

# POST-TREATMENT DILEMMA IN GARMENT SELECTION FOR BREAST CANCER PATIENTS. FIT ATTRIBUTE: REALITY OR FANTASY

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**Abstract:** In contrast to disability people, academic research has neglected breast cancer patient needs for fit in garment selection. It is argued that this type of consumer deserve particular research attention. Most of the breast cancer patient facing a number of change after treatment, this includes physical change, psychology concern, and social concern. These changes lead to stigma or negative perception. This paper presents the results of exploratory research designed to explore in depth the fit preference in garment among breast cancer patients. Spontaneous speech of a ten informants was audio/visual-recorded and sketches as an artefact probe during the interview. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, and three key themes were found: loose cutting, actual size, and flexible. It was concluded that these breast cancer women's had a hate-love relationship with clothes fit and sizing especially with ready-made clothing and used well-fitting clothes to upturn self-confidence, camouflage the flaws, and try to be normal as they can. Ideas for future instructions for research in these areas are deliberated.

*Keywords: body confidence, clothe, stigma*

## 1. Introduction

Breast cancer is a common cancer as one in eighteen women in Malaysia is diagnosed with this disease (Azizah Ab M, Nor Saleha I.T, Noor Hashimah A, Asmah Z.A, 2016). Contracting this cancer once it infected, it will change the patients' lives sufferers live in many ways. Due to the cancer's monumental effects, stigma will always linger and become an issue. In the 1890s, a brilliant and talented, William Stewart Halsted the surgeon at Johns Hopkins Hospital, develop a radical mastectomy procedure for breast cancer patients. The procedure involves removal of the tumours and decreases the local recurrent disease. It was reported that this procedure improved the survival rate of breast cancer patients which earned the surgeon a distinguished place in the history of America science (S.Olson, 2002) . However, the mastectomy procedure left many women, especially women feeling wounded and handicapped despite surviving the procedure (S.Olson, 2002). Until now, the treatment and surgery procedures have left marks on breast cancer patients. The marks not only include physical marks, but also emotional marks (psychology) and social marks. Hence, this paper is focused on identifying fit preferences in clothing concerns among postmastectomy women.

## 2. Stigma

Goffman (1963) conceptualised stigma as Physical Deviance. He also defines stigma as a unique connection between the attributed and stereotyping. When an attribute is not needed, hard to understand, or different, that attributes become a stigma(Goffman, 1963). Goffman revealed two strategies for

overcoming stigma. The main strategies in concealing stigma are covering and passing. The main idea of these strategies involves covering the flaw. Covering involves the concealment of a stigma in order to lessen tension, or to remove obvious attention from the stigma. Meanwhile, passing is expected to apply to the concealment of disabilities by persons with disabilities (Feather et al., 1988); Goffman, (1963); Freeman et al., (1985).

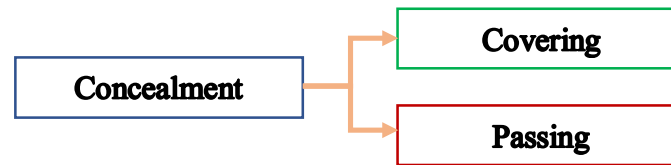


Figure 1 : Concealment strategies by Goffman (1963)

Clothing is used in appearance management. Appearance management is important to create a between appearance and disabilities. Kaiser, (1998) stated that people with disabilities tend to use clothing as a tool to minimise community view from their disability to their appearance as an individual. Appearance can be manipulated through the correct use of clothing and accessories. However, Malcom, (2002) believes concealment is not just to hide weaknesses but also to protect their modesty. Clothing is also symbolic in improving their confidence.

### 3. Clothing and appearance

Clothing is a necessity in life. Generally, clothes refer to “garments to cover the body”. However, clothes do more than just cover and protect the body. Clothes also provide protection from physical elements such as a weather (rain, snow, and heat) as described by Barnard (Chang et al., 2013; (Freeman et al, 1985);(Fujikami et al., 2011);(Klerk & Ampousah, 2003); (Jones & Gidding, 2010); (Kaiser, 1998b); (Davis & Lennon, 1988); (Meinander & Varheenmaa, 2002); (Meinander & Varheenmaa, 2002). Clothes are also used to create an individual’s social and cultural identity in order to be differentiated from others (Albrecht et al., 2015; Albrecht et al., 2015 Albrecht et al., 2015; Grogan et al., 2013; Howe, 2012; Roach-Higgins Mary, 1992; Strickfaden et al., 2013). Damhorst (1990) highlights that “dress is a systematic means of transmission of information about the wearer” which explains that clothing is part of communication in revealing their culture and identity and this statements also in line with empirical

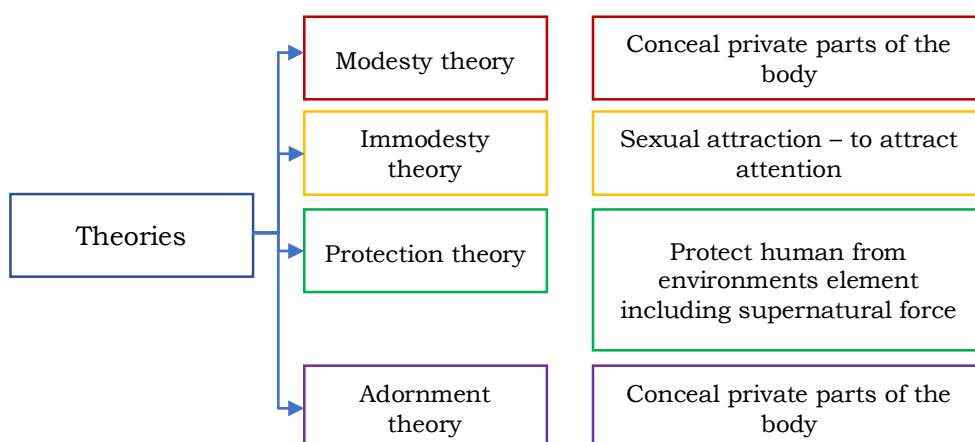


Figure 2 : Four theory reveal “Why people wear clothing”

findings from previous literature Coury (2015), Howlett Neil, Pine Karen, orakcioglu Ismail (2012); Malcolm, (2002) Roach-Higgins Mary,( 1992) and Kim & Damhorst (1998).Four established theories are discussed by Kaiser et al (1987) in elaborating why people wear clothing. According to Kaiser, people wear clothing due to reasons depicted in Figure 2 above.

Kaiser (1990) revealed four theories why people wear clothing. However, these four theories are relevant for people without impairment. People with disabilities need clothing for other reasons than to just cover their body. A research by Lamb & Kallal (1992) discussed that clothing has communication elements for the wearer. Damhorst (1990) suggested the beauty in the garment varies according to how well the garments fulfil its specific purposes. People with disabilities use clothing to cosmetically cover their weaknesses and disabilities. Table 1 compares In Table 1, Kaiser theories are segregated according to people without disabilities who wear clothing, students with disabilities, and other studies. The theory is almost similar between “without disability” and “student with a disability”. Rouse, the author of fashion theory [p122] has a little argument regarding the modesty theory. Kaiser (1990) stated that the modesty theory refers to concealing private parts of the body while Rouse stated that clothing does not attract the attention away from the body or lessen awareness.

Table 1 : Comparison of Kaiser’s Four Theories

<b>Without disability “Why people wear clothes “ 1990 (Kiser)</b>	<b>“Student with a disability “ 1985 (Kaiser, Freeman, and Wingate)</b>	<b>Other research</b>
Modesty	Concealment	Covering (Goffman, 1963)
Immodesty	Deflection	Bareness (Chun, 2010)
Protection	Compensation	none
Adornment	Emphasis	Exaggerated (Chun Sheng Wu, 2010)

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Design

Given the vast selection, the researcher chose to focus on fit preference function. Semi-structured interviews using open-ended question was conducted to learn about the physical issue, psychology issue, fit preference, and social impact. Due to the difficulties to obtain participation, the snowball sampling method was used to locate name and address that cannot be distributed. This sampling method enables the researcher to ask each respondent to recommend another respondent. Thus, the number of participant will increase and the researcher is able to obtain new data and rich cases (Merriam, 2009).

### Technical drawing analysis and article probes.

Investigating established patterns and model is an essential part of the systematic exploration of the design problem. Thus, this stage included an investigation of clothing models and pattern in the academic literature, catalogues, and website. In this case, breast cancer patients do not want to be isolated with uncommon design. Therefore, this study aims to determine the best and suitable clothing for breast cancer patients to fulfil their needs. The investigation is done based on empirical evidence from prior research and is then combined with interviews. The combination of data will enable this study to identify the range

of breast cancer patients needs and abilities. This information might ease the breast cancer patients' requirement and also an indicator for the range of clothing to categorise functional, expressive, and aesthetic (FEA) attributes (Lamb & Kallal, 1992).

## 4.2 Participants

Since the target respondent has been decided, the sample population is homogeneous. The sample consisted of breast cancer patients and women who are involved with breast cancer. The participants can also address the limitation of the upper body and fit preferred. In this research, only upper body was used.

Table 2 : Total respondents and informants

Sampling	Summary of the respondent (group one)	Summary of the interview (group Two)
	Participant (n=20)	Participant (n=13)
Paper	2	2
WhatsApp application	4	2
Email	14	0
Snowball	0	6
Drop out	0	3

## 4.3 Data collection

The data collection process started in February 2017 and was completed on 27th November 2017. The data collection process was extended due to several reasons. The reasons include the participants' health issue, cancelling the meeting last minute due to the treatment and follow-up session, the address cannot be reached, and also unwilling to participate at the last minute. Each interview took approximately between 30 minutes and 2 half hours.

A total of 10 women were initially interviewed. Specific questions in the interview were designed to reveal physical issues, psychological issues, and fit preference to create the best clothing that can boost the participants' confidence.

## 5. Findings

Four key themes emerged from the experiences of dress fit among women with breast cancer. The four themes are physical issue, psychology issue, fit preference, and comfort (see Figure 4). The theme was linked through sub-theme as shown in Figure 4. For example, fit preference was linked to camouflage and comfort since breast cancer patients reported that camouflaging the flawed part with clothing made them feel confident and comfortable. Each theme will be elaborated and supported by descriptive quotes from the participants.

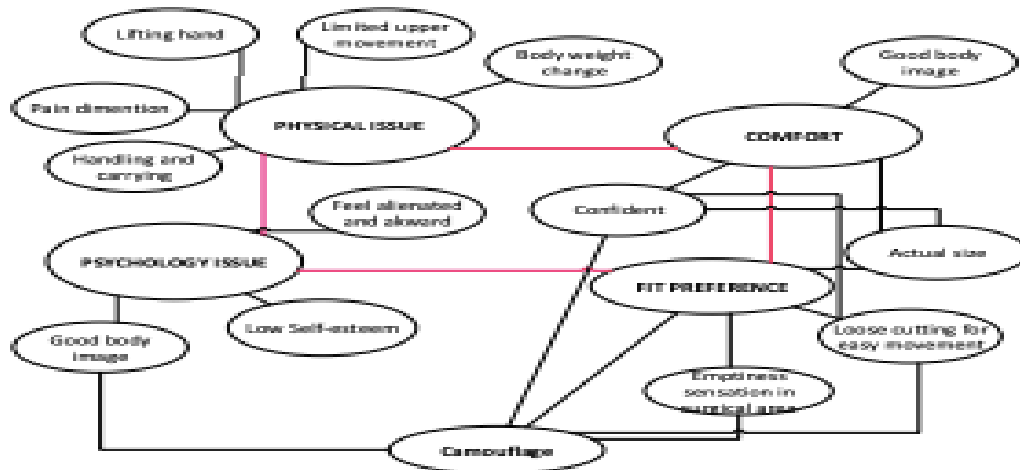


Figure 3 : Theme and sub-theme

### 5.1 Physical issue

Post-treatment for breast cancer lead to several issues, for instance, mastectomy treatment, it like other body part amputation. It will lead to unbalance body structure. Pain dimension and lifting and carrying. Therefore the right fit of clothing is important to conceal the flaw. Figure 5 showed all the informants indicated, they facing with pain dimension. BCP09 point out that “I: Yes, both (refer to bra and prosthesis), they put silicone inside the bra, they give us comfort, maybe. Me myself, sometimes not wearing it, because, my surgical wound area is here, so went wearing it tight, it feels hurt, so it becomes uncomfortable”.

Pain dimension due to radiotherapy will lead to burning sign where the skin becomes more sensitive (Carroll, 2001; Ghos et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2004; Song, 2011). Therefore, women who undergo radiotherapy treatment and are in pain need suitable clothing during treatment to ensure they are comfortable. Good thermal clothing to withstand heat and provide moisture will help them feel more confident and comfortable during the unpleasant treatment period.

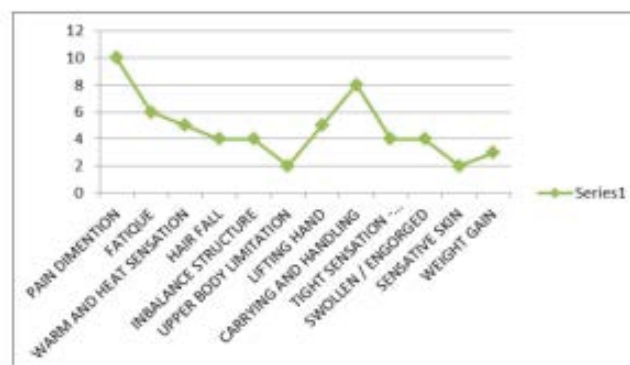


Figure 4 : Physical issue by ten informants

## 5.2 Psychology issue

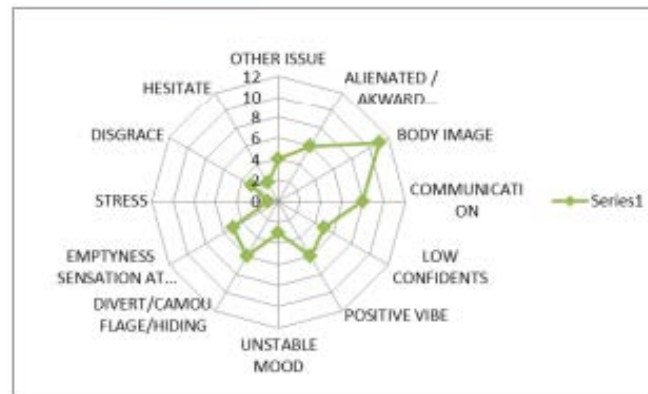


Figure 5: Psychology issue

Psychology issue has depicted 12 subthemes. However, the saturated point was selected for discussion. Body image plays a prominent role among women with breast cancer since a good and positive body image is a camouflage to gain confidence and be comfortable. In fact, these women do not want to show their weaknesses.

These women need to conceal their psychology stigma. In order to conceal this stigma, Kaiser (1990) indicated that clothing has an aesthetic appeal to overcome anxiety feeling. Clothing provides comfort after cure (medical approach) (Kang, Johnson, & Kim, 2013; Lamb & Kallal, 1992). Therefore, positive psychology can help these women to overcome this feeling. Hence, proper fit is the best attribute to build positive psychology

## 5.3 Fit preferences.

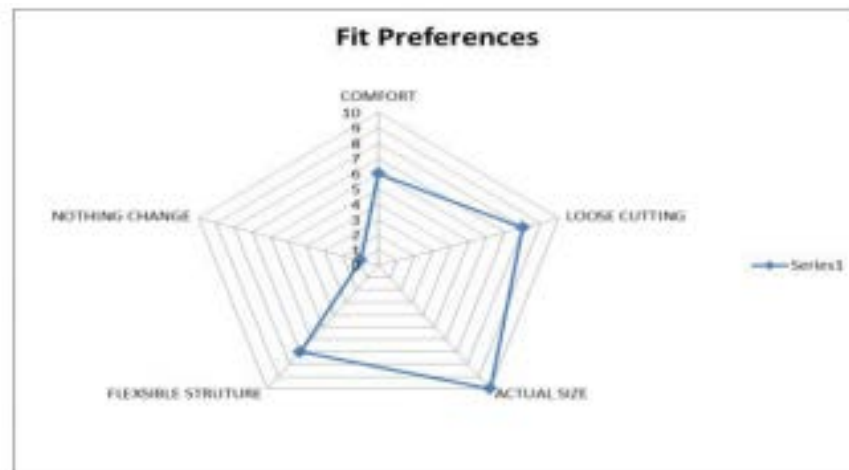


Figure 6 : Fit preferences for clothing

Indicated that actual size is the most important element during purchasing or selecting clothes (Jackson et al., 2004; H. K. Song & Ashdown, 2013; Kasambala et al., 2016; Newcomb & Istook, 2011; Pisut & Jo, 2010; H. K. Song & Ashdown, 2013). Thematic analysis shows that fit preference is linked to actual size and loose cutting. It is also linked to comfort and confidence. If the clothing is too big, these women would not feel like themselves. BCP09 stated that “*before this, I’m wearing clothing like.....shirt, yes shirt, it comfortable, now if I’m wearing the same shirt it won’t feel comfortable, quick feel rubbing sensation at*

*this area, like aaa not comfortable anymore. Let it loose, I like wear an inner reach to the bottom, and next I will wear a blouse or jacket. Ha currently I love it, actually, at present, I'm wearing jacket always"*

This statement is in line with Gao, (2016), Chau, (2012), Strickfaden & Stafiniak, (2015). Tullio-Pow (2016) stated in their previous studies. Loose cutting is also to camouflage flaws and impairments.

Without a proper fit, the wearer will feel dissatisfied and stressed (Alexander et al., 2012). Although the clothing may provide comfort, they would not purchase it if the size is not right (Alexander et al., 2012; Dallesasse & Kluck, (2013); Kasambala et al., 2016; Makhanya et al., 2014). During an interview, BCPO9 said:

*"I can wear it...but the feeling is changed, after the treatment, feel like uncomfortable.  
R: meaning that need to find a bit loose right?  
I: hmmm yes  
R: meaning that to shift other .....  
I: ermmmm attention, that's why. 26:36. Clothing needs to be loose. If tight no need to wear right now. Absolutely now, really no need. There is a benefit (giggling).  
R: meaning that, tight kebaya you never try yet?  
I: ermmmm not yet R: is it because of comfort?  
I hurrmmmmmm yes indeed."*

This indicated fit plays an important role to these women. Fit preference is linked to **actual size** and **loose cutting**. There is no way for big clothing to hide flaw as the participants feels that other people would notice the differences if they wear clothes that are too big. **Loose cutting** is the best solution as they can move freely and can wear the clothes easily without needing help from others (Tullio-Pow, 2016). However, the most important attribute is to conceal the flaw to reduce physical, psychology, and social barriers. Fit preference will lead to comfort and confidence attributes. Prior research( Alexander et al., 2012; Hiller Connell, 2011; Kasambala et al., 2016; Makhanya et al., 2014) indicated that bad fitting will lead to dissatisfaction with garments.

#### 5.4 Comfort

Comfort is the leading role in clothing selection (K. Carroll & Gross, 2010; Chang, Hodges, & Yurchisin, 2013b; Fairhurst et al., 1989; Kasambala et al., 2016; Yick et al., 2006). Without comfort, the wearer will become stressed and dissatisfaction (Jackson, 2004; Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012; Watkins, 2011). Comfort attribute is linked to confidence. Therefore, the wearer becomes more positive and feels better when they feel comfortable. The participants unanimously agreed that comfort caused by fit preference (loose cutting and actual size) is the main attribute to enhance confidence and self-satisfaction. BCP02 pointed out that *"if the garment distract our movement, if the movement stuck, of course not comfort."* Meanwhile, BCP07 provided support as said she *"interesting and comfortable. Yes. Definitely, it must be comfortable"*. Then, the participant added that if she wants to meet other people, she prefers well fitted clothes in order to look more confident and do not want to fuss about her dress anymore.

## 6. Discussion

These women's view and experiences of the fit of the clothes were closely related to the image of their own body. They also supported that camouflage, fit, and comfort are important in clothing selection. The finding also shows fit preference is significant to these women to hide their impairments. For this specific reason, they prefer loose cutting clothing compared to fitted clothing but still in the actual size. If the size is too big or small, they will not purchase the clothing.

From the interviews with the participants, the fact remains that the women want to be part of the society, does not want to be isolated, and look their best despite their flaws (Chang, Hodges, & Yurchisin, 2013c; Grogan et al., 2013; Kabel, Dimka, & Mcbee-black, 2017; Tullio-Pow, 2016).

No respondent wanted to show sex appeal and they emphasised that they tend to avoid clothes that have lower neckline or feel embarrassed if they wear inappropriate clothes in front of strangers. They are also worried that lower neckline or sleeveless clothes could expose prosthesis and more private areas of the chest and arm. It is recommended for future research to analyse the data from another perspective such as perspectives from caretaker, industry, and textile. It is also suggested for future research to obtain more quantitative data to investigate the relationships of the attributes.

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