

Fashion for All

TODAY'S STYLE STATEMENT EMBRACES EVERY WOMAN
BY JEANINE GORDON

“Inclusivity and diversity have *always* been having a moment. The **MOMENT** is now a movement”

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There's a lot to talk about in fashion this fall, but it's not all coats, dresses and designer bags. After generations of designers who only cater to ultra-thin Caucasian models and the women who resemble them, the fashion industry is undergoing a sea change.

In the past, if you were one of the many women that came in a so-called “different” shape or shade, you were out of luck finding brands that represented women like you and clothing that truly fit your body. Now, as we see more diversity on the runways and real options for women of all sizes, 2020 is proving to give fashion a much-needed upheaval.

Plus-size influencer and model Brittnee Blair believes that the shift began with consumers' frustration. “We have always lived in a world full of diversity and people have always come in different shapes, sizes and shades,” she says. The lack of representation from fashion brands has created shoppers who are simply sick of being ignored. “People no longer want to see unattainable images, they want to see real humans from all walks of life, wearing clothes that they can picture themselves in. This is now what is creating the demand for more inclusivity and diversity.”

But inclusivity isn't just the latest fashion buzzword. It's no secret that diversity has been getting a lot of attention in the call for equality among races, genders and all people; we're talking about more than just a passing trend. As Indigenous influencer Shayla Stonechild puts it, “Inclusivity and diversity have always been having a moment. The moment is now a movement.”

“There are BIPOC and plus-size humans all over the world and they deserve to be represented in brands just as much as any other,” adds Blair. “This is the beauty of our world; we all look so different and we each bring so much unique beauty to the table. Brands have the opportunity to shape culture and shape society.” She urges fashion companies to systemically embrace diversity as part of their foundation, saying, “I'm very tired of seeing BIPOC and full-figured models used in campaigns as a trend.”

Catherine Addai, CEO and designer of bold, chic, Ghanaian-inspired brand **Kaela Kay**, too sees that the current fashion industry is ready for change, saying, “People are being held accountable in areas where there is a lack of inclusivity and diversity. I hope that it is not a ‘moment’ that we are having but that we will continue to be seen, heard



PHOTO: KAEALA KAY



and included. It should be long lasting and ever existing.”

For Canadian-designer-turned-New-York-fashion-powerhouse **Tanya Taylor**, it's about time. “I think the exclusivity of the fashion bubble has been crumbling for a few years now. Nothing that's going on is anything new but, for the first time, I think the industry is really listening to their audience because they have to. Consumers of all ages, sizes, ethnicities, races and genders—they all want access to fashion and it's the brands that understand that and want to cater to them that will make it through.”

Indeed, designers who are tuned-in to inclusivity have built successful brands by giving women what they want: clothing that makes them look and feel authentically beautiful and empowered. This comes from their choice of campaign images, runway-model casting and putting clothing options on the racks for real (read: all) women to wear.

Taylor built her eponymous label on inclusivity, designing her pieces in sizes ranging from zero to 22. She's

dressed the likes of Beyoncé and Michelle Obama but doesn't limit the Tanya Taylor woman to a certain type: “All women deserve access to joyful, colourful clothing that makes them feel confident. It's important to us that all women feel that they can be part of our community.”

Addai, who also dresses women to size 22, says, “I want women of all sizes and race to be able to appreciate colours, styles and creativity.” The days of excluding plus-size women from enjoying the same clothing that anyone else does are in the rearview mirror, she adds, thanks to designers who insist on doing things differently. “I also want women of all sizes to be able to wear my clothes and feel beautiful and fierce in them. Size shouldn't be a barrier to fashion and neither should race.”

As a plus-size model, Blair has a deep appreciation for designers who embrace women of all types without it being tokenism. “It's always great to see a brand promote body positivity, but it's important to see them truly showing love for all bodies. You see this best when all bodies are always

being represented and considered in their mission.”

There's no doubt that real change is in the air for the fashion industry. Says Addai, “It's been great to see the shakeup ... it's been uncomfortable for some, too, but it's necessary to fix long-lasting issues around equal opportunity. It's going to take time, but it needs to be done and now is a great time to start and continue.”

Stonechild wants for collaboration between diverse groups rather than one leader group calling the shots. “I would love to see more long-term, reciprocal and respectful relationships with BIPOC within the fashion industry. I want to see people that look like me—and not like me at all,” she says. “We have a lot to learn from one another and the mic has been in the same hands for long enough.”

Taylor agrees, saying, “It takes a dedication from all aspects of the business and it requires an openness to admit when you're not doing something right and learn how to do it better. I'm hoping to see the industry have honest and open conversations so that we can work together on fundamentally changing.”

If you wear a size outside of small, medium or large, or want to see brands genuinely represent BIPOC women, make conscious choices about where you open your wallet.

“As a society we have to be more conscious of where our dollars are going,” Stonechild says. To accomplish this? “Diversify your feed. Follow BIPOC influencers, bloggers, foodies and fashion. Research online and make sure to read about the founder or designer.”

Blair also wants to see women align their purchases with their beliefs. “There is so much power in your voice so, when you seek diversity or more options, let your voice be heard,” she says. “Look at brands that are actively creating fashion that not only makes you feel empowered, but are also about empowering other women.” And, she adds, “It never hurts to do a little research about what the brand is really doing to be inclusive and diverse.”

“I believe fashion is a way to introduce yourself before you even say tansi [hello in Cree],” says Stonechild. “Fashion has the ability for you to embody a specific feeling, emotion and statement. It conveys a message for you that doesn't even have to be spoken.”

That modern fashion statement includes all women's inherent beauty, which Taylor sums up just right. “I define a beautiful woman as someone who embraces who they are, who is comfortable in their own skin and who celebrates their uniqueness,” she says. For Taylor, Addai and the many other designers that are accepting, including and creating clothing for every woman, it's a beautiful thing indeed. ♡

The People's Picks

OUR BEAUTIFULLY DIVERSE INFLUENCERS SHOW LOVE FOR THEIR FAVOURITE CANADIAN BIPOC AND SIZE-INCLUSIVE BRANDS

BRITTNEE BLAIR



PHOTO: BRYAN WHITLEY

ANDREA IYAMAH: Black-owned swimwear up to size 3X. Gabrielle Union and Kate Hudson are fans!

OMI WOODS: Black-owned jewelry made from fair-trade African gold.

ŪNIKA SWIM: Brazilian-Canadian-owned swimwear with a body- and race-diverse mission, in sizes up to 4X.

SHAYLA STONECHILD



WARREN STEVEN SCOTT: Indigenous-owned, Nlaka'pamux Nation-inspired jewelry and accessories.

DOROTHY GRANT: Indigenous fashion-industry veteran known for luxe Haida-inspired clothing.

ANGELA DEMONTIGNY: Indigenous-owned, Cree-Métis-inspired luxury fashion, home and lifestyle products.