

Emily Moore

Hairdresser Emily Moore is focused on inclusion and helping people discover more confident versions of themselves. What she's not interested in? Diet culture.

By Lauren Harkawik

Hairdresser Emily Moore works out of a [private studio](#) in Brattleboro, Vermont, which she's custom-designed to be inclusive to all genders and body types. That means when she was designing her space, she asked herself: how would a client who's four-feet-tall and weighs 90 pounds feel in this space, and how would a client who's five-foot-six and weighs 350 pounds feel? Do people of all genders feel welcome here?

"I never, ever, ever want someone in my place to feel nervous or apologetic for their body," she says. "Do the capes have enough snaps that they accommodate a bigger neck? Or, can someone in a wheelchair or walker get in and out of the space? Can they turn around?"

This led to some practical decisions: she bought the hydraulic salon chair with the highest weight limit and widest seat she could find. She bought capes with the most amount of snaps, to accommodate both a small neck and a larger one. She uses a non-gendered pricing model, charging hourly for her services rather than having one price for a men's cut and another for women's. The black and white photos of models that adorned mall salons in the 1990's feel like an impossibility here. Instead, Moore's space is filled with colorful and thoughtfully-chosen art that doesn't boast a particular body image, but rather exudes an artistic, vibrant, intentional spirit reminiscent of Moore herself.

When Moore describes the experience of cutting someone's hair, she talks a lot about discovery, and of

helping people see themselves. That distinctly doesn't mean covering up qualities they want to hide. Instead, it's about embracing ones that give them confidence.

"I love to find something about somebody and highlight that thing," she says. "So if someone has really amazing eyes, I'm not looking at their chubby cheeks, round shoulders or big belly. I'm looking at — 'How can I make them see how beautiful their eyes are?'"

Part of finding the right thing to emphasize is figuring out what might be holding someone back. She uses an example of someone who has long hair they seem to hide behind.

"Often when someone has that big curtain of hair, I see somebody who's hiding something. Let's get rid of it. Let's get rid of what's not serving you. I want people to see themselves the way that I see them — I want them to be seen in the world the way they should be seen. Whether it's finding a way to layer the hair so it opens their face, or giving them bangs, or cutting their hairs shorter, it can really change the way they show up in the world."

Within the realm of Moore's workspace, there's a focus on joy. She believes being in a hairdresser's chair should be a joyful experience, but also that the right haircut can help people discover joy in their own reflection. "People sit up straighter, they walk out in a different way than they walked in. That is powerful," she says.

In addition to joy, though, she's passionate about protecting the experience from any form of body shaming, and that includes engaging in diet culture. To that end, in December, Moore put a plea out to her Instagram followers: "Let's get diet culture out of salons."

[The post](#), which was broken up over several slides, explained Moore's reasoning. "'Tis the season for lots of clients and coworkers talking about dieting, body shame, and size. Spending energy talking about body size negates so many other factors of someone's life and health. Fat does not equal unhealthy. A choice for you may not work for someone else. Diet culture

centers on an ideal of a white, thin, cis-gendered, non-disabled body and negates other bodies. We owe it to each other to do better.”

Though Moore operates out of her own space now, she worked in bigger salons earlier in her career, and diet culture was infused into the workplace in a way that made Moore uncomfortable. That experience shaped her approach to her work now and inspired the post.

“As somebody who has always been a small fat person — I’ve always been on the upper-end of standard sizes — I’ve worked with women who are way thinner than me and all they would talk about was their weight, and losing weight, and how broken they were because of their weight,” says Moore, reflecting on what was on her mind when she made the Instagram post. “And I would look at their bodies and say, ‘If your body is broken, then what’s my body?’ And that was happening in my *workplace*. I think we all deserve to be in a space where we aren’t feeling judged.”

Moore says she was floored by the response the post got, both in likes and comments and in direct messages.

“I heard from moms who are worried about raising daughters or sons in this culture,” she says. “People who own salons said, ‘Instead of a wellness-focused January, we’re just going to try to focus more on people’s ergonomics and healthy bodies and not talk about food at all.’” One responder in the comments on the post said she’s a teacher and she planned to share the post with her 9th grade students, who were learning about social issues and change.

“Students are always wondering how what we learn in school is relevant in the real world, and I think your post is a perfect example,” she wrote.

Moore says the responses helped her see how many people, both hairdressers and not, connect with a message of inclusivity and not engaging in diet culture in the salon. In recent months, she’s also had the opportunity to connect with hairstylists around the country through a career coaching program, and it’s helped her find likeminded souls — people who are also trying to use clean products in their workspaces,

working on body-image positivity for themselves and in their work, and creating queer-friendly spaces.

“I think there are a lot of proactive, radically-minded people who happen to be hairdressers and who are trying to make these changes,” she says. “I’m so glad to find out that I’m not alone in this. Industry-wide, it’s happening. That makes me so happy, and I really hope it continues both for my sake and the sake of our kids and the young hair stylists who are coming up.”