

Not Ready for Chico's Chic



I'm not the Chico's target market, but no one told my seventy-four-year-old mom this. "You have to come with me," she said. "It's fabulous. They have these great sales. And Donna always knows exactly what I want." Donna is the salesclerk who emails my mom about sales, pulls her sizes, and yes, gives her a Christmas gift because she spends so much.

If you are a woman over 60, you must shop at Chico's. Do not pass Go, do not collect \$200 until you have accepted Chico's as your wardrobe savior. Chico's is to Boomers what American Eagle is to teenagers. It's the ultimate den of peer pressure, age-appropriate standards, and generational norming.

The Chico's look is recognizable from afar. It involves layering (preferably a shirt and jacket, although a vest is allowable), an artfully draped scarf to draw attention away from the neck (see *I Feel Bad About My Neck* by Nora Ephron), chunky necklaces, and lots of silver (extra points for turquoise). Pants are preferably black or dark denim with the key word 'slimming.' The Chico's lifestyle is active (but not too active!), involves travel (thus the "Traveler's Collection"), and always has you looking right for a nice lunch.

Like a good daughter I acquiesced to a Chico's trip— every mother likes to have a chance to dress her daughter up and I still know how to fall into line. We went on a day Donna the savior sales clerk would be there (of course). On the

way, Mom explained that the sizing is different and goes from a 0 to a 4. That did not sound encouraging to this plus-sized gal. “Their tops will fit you,” Mom insisted. “You’re tiny on top.” Um, thanks?

The store feels like someone’s custom designed closet on ‘roids. The blond hardwood and carefully designated “rooms” of fully accessorized “looks” project a relaxed and casual style while aggressively screaming “Look how well put together I am!” Donna began flipping through the racks. “We only carry 0 to 3 in the store. Extended sizes are available online, but try on some of these,” as she extracted a plethora of perfectly trendy tops that somehow felt really plain without the gaggle of accessories that surround them on the racks. Donna, old warhorse that she is, knew instantly my bottom wouldn’t fit into their bottoms. She led me to the dressing rooms.

The dressing rooms have no mirrors. I repeat: no mirrors. To see yourself in your chosen duds, you have to run the gauntlet of the shared dressing room hallway where all the other women trying on clothes are examining themselves (and each other) in the community mirrors. Because we all support each other. And it is fun to shop together. And we secretly enjoy evaluating who looks the worst. There is side eye here. Lots of side eye. Subjecting myself to the mass opinion of the gathered gals of a certain age was more than I could take. And the size 3s Donna pulled didn’t fit this size 20. Trying on clothes is hard enough, but trying them on in front of a gaggle of ladies passively aggressively competing to see who looks youngest, slimmest, and chicest is too uphill a battle.

My mom had a plan. “We’ll look at the accessories here because everything they have is great and they know exactly what to put with what. And then we’ll go home and order the extended sizes online!” My mom soon admitted that the accessories look good with what they’re paired with but maybe not with what I have at home in my wardrobe. Part of the Chico’s hook is to sell you the whole head-to-toe look, pieces that are meant for each other, but not really meant for anything else. Because you presumably don’t know how to dress yourself. We soon left, but not until Donna promised to call my mom

when the next sale started.

On their site I was able to sort the extended sizes and surf the very limited selection (extended does not mean extensive). With Mom hovering, I chose four items in extended size 4 (which apparently is so offensive it can only be offered online: they do not want the Chico's woman to have to have contact with larger women) and ordered them with Mom's Chico's Passport (because we are all about TRAVEL) free shipping loyalty account. Soon the Chico's box arrived on my doorstep. Mom wasn't here to see me try it all on thankfully. The pants and shorts fit, but both shorts were see-through and the pants a funny pink-beige. The button front *crisp* shirt (we might be relaxed but we are always dressed in a look that is clean and fresh) in coral (an eponymous Chico's color that brightens your look and makes you look vibrant and young) did not fit. I returned it all to the local store (Donna, thankfully was not in).

I felt a great burden lifting as the return was processed. I wasn't yet ready to be sucked into the mean girls "on Wednesdays we wear pink" rules of this fashion group. I'd rather piece my wardrobe together in free spirit style from a variety of stores than have Donna enrobe me in what is deemed youthful and slimming. And I choke at spending money with a store that won't even carry my size on its racks.

Mom was undeterred. "I'll call you when the next sale starts. You'll find something great when the fall collection is out." I don't feel about bad my neck yet so I probably can make it a few more years before I need Donna's help.

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24





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