

HED: Ozempic and the Return of the '90s Figure

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The world was truly moving in the right direction towards body positivity. In the last decade, major fashion houses and cult classic brands have included a wide range of body types in shows, ads and even mannequins. However, the rise in usage of the diabetes weight loss drug, Ozempic, is bringing back the culture of toxic thinness.

Brands like Dolce & Gabbana, Savage x Fenty, Coach and Prada highlighted plus-size men and women to wear their pieces in order to better represent the many faces of society and the people that actually wear these clothes. The widespread use of Ozempic and heightened wellness culture that commoditizes thin figures, similar to the '90s, is causing fashion to take steps backwards.

Models and activists of this movement are left confused as to how everything shifted so quickly. Plus-size model, Skye Standley, noted in an interview how the rise of Ozempic usage has shown which fashion houses were serious about being inclusive and which were just following the trend. Model Tess Holliday stated that the increased inclusion felt like a fashion Renaissance, but it's all gone downhill so fast.

In 2023, model and activist Felicity Hayward noticed a dramatic shift in the fashion industry's approach to body diversity. The increasing popularity of weight-loss drugs coincided with a stark decline in plus-size representation on runways. Hayward, who tracks the use of curve models through her report *Inside the Curve*, found that cities like New York, which had once featured over 70 plus-size models, dropped to just 23 this year. London followed suit, with numbers plummeting from 80 to 26 — 17 of whom walked for a single designer, Sinéad O'Dwyer. In Milan and Paris, where size inclusivity had always lagged, representation was almost nonexistent. The supposed progress of the past few years, Hayward said, is being reversed at alarming speed.

This backslide is not just statistical. Many curve models have either lost weight to continue working or have seen their job opportunities vanish. Many curve models have either lost weight to continue working or have seen their job opportunities vanish. Nyome Nicholas-Williams, once thriving in campaigns for major brands, has had to shift to hand modeling and is now job-hunting outside the industry. The emotional toll of this regression is heavy. For Nicholas-Williams and others, it's not just a lack of work — it's the painful reminder that they were never fully accepted. Hayward also highlights a troubling trend of brands opting for mid-size models (UK sizes 12–16) instead of true plus-size models, creating a false appearance of inclusivity.

Casting director Emma Matell, who quickly became known for championing size diversity, laments the lack of opportunities for plus-size talent she's worked hard to promote. Even when editors and stylists want to feature larger models, sample sizes often don't exist. As a result, models are frequently underdressed in shoots — not as a statement, but due to limited clothing options.

Worse still, the online abuse directed at larger models has intensified, with brands like Snag receiving hundreds of hateful messages daily. Activists argue this hostility never truly disappeared — it was simply masked during a performative phase of inclusivity. The industry's return to old norms reveals how fragile and surface-level those changes were. Despite this, figures like Hayward, Nicholas-Williams and Matell remain committed to challenging fatphobia and pushing for genuine, lasting change. Whether brands can ignore the growing demands of a more conscious and diverse consumer base remains to be seen.

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