

# **DANISH FASHION ETHICAL CHARTER**

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**DANISH FASHION INSTITUTE (DAFI)  
NATIONAL SOCIETY AGAINST EATING DISORDERS AND SELF-  
MUTILATION (LMS)**

## **BACKGROUNDS FOR CREATING THE ETHICAL CHARTER**

Lately, there has been debate on the role of the fashion industry with regard to the occurrence of eating disorders and very thin models. Thus, a number of foreign fashion events have decided to delimit body measurements of models. DAFI and LMS have been in dialogue on this matter, which has resulted in a common ethical charter to secure better welfare for Danish models and partake in creating information about eating disorders, and the ideals which the fashion industry a.o. generates.

The Western world is witnessing an obesity epidemic these years, which poses a serious threat to public health. Others strive to attain an ideal of unhealthy slimness and there is a rise in the number of eating disorders. About 75,000 Danes suffer eating disorders and a similar number are considered an 'at risk' group. Out of the 75,000, 5,000 suffer from anorexia nervosa, 30,000 from bulimia and 40,000 from compulsive overeating.

There is a tendency to focus solely on anorexia nervosa, when speaking of the relation between the fashion industry and eating disorders. Anorexia nervosa is a serious social problem and a very dangerous illness for the individual. Many more, however, suffer from bulimia, which is not similarly visible. Consequently, the charter aims at all types of eating disorders, which is also the primary reason that the charter does not operate with one single factor, for instance BMI, since it cannot identify such eating disorders as bulimia.

## **THE PARTIES**

LMS works to prevent low self-confidence and negative self-image with a view to lessening the occurrence of eating disorders and self-mutilation.

DAFI is a network organization that brings together different Danish fashion companies. DAFI has 107 members, a majority of whom produces clothing and accessories, while the rest are model agencies, educational establishments, design agencies a.o. DAFI works to further growth within Danish fashion export and culture.

## **OBJECTIVE**

LMS and DAFI have joined forces to compose this ethical charter in order to heighten the level of knowledge and affect the opinions of the trade, the media, and society in general. Moreover, the charter establishes a number of facts in order that the public and political debates may start with a proper conception of the fashion industry.

Since the fashion industry is not alone in creating body ideals, LMS and DAFI seek to involve other partners in the charter, e.g. media, fairs, retailers, photo agencies, the sports world as well as the film- and music industries.

## **VALUES AND INITIATIVES**

With this charter, LMS and DAFI aim at three basic values dealing with responsibility, human respect and health:

- We respect our trade associates and colleagues. We wish to guarantee their health and security, and we appreciate diversity.
- We are attentive to the influence of the fashion industry on body ideals, especially with younger people.
- We wish to promote and work towards a healthy life style and ideals regarding natural and sound relations to food, body and exercise.

In order to secure the ongoing development of the charter as well as the focus, awareness and high level of knowledge within the trade, a number of initiatives are embedded in the future action plan:

- The ethical charter must be on the agenda with meetings coordinating the biannual fashion weeks and –shows.
- A series of informative seminars and going-home meetings for the trade, revolving around issues such as eating disorders, self-confidence, correct diet and the content and aims of the charter.
- A series of seminars for models and others who share an interest in the subject of correct diet and healthy exercise practices towards a slender body.
- Planning of lectures and information for schools and educational establishments about beauty ideals, health and eating disorders, in a co-operation between DAFI and LMS.

The charter further implies:

- We aim at securing a healthy working environment by introducing wholesome and nourishing food at photo shoots and shows.
- That, if the model is under 16, close contact with the family must be secured as well as written consents prior to shows.
- Establishing a service working together with LMS offering anonymous, prompt and professional assistance for the person in question and family or company.
- Information on eating disorders and risk behaviour must be accessible, and should include advice on how to spot symptoms in a person suspected of having an eating disorder.

## **EVALUATION**

The charter must influence the responses and standards of the trade. This can only happen if the charter maintains ‘open’, and is developed through dialogue and other activities. LMS and DAFI will be responsible for an evaluation of the effects of the charter after 1½-2 years. The charter does not employ sanctions, but urges for self-justice in the trade.

## **RISK FACTORS, SELF-CONFIDENCE AND EATING DISORDERS**

The body ideals of magazines, movies, music videos and within the sphere of elitist sports may work a great influence on younger people’s self-confidence and self-esteem. Therefore, the fashion industry seeks to demonstrate and inform of the differences between illusion and reality.

It is, nonetheless, important to draw attention to the fact, that one does not develop an eating disorder from reading magazines. Eating disorders are complex psychogenic diseases that are often the result of a combination of poor self-confidence and other serious problems. In acknowledging that the illusions made by fashion are often mistaken for reality – not least by young people – the trade can actively partake in preventing the formation of such risk behaviour, which may ultimately lead to an eating disorder.

## **THE ILLUSION OF BEAUTY**

Every culture holds certain beauty ideals that stress particular features and generate extreme behaviour. The varieties are many, historically as geographically.

The beauty, which the fashion industry portrays, is a manufactured one. Prior to any photo shoot, the model is styled by a host of professional hair- and makeup artists. The photographer sets optimum light and shoots numerous pictures. Having chosen the right picture, it goes through an extensive process of computer editing. Even the most beautiful of models are touched up to perfection.

Not even models look like their pictures. This knowledge must be communicated and diffused. Most important, the society, parents and other adults around the young must take responsibility and discuss ideals up against realities with them, - not least stress that it is, in fact, ok to look different from these ideals.

## **INFORMATION ON COMMON PRACTICE IN THE MODEL AGENCIES WITHIN DAFI'S NETWORK**

Height and breadth matter when model agencies seek models, but it is just as much a question of charisma, and of being photogenic. The things that qualify a certain model are different in each case. One can neither study nor slim oneself to become a model.

Misunderstandings have arisen about the relations between the slender body ideal and eating disorders with models. For a model to be slender and/or fit does not necessarily imply an eating disorder. Models live by their body and looks. So it is essential that they live healthy, sleep regularly, eat right, and exercise. Model agencies support their models in this way of living.

Model agencies affiliated with this charter have always taken particular interest in their models well being. This approach is quite essential for a trade that works primarily with appearance. Fashion companies and model agencies within DAFI are careful that the work does not have a negative impact on staff or models.