe practices for investigation: (1) consumption, (2) organization, (3) individualization, (4) care, and (5) imagination. In a modern society, where most consumers possess far more clothes than they can wear at once, the wardrobe is a central part of the consumption cycle. The need to store clothes has led to an industry of closet organization experts and storage tools. Despite the abundance of advice and available storage devices, closets often become chaotic spaces of forgetfulness. Nonetheless, closets are the underpinning of appearance individualization. From the collection of garments, an infinite number of appearances can be mix-and-matched. The individual decides each day how much they will affirm or deny the impulses of fashion. To maximize these individualization choices, a range of care practices are necessary to keep the clothes in good repair. Lastly, Cwerner (2001) identifies the wardrobe as a place of imagination. The wardrobe stores all the potential selves—past, present, and future. The individual is limited in their appearance choices only by the garments in their wardrobe. While much fashion theory has focused on the dressed self, Cwerner (2001) encourages a research focus on the wardrobe as the vocabulary that affords the communication of the dressed body.

### **Asking Women about the Clothes behind Closed Doors**

The purpose of this research was to explore the reasons women keep clothing that do not fit their current bodies. A web-based questionnaire was used to collect information about sizes currently in the closet, number of garments that cannot be worn due to misfit, and current clothing sizes worn for tops, bottoms, and dresses. Participants also described up to four garments, the reasons these garments did not fit, and their reasons for keeping them. The sample of 300 participants was randomly selected from a mailing list of 2,000 of a nationally known image consultant located in the southwestern United States. Participants were invited by the image consultant through e-mail to complete the online questionnaire and were sent a reminder two weeks later. The survey was available for 60 days. Participant anonymity was insured with the use of an online survey service and direct participant contact through the image consultant. This anonymity may be one reason why women were so candid in their responses. Forty-six usable questionnaires were returned.

Participating women were 18–65 years old with the greatest number (39.5%) in the 36 to 45 age group, followed by 46–55 year olds (23.7%), and 26–35 year olds (15.8%). The majority reported annual household income of over \$100,000.00 (56.8%) and had professional occupations.

### **What I Don't Wear (and Why)**

These women revealed a relationship with their kept clothing that goes beyond whether or not the garment fits the body. They were indeed storing clothing that they could not wear—often in multiple sizes. Their explanations for this behavior yields deeper insight into the intimate relationship of clothing to self.

#### **The State of My Closet**

To the open-response question, “How many garments do you have in your closet right now that you CANNOT wear because they do not fit?” approximately 15% reported zero non-fitting garments, 37% reported one to ten garments, 17% reported eleven to twenty garments, and 15% reported twenty-one to fifty garments. The remaining 16% of participants gave a non-numerical response such as: “25 percent” (*of what she had in her closet*), “don’t know,” or “You want me to count????” Given these numbers of unwearable clothes in the closet, it was surprising to find that the majority (85%) reported following the media advice to clean out their closets once a year. How were these non-fitting clothes getting through the annual wardrobe purge?

Participants were also asked about their use of professional consultation on appearance. Half of the participants had sought advice from a

wardrobe/image consultant. The most popular services were clothing style selection (97.5%) and clothing color selection (82.6%). Only 17.4% of the participants had used a consultant for help with closet organizing. Perhaps this relates to the intimate and personal nature of the wardrobe suggested by Cwerner (2001).

Some participants kept a range of labeled garment sizes in their closets. In general, participants reported having from two to six different labeled sizes of clothing in their closets with an average of three different labeled sizes. Most reported a three-size range, for example "8, 10, 12," which could be explained due to the practice of vanity sizing or perhaps a more modest fluctuation in weight. Roth says that most women keep at least three sizes of clothing in their closet—"thin, thinner, and fat" (2004: 77). One woman reported "from 7 junior to 18W," perhaps an individual whose weight fluctuates a great deal. The following quotes illustrate the range of responses:

Misses 14–16 primarily, but depends on fit rather than size.

Size 7 all the way to 18W.

4 to 8—but I'm the same size I have been for years. Some 4's fit like a 6 and some 8's fit like a 6.

#### **I Have My Reasons for Keeping These Clothes**

From the media's view of sensible behavior, the only reason to have a garment in one's closet would be that it is useful for wearing. However, participants made it clear that garments hold value well beyond their ability to be worn. Participants described up to four non-fitting garments, the reasons these garments did not fit, and their rationale for keeping them. Examination of these open-ended responses, guided by open-coding methods (Strauss and Corbin 1998), generated initial themes for keeping clothing that do not fit. The themes were then subdivided and links were explored through axial coding. Discussions led to deeper understanding of the integrated nature of the responses. Weight Management, Investment Value, Sentimental Value, and Aesthetic Object were the final categories that emerged. Most of the participants cited at least two of these reasons for keeping a garment and these were most often a combination of Weight Management and Investment Value. Garments described as an Investment Value were the greatest in number, followed by Weight Management, Sentimental Value, and Aesthetic Object. These categories seemed to comprise a process for separating the self from the garment and the garment from the closet. This process occurs over a variable period, may not be linear, and may skip stages. The typical process that emerged from the data is described.

While the move of a garment from active use to just being stored is seldom a conscious decision (Banim and Guy 2001), those garments that no longer fit are forced into inactivity. This forced decision may be

positive or negative for the owner of the garment. Discovering that a favorite pair of pants or top no longer fits can be frustrating when the garment is too tight or satisfying if the garment is too big. Most women will put the garment back in the closet and wait, ever hopeful that diet, exercise, or time will allow the garment to fit again or that their smaller body will be maintained. As time progresses and the body does not change, there appears to be a second step in the process. The garments become an investment, too expensive or not worn enough to justify divestment, despite the inability of the owner to wear them. At this point, the women still seemed hopeful that their bodies would change, but there appeared to be a need for additional justification for keeping the garment that did not fit. Over half of the investment descriptions also included mention of weight management. We believe these garments were in divestment transition moving from Weight Management to Investment Value. Other investment descriptions made no mention of hopeful body change, and thus were further along in the separation process. Finally, the woman accepts that the garment no longer fits and investment is no longer justification for keeping it part of her wardrobe. At this point, many garments are divested, some are kept and put in storage because they hold sentimental meaning, and others are kept because they are viewed as aesthetic objects. The following model for the separation process from garments that no longer fit (Figure 1) is proposed.

The following quotes illustrate this process.

**Weight Management:** Tan cropped pants. A little too tight, it is so close on a thin day it might and it is my only pair.

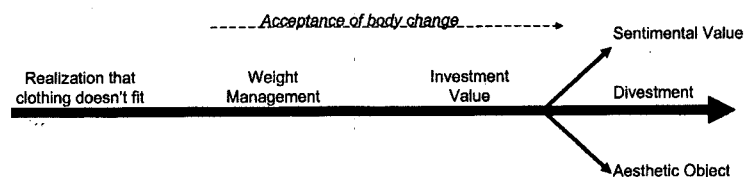
**Weight Management and Investment Value:** Silk purple button down, V-neck dress, size 16. The dress is too tight in the bust but, once again great color for me and have not had in my closet as long as the grey suit. I feel that someday I will be able to fit into again!

**Investment Value:** Tan slacks-too small. Paid good money.

**Sentimental Value:** Dress I wore for my engagement party-sentimental value.

**Aesthetic Object:** Green suede bomber jacket. Too small. One of a kind item.

Discussion of each category follows.



**Figure 1**  
Model for the separation process from garments that no longer fit.

*Weight Management—I Keep Thinking I'll Lose the Weight*

Many women in this study mentioned weight gain or loss as a reason why the garment did not fit and was being kept. Some participants described their body changes in terms of a specific amount of weight they had gained or lost, some used the garments as a guide to the amount of weight they needed to lose, while others were more focused on getting into a specific size. One woman sent a separate e-mail explaining that she had kept two sheath dresses and a pair of slacks that have fit her for many years and used them as a guide to control her weight and exercise habits. She did not complete the questionnaire because all her clothing fit. Clothes that were both too large and too small were kept for reasons related to weight management. Only one participant mentioned a garment that no longer fit due to shrinkage. Perhaps these garments were not kept because individuals viewed the failure of the garment as being beyond their control and thus it may have been easier to divest the garment. This is in contrast to women taking the blame when garments do not fit in the dressing room (LaBat and DeLong 1990).

Many participants cited the need to reduce their weight in order to wear the garments they were saving and were strong in their hope that they would lose weight. Too small garments that were kept seemed to provide some incentive in hopes of losing weight. These garments seem to relate to Banim and Guy's concept of Transitional Identities. There is a desire to "revisit the images that these clothes achieve" (2001: 212).

Brown animal print pants too small very cute and I will get back in them soon!

I've gained 15 pounds since I bought them, but keep HOPING I will lose the weight.

Size 10 jeans ... they are too small. Someday I want to fit back into them.

Pants outfit—too tight in thighs—love it and will lose enough weight to wear it again.

Several slacks. They are a size too small around the waist. Hope to lose weight to fit into them again. The slacks are still in style.

For some participants, keeping too small garments was an insurance policy if their weight loss efforts were successful, as in these comments:

Grey striped wool suit ... does not fit because of the size 12/13 ... cannot bear to get rid of it in case I ever get down to that size again.

I hope to lose some weight and would like to have a few pieces of clothing a couple of sizes under my current size so I don't have to run out and buy a whole new wardrobe immediately.

Don't want to have to buy a whole new wardrobe if I lose weight.



Several women held on to garments that were currently too big, just in case of a future unintended weight gain.

Black pleated trousers ... too big. Wore them when I was a little heavier—I guess I keep them just in case—though even if I gained weight I probably wouldn't wear them with the pleats!

Misses size 16, off white shorts. Too large. May need bigger size in the future/ would not want to buy the same size again.

In addition, others who had successfully lost weight were either planning to have a garment altered, “but haven't gotten around to it” or wear the garment a little big because, “they are quality and great colors for me.”

While most women kept garments to wear again at some indefinite time “when I lose the weight,” others were more concerned with a definite time period. Some women hoped that by the time the season or event to wear the garment occurred again, their body would have changed to fit into the garment.

A short sleeve fitted denim shirt. It is too tight ... doesn't look good when buttoned. I keep it because I am just switching into my spring/summer stuff and had hoped I would have lost some inches this winter to be able to wear it again.

Turquoise blue sheath dress with jacket. It is slightly tight through the hips. I keep it because it is SLIGHTLY tight, and I hope to lose enough to wear it this summer—it is a summery, “we're on vacation” dress.

Roth cautions against keeping “thin clothes” or “fat clothes” because they are like “a shrieking voice in your closet that automatically turns on when you open the door” (2004: 77). In her practice of counseling women, she finds that people are “afraid to give away [their] thin clothes, because [they] feel like [they] are giving away hope” (2004: 77). The women in this study seemed indirectly to echo this sentiment. It was clear that the majority of the sample perceived a smaller body size to be desirable. One woman was very clear about this.

Jeans. Too tight. I don't want to wear my current size. I want to fit into the jeans.

#### *Investment Value—I Paid Good Money for It*

Many women cited the value of the garment as a reason to keep it even though it did not fit. Some kept garments that had not been worn enough to justify the monetary investment, other garments were an expensive purchase, and some garments just were not old enough to be discarded. The garment itself still had value, even though it did not fit the owner.

It seemed that there was some guilt associated with getting rid of garments which had received little use or were fairly new. So they were kept instead. Usually this was seen in combination with some hope of being able to use the garment again in the future. This was sometimes seen in combination with having spent a substantial amount of money on the garment. This concurs with a recurring theme in Banim and Guy's (2001) of women feeling the need to get enough use out of something to justify its price.

New pair of brown pants. Just a little too tight in the thighs. There is some hope I might be able to wear it with a little effort at weight loss.

Linen pants. Too tight around butt. I know I need to lose weight and I really like pants and paid to have them altered before I gained weight and the pants are less than 1 year old.

Misses 10, black jeans. Too tight. Did not get to wear very often/would not want to buy same size again.

I actually have seven pairs of Capri pants that are size 4. I've gained 15 lbs. since I bought them, but keep HOPING I will lose the weight. They are all too new for me to bear to part with them (two years old or less).

Even garments that perhaps had been worn enough were still kept due to the money that had been spent in them. Again, some of these cases are tied to the hope that the individual would lose enough weight to wear the garment again.

Large Cashmere Sweater Set. It's a little too small. I'll probably never wear this, but it cost quite a bit.

Black slacks—too tight in stomach and waist. Kept it because I paid good money for it and it's pretty close to fitting.

A turquoise dress. It was expensive and super cute and I can wear it as long as I don't have to sit! HAHA.

A size 8 cream silk dress and matching jacket. It is a size too small and I'm keeping it because it was expensive, I love the dress, and I'm hoping to be able to fit into it again.

One woman in particular seemed to have her own ordered time line in which garments could leave her wardrobe:

Silk purple button-down, V-neck dress, size 16. The dress is too tight in the bust but, once again great color for me and have not had in my closet as long as the grey suit. I feel that someday I will be able to fit into again!

Garments that were part of a set of clothing were kept because the set had more value than the individual item.

The top fits but the pants are too small. I keep thinking that I'll wear the top with another pant, but I never like the look. Maybe I'll fit back into the pants eventually.

But in this response, even though the top fits, neither part of the set is worn because the pieces are not suitable as separate components.

Purple jean style suit. Too tight around the butt. The matching jacket fits and I like it, so I keep the pants for when I lose weight.

Brown pinstripe slacks. Waist is too tight. Part of a suit. I love the fabric, the tailor did a poor job on the alterations, so I don't want to get rid of it because it is not too far off.

Some non-fitting garments were kept due to a need for them as wardrobe security. This relates to Cwerner's (2001) concept of the wardrobe as a bank from which individuals can withdraw components needed to create a variety of possible identities. These people seemed to feel uncertain that they would have the money, time, or ability to find a replacement garment that would be liked as well, so they kept the old garment even though it did not fit their body.

Ralph Lauren fall print pants. Too big. Expensive and were hard to find when I needed them. Too good to get rid of, just in case I might need them again. Still very stylish.

Misses size 12 pants. Too big in waist. Cannot find pants large enough in the thigh area, but fit well at the waist/cinch pants with belt instead of searching forever.

Multiple nice work dresses. Too small. Might go back to work and I've only kept the really nice expensive dresses. Got rid of all my bargain dresses so feel it's okay to keep a few, just in case.

Capris ... sigh ... they're too tight in the butt area ... haha ... I kept them because I need them for a volunteer job, and hope to be able to fit back into them at that time.

As the women described garments that no longer fit but were still kept in their closet, a majority included the concepts of quality, cost, length of ownership, or the effort required to shop for the garment. In some cases, perhaps the investment is a more tolerable justification for keeping something that does not fit rather than accepting that the weight they had hoped to lose has not disappeared. We believe this is part of the process of divesting garments that do not fit the physical body but still have value in the eyes of the owner. McCracken (1986)

says that there is a process individuals must follow in order to remove the meaning from the clothing that they own, before it can be discarded. Banim and Guy (2001) might classify these garments, held for their investment value, as part of a transitional identity representing a value to the owner's self image, but one that is not yet resolved. In this sample, the women were focused more on the value of the garment than the meaning of the garment.

*Sentimental Value—It Reminds me of a Lovely Time*

Sentiment related to an event or memory provided reasoning for keeping a garment that does not fit. This category had the fewest responses, which contrasts with the results presented by Banim and Guy (2001) in which the majority of their participants tied some meaning of an earlier life or event to the kept, but not actively worn, garment.

Participants described sentimental garments that did not fit, but the reason the garment was being kept was clearly related to the sentimental value it held and not to investment value or as incentive for losing weight. Many sentimental garments that no longer fit were kept because they reminded the wearer of a favorite event or occasion. Blackwell *et al.* (2001: 456) states that possessions can be "anchors for our identities" and Cwerner (2001) thinks of clothes as having biographies including the making, purchase, and wearing of a garment. Banim and Guy (2001) found that some women kept clothes because they wanted to remember a story that was associated with the clothing. Engagements, honeymoons, and first dates provided justification for keeping a garment that did not fit, as in these two quotes:

Pink suit—Much too small (size 14—maybe even a 12). One of my favorite suits from my professional days. Wore it in my engagement photo. I keep it more for memories rather than any hope of wearing it again. It is a really nice design and I felt terrific wearing it. Very flattering ...

Gorgeous black velvet mandarin collar button all the way up the front—feminine darts in front and back to flare the skirt. It does not fit because it is WAY too small. I keep it because I wore it many times on my honeymoon in San Francisco, and I love the look of it and it reminds me of a lovely time.

Some women were more sentimental about their changing bodies than the garments that did not fit. One participant shared:

Pink top with buttons on shoulder. After two children, I am much too busty for it. Loved the way I looked and felt when I could wear it. Wore it on one of my first dates with my husband.

Though the top clearly has sentimental feelings attached, they appear to be more directed at her previous body than the event to which it was worn. There seems to be some process involved in the transition from thinking hopefully about a potential weight loss to acceptance of lasting body change. However, other garments were kept because of a memory of how the wearer looked or felt while wearing the garment. There was no indication that these participants wanted to lose weight, only perhaps that they mourned their previous shape, as seen in these comments:

Blue suit. I wore it way past time to purchase a larger size. It looked great when it fit.

Tank top, blue ... again, I gained weight and cannot wear it. I kept it because I used to look so good in it.

... loved the way I looked and felt when I could wear it.

A few participants kept clothing because of the relationship it represented, as in:

White cotton blouse with ruffles on the front—very out of date. It does not fit because it is TOO SMALL. I keep it because my Mother gave it to me one year for Christmas because she saw me as a ruffled shirt person, and so I keep it because my Mother gave it to me.

This relates to Banim and Guy's (2001) concept of clothing as a way to keep a connection with the giver.

We believe sentimental reasons for keeping garments that do not fit are valid and enable the owner to hold onto an important piece of their personal history, much the same way historic costume collections hold our collective history. These garments deserve careful storage separate from the everyday wardrobe.

*Aesthetic Object—I Just Really Love It*

Beyond sentiment, a category emerged in which the participants described their kept garments as beautiful objects. These women kept clothing primarily for its aesthetic value. Participants that described garments that did not fit when purchased were most likely to view the clothing as an object.

Red silk tank top. Too small. Expensive purchase. Knew I wouldn't wear it much when I bought it but fell in love with it.

The look or the color was reasoning enough to justify holding on to the garment.

Jacket—nothing goes with it—love the color.

A beautiful long fitted yellow dress with flowers. It is too small because I gained weight. I have kept it because it is so beautiful.

Jeans. I grew out of them. I have kept them because they are fancy with flowers painted on them.

Some participants were non-specific, but nonetheless strong in their affection for the garment. Others cited specific fabrication or details as aesthetic attractors to the garment. The following responses provide illustration:

Skirt, just really love it.

Shorts ... too short ... don't like how they look on me ... I like how they look on the hanger.

Responses categorized as Aesthetic Object were singular in their reasoning, and void of any reference to sentimental attachment or an actual desire to wear the garment. Participants had objectified the kept clothing with attention focused on the beauty of the garment. Clothing kept as an aesthetic object should also be viewed as separate from the active wardrobe and stored or displayed so that the owner benefits from its full aesthetic value.

## Conclusions and Implications

It is clear from the data that a woman's relationship with her clothing that does not fit is complex. Though discarding garments that no longer fit, may seem like a relatively practical matter, these women revealed that there are other issues that must be examined before the reality of letting a garment go can take place. These garments do hold meaning for the owner as suggested by McCracken (1986) and Banim and Guy (2001). In addition, in this sample, it appears that the women needed to go through a process of divesting garments that no longer fit. McCracken (1986) does suggest that a ritual process is necessary to remove meaning from the garment; however, the results of this study reveal more details about this process.

The proposed model of divestment of garments that no longer fit expands on the current consumer consumption process model (Blackwell *et al.* 2001). It provides details about the process that reveal the relationship individuals have with their clothing. The model may serve as a basis for future research on the way individuals manage clothing after purchase, as suggested by Cwerner (2001). Continued research is needed to expand the model to include other motivations for divesting garments from the wardrobe. How a garment was purchased or acquired may relate to the process of divestment. In addition, divestment behavior is influenced by culture (Blackwell *et al.* 2001), so

clothing divestment behavior in other countries may be compared to that of this study's sample.

Few individuals or manufacturers think about divestment during purchase. Divestment of clothing is considered when an item is no longer needed due to changes in fashion, fit, lifestyle, or perhaps is worn out. Consumers may feel guilt or frustration with the process of divestment. Validation of the process may support individuals as they work to maintain a functional wardrobe. Valuing a garment for sentimental or aesthetic reasons should be viewed as a valid alternative to divestment. Such a view would give women permission to remove these garments from the active wardrobe, resulting in a more functional and less emotionally charged closet. Education for consumers regarding proper fit, regardless of size or weight, may also help consumers to make better purchase, consumption, and divestment decisions in the future.

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