

# Inclusivity in Vegan Fashion

A model's perspective of the vegan fashion industry

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Charlotte Elizabeth has been an extended size model for ten years, and her career focus has been working with brands who design for more than the standard sizes. As a vegan model, she's become more aware of fabrics and how fashion is made. But it's because of her extensive experience and the ever growing awareness of inclusivity that Canadian Vegan Magazine reached out to learn more about her insights and personal experiences into this topic related to the fashion industry.

Charlotte thinks vegan fashion is in a growth or awareness phase and starting to move away from the false perception that all vegans are thin and wear a size 2. As she points out, the diet culture is pervasive, including in the vegan space. But not all vegans give up animal products for their health. Many do so for the animals, and trying to conform to what society perceives to be the typical vegan body has never been



This spread—Fall looks by Hilary MacMillan: Faux Leather Overshirt, Navy Mock Neck and Plaid Pleated Skirt paired with Suede Sky shoes by Matt & Nat.

on their radar.

"It's now present in our modern-day culture to see a lot of diversity in media, in companies doing extended sizing and being more inclusive in showing different body types to sell their products," says Charlotte.

While fashion is still predominately straight sizes, which is what the fashion industry calls small, medium and large, some brands are including a wider range of sizes in their collections.

"I understand that a lot of vegan businesses aren't big corporations, they're small companies. It's financially challenging to do extended-sizes collections. That has to be considered," says Charlotte. "It takes time to build that. But it would be nice for brands and companies and consumers to have more awareness.

"If someone in the vegan fashion industry is designing only standard sizing, they're ignoring the majority of the population. I would think as a vegan fashion designer, you're not necessarily targeting only vegans, but you would want everyone to shop your brand. But yet you're ignoring the largest group of folks. I think that's a missed opportunity, and a missed opportunity to promote veganism in an inclusive way that makes people feel welcome," explains Charlotte.

For example, vegan fashion brand Hilary MacMillan designs from size 2 to 28, or XS to 4X. "I researched her as a designer and learned that she is not only vegan but her journey to veganism and also her personal journey

as a woman who isn't a small vegan; she wanted to make fashion more accessible and cruelty-free, which she's done successfully. Other bigger brands are now picking up on this as well," says Charlotte.

"Folks out there that are artistic, that have talent and passion and just create beauty, and they want to do it in a way that honours their values and cares for the planet and the animals, I love that. I'm so on board with that. Any time I get to work with a brand or a designer that I admire in that way, it's amazing," says Charlotte.

At this point in her career, Charlotte has the privilege of setting boundaries around what she will model. "I won't model anything that is made from an animal. I'm pretty direct with companies when we're first chatting and my agent also is aware of that. She communicates that to brands that are interested in working with me. I think that's also a form of activism because it's education for people."

Charlotte shares that a company she recently signed on with asked her to sign a contract saying she would not wear fur—and in particular post images of herself wearing fur. This isn't a problem for this vegan, and it shows that brands are paying attention. "That was super inspirational to me. I read about their code of ethics; they're finding alternatives to leather and wool."

Charlotte appreciates Canadian company Matt and Nat leading the way in the vegan accessories market. "They've been around forever; they are one of the pioneers in vegan handbags," says Charlotte. "Now they've completely extended their offerings. They do outerwear and shoes; it's pretty incredible how much they've grown their brand in that way."

The Matt & Nat name comes from MAT(T)ERIAL and NATURE. This brand launched in Montreal in 1995 and

now has stores across Canada.

### Body Positivity vs. Body Neutrality

"Body positivity has been that pioneer in creating space for folks that occupy larger bodies to be seen in the media, to have a place to be able to shop for clothes. It brings this message that I'm beautiful in my body, no matter what shape or size, and I deserve a place here.

"Body neutrality says that I'm more than my body. My level of beauty does not define me. My value as a human being is not about beauty. Body neutrality is about being thankful for your body because it allows you to do things—it allows you to go for walks, to enjoy food," explains Charlotte.

She goes on to say that body neutrality is more about acceptance, and there's not this expectation of loving your body as there is with body positivity. Anuschka Rees of Instagram's @beyondbeautifulbook describes it this way:

Body positive: I feel good about myself, because I know I'm beautiful.

Body neutral: How I feel about myself has nothing to do with my appearance.

Charlotte has her own way of helping women feel good about themselves, particularly when it comes to fashion. Many women have this preconceived and often false notion of the type of clothing that suits their body shape. "It's about creating more play and ease with your personal style and exploring new avatars, as one of my friends likes to say."

While she's coaching these women, Charlotte gently inspires them by telling them about why she avoids fashion made from animals. "I feel the more open we

It's essential that there are size-inclusive offerings in fashion spaces. Not only to meet our basic needs of clothing ourselves but also to feel valued, seen and accepted and to uplift others by expressing ourselves in creative ways.

can be with others, the more lives we can touch.

"I think there needs to be more of a conversation about the fact that vegans do come in different shapes and sizes and that it's important for vegan business owners to be more inclusive with what they share in our media." As Charlotte says, this includes diversity of ethnicities, gender identification diversity, and abled and disabled bodies diversity.

"I think that if fashion can be accessible financially and size-wise, you're going to hit all the marks." She's confident that there is demand for size-inclusive vegan fashion. "There's a huge market of folks out there who just want to feel good and look good in clothing, and vegan or cruelty-free designers are bringing added value to the animals, to the planet, and to humans by the way their products are made.

"There's an opportunity for education. It's a way to touch more people's lives when vegan fashion brands don't only promote to vegans. I think that's why some brands like Hilary MacMillan might use the words cruelty-free instead of vegan, because they want to attract, or make it comfortable for, more people. It's all about creating conversation and a safe space for folks to feel welcome." ●

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## Acknowledgments

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Fall looks by Hilary MacMillan:

📷 @hilarymacmillan | [hilarymacmillan.com](http://hilarymacmillan.com)

Shoes by Matt & Nat:

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