

# Topshop attacked for introducing a

THEY SAY you can never be too rich or too thin. But there is growing alarm over the number of Irish women who are starving themselves in an attempt to emulate super-slender celebrities such as Victoria Beckham, Nadine Coyle

By **Georgina Heffernan**

and Lindsay Lohan.

Once, it was okay to be slim but now 'skinny' is the new goal. And it is less to do with feeling healthy than looking like a movie star.

Last week, experts revealed there has been a huge increase in

the numbers seeking help for eating disorders. Bodywhys chief executive Jennie O'Reilly said there were 200,000 people suffering from eating disorders in Ireland and the health service was unable to cope.

Now, in a worrying development that will add to the sense that women are being subtly pressured into losing more and more weight, Topshop has introduced a range of size-four garments to its petite range in Ireland.

Topshop does not sell children's clothes and the size-four range is not being marketed as such. Nor is it being targeted at pre-teens.

Size four is roughly the equivalent of the controversial American size 0 - which requires a 24in. waist, a 32in. bust and 35in. hips.

This new size is for the seriously slender woman - even supermodel Kate Moss is a size six - and yesterday its introduction was condemned by fashion industry experts.

'A size four is just not a healthy weight,' said Tanya Grimson, fashion agent at Morgan, a modelling agency in Dublin.

'We'd turn away a model who was that thin because it's a look we just don't encourage and Irish clients are put off if a girl is underweight.'

'Fitting a size four is unnatural and usually a sign that a girl is suffering from an eating disorder. If a girl is sick, you can usually spot it because she'll begin to grow hair on her back and arms; it's the immune system's way of fighting hunger.'

'There's no demand for models who are that thin in Ireland - clients will just not book them,' she added.

This view is echoed by Lydia Bunni, the model who posed for this photo-shoot with Topshop's new range.

'What? You don't expect me to fit into that!' she laughed when I presented her with the clothes she would be wearing.

At a perfect and healthy size 10, Lydia, 26, was flabbergasted at the microscopic size four from Topshop.

'I think it's quite shocking that they'd produce these type of clothes. No woman with breasts and hips could fit into these jeans or tops unless she was anorexic,' she said.

'These clothes seem to be aimed at pre-teens or kids - but that's where the issue lies. If Topshop wanted to expand their range to include a kids' section, it should be advertised as such. This new size four is irresponsible and dangerous.'

'Irish women are naturally curvy. We're not built like the Asian women, who are a lot smaller and are more suited to these small sizes.'

## 'You don't expect me to fit into that?'

Yet in an affluent culture where dieting is less a trend than a way of life, the pressure on women to conform can be enormous.

Dublin-based model Asia Kawczyk, 21, went to the fashion capital Milan to work as a model when she was 17. There, she worked for or top labels such as Prada but she was shocked by the skeletal figure required by her Italian fashion agents.

'In Milan, everyone was very skinny and if we wanted to work, we had to be very thin. My friend was told by her agency to stop eating altogether because she looked fat - they wanted us to lose weight at any cost.'

'When I was modelling full time in Milan, my diet consisted of one croissant a day washed down with cups of coffee and lots of cigarettes. I thought that was normal. The agents saw that we were exhausted but they didn't care about us - to them, we were cash cows. I can't understand an industry that takes a young, beautiful girl and starves her half to death.'

Asia returned to Dublin and now works with the bScene model and talent agency. She thinks the fashion

industry in Ireland is healthier than in Italy as there is less of an emphasis on being a size six or below. However, she is concerned by the size-four range.

'I think it's absolutely crazy,' she said. 'When are people ever going to learn that size doesn't matter? We seem to be interested only in the size of someone's ass rather than their personality.'

Many psychiatrists blame the global media's ubiquitous use of hyper-thin supermodels, actresses and popstars for promoting an unrealistic ideal of female beauty.

'In the past 40 years, the pendulum has swung towards what the media calls slim but what I call thin,' said Dr John Griffin, 59, director of the eating disorder unit at St Patrick's Hospital

## 'A croissant a day and lots of cigarettes'

on James's Street in Dublin.

'I think that the introduction of a size four is dangerous. When I was a student at medical school, the female icons were women such as Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. Both were a size 16. To have a size four as the new ideal shows a huge shift in our attitudes to weight. Any degree of obesity in the western world, especially among females, is frowned upon.'

Dr Griffin has had to treat girls as young as 13 who are concerned about their weight, as well as ex-models and ballet dancers who are anorexic as a result of their 'glamorous' professions.

A weight-loss craze has swept Ireland, sending women of all ages, as well as some men, scurrying to exercise studios and slimming salons. Liposuction is now commonplace, as are diet powders and pills, weight-loss teas and other herbal concoctions 'guaranteed' to melt away the pounds.

Over the past five years, the self-starvation syndrome has spread, creating a generation of women who feel ashamed of their curves.

Now the doctors and parents of adolescents with anorexia and bulimia are accusing fashion stores of shrinking their clothing sizes. Dieting is not only trendy, it's a necessity for many Irish women who want to fit into the most fashionable designer clothes.

Only last week, St Patrick's Hospital opened its new, expanded eating-disorder unit to help cope with a massive upsurge in eating disorders.

It is estimated that there are between 1,000 and 5,000 people with anorexia nervosa and approximately 50,000 with bulimia in Ireland today.

'Appearance and figure have become very important in the minds of young people,' said Professor Fiona McNichols, a psychiatrist at the eating disorders unit in Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin, Dublin.

'I don't think that the introduction of a size four will affect most normal people. However, I do think that it will influence those who are at risk of an eating disorder and are already very sensitive about their shape. The introduction of a smaller size will increase their anxiety.'

'If they thought they were okay before because they took the smallest size in Topshop. Now they'll think they need to diet to fit this new tiny size.'

This week Topshop defended its new range by saying it was aimed at petite women rather than women who are an average build.

A spokeswoman said: 'The size issue, to be honest, is something which has appeared from nowhere and there isn't really too much to say on it from our side apart from the fact we did introduce fours into our petite range at the end of last year.'

 **easygoing**



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