

the SKINNY S



The male form has a new fashionable aesthetic and it certainly isn't beefy. With increasing media pressure and a new image of the male body being paraded down the catwalks, expect to hear cries of 'does my bum look big in this?' from men the world over

Words PAUL EWART Photos GETTY/GALLO, P.A., REX, ALLSTAR

Little over a year ago, the world's media were having a field day with the news that designers in Spain were commanded to choose female models based on a healthy body mass. Next, physicians were called in to monitor Italian casting calls, and conferences were being arranged left, right and centre by powerhouse fashion editors across the globe.

So, why are we still talking about models' weight (or lack of)? While these women show no sign of an increase in BMI, the focus is now on their male counterparts. If you thought anorexia nervosa was a woman's problem, guys, you'd better think again. 'Manorexia' – the latest incarnation of anorexia – is, according to reports, dramatically on the rise.

Last month the UK-based annual fashion event, The Clothes Show banned skinny male models after a reported 67 per cent rise in the number of cases of male anorexia. Gavin Brown, managing director of The Clothes Show – who also banned size zero girls in 2006 – said the rise of male eating disorders over the past five years "has been attributed to the fashion industry's increasing preference for very slender male models".

Information from specialist treatment centres in the UK in 2000 suggested that one in 10 people experiencing an eating disorder was male and research from Canada in 2002 doubled the figure at one in every five. A Harvard University study released last year found that 25 per cent of those with anorexia or bulimia and 40 per cent of binge eaters were actually male.

Although manorexia has inspired far less breast-beating from the international media, it doesn't mean that it isn't a cause for serious concern. "Anorexia is definitely on the rise in males," says Devika Singh, a Dubai-based psychologist. "It is important to note that it may well be the case that there are more cases reported than before due to increased awareness and more willingness to seek therapy in the male population.

"One of the reasons why anorexia in males hasn't received as much attention as women is that many men report being able to mask it compared to women, who talk about it more than men do. So, even though current statistics show that women are at a higher risk of developing an eating disorder, this may not be a true reflection."

The androgynous look has long been close to the surface in fashion, for both men and women, however the recent shows in Milan and Paris were definite proof that the towering six-packed Greek God-like version of male beauty is no longer. Instead, the new model for male beauty is a pigeon-chested, emaciated, testosterone-starved teenage boy.

Former head of menswear at Dior Heidi Slimane – the designer credited for spawning the skinny model trend – is one of the most obvious contenders for blame. His stick-figure aesthetic marked a definite change in the male silhouette and Slimane is even credited for Karl Lagerfeld's drastic weight loss (apparently he

'One of the reasons why anorexia in males hasn't received as much attention as women is that many men report being able to mask it compared to women who talk about it more than men do'

wanted to wear Dior Homme skinny jeans).

Even designers such as Dolce&Gabbana and Dsquared, who have traditionally favoured more muscular, beefcake types, used models this season that were noticeably leaner. And New York has followed suit. The European trend for the ultra-slender look is dominant, which was made clear in the castings of models for New York shows including Duckie Brown, Thom Browne and Marc by Marc Jacobs, where 6ft-tall models with 28-inch waists were the norm.

The shrinking of the male model can be charted through designers' sample sizes. For example, back in the mid-90s the sample size was an Italian 50, then around five years later (coincidentally, or not so coincidentally around the same time that Heidi Slimane left Dior Homme) the typical sample size had dwindled to a 48 – it's now a 46. Not so shocking for a man lacking in height, but to work on the catwalk these male models have to be at least 5ft11. With the huge pressure to remain slim, you might wonder why these models starve themselves to fit into designer clothing,



'Anorexia is definitely on the rise in males'

aside from the handsome monetary rewards. Successful male models earning around Dhs1,840,000 annually, with high-end catalogue and photoshoots paying an average of Dhs37,000 per day. In the fashion world there's always a desire for change – if muscles were in last year, then they must be out this year.

The change in male body image is something that has been evolving gradually from the days of the Charles Atlas school of thought. Even then, the bulky muscular look that was deemed preferable caused an increase in male steroid abuse, comparable to the rise in anorexia or bulimia today.

It's obviously difficult to gauge the exact number of male sufferers in the UAE, as official statistics aren't kept. However, it's reasonable to assume that with the huge Western expat population and with increasing globalisation, the number of cases of men suffering from eating disorders will follow the same upward path as it has in the West. And, for us desert-dwellers, the warm climate provides ample occasions for stripping off, meaning there's even more pressure to achieve a beach body. In addition, men in the competitive sporting world are also at risk, where jockeys, boxers and the like are all at risk of obsessive calorie counting to stay within their weight limit.

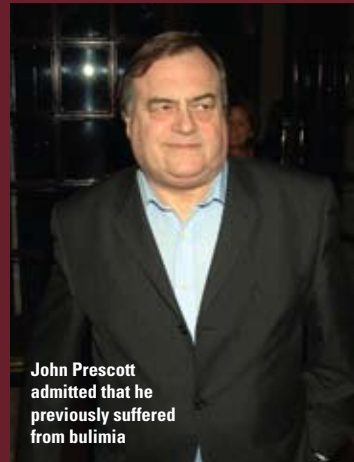
Perhaps, in this time of financial and economic anxiety, we're all tightening our belts (literally) or perhaps Slimane's influence has changed the desired characteristics of male bodies forever. Whatever the case, it's pretty clear that men are succumbing more and more to the pressures that women have been under (as they like to remind us) for years. We're sure that Germaine Greer and her ilk will be having a chortle at our expense.



Christian Bale dramatically slimmed down for his role in 2004's *The Machinist*

THE THIN LINE

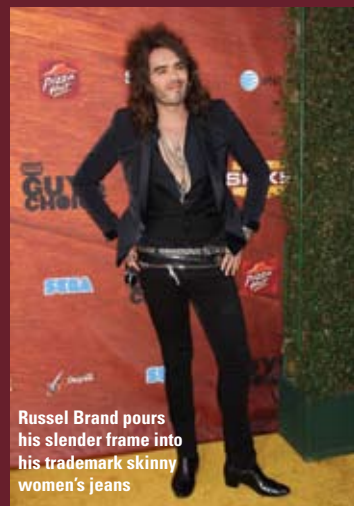
The underweight male isn't only confined to the catwalk. From musicians and celebrities to politicians, men the world over are affected by the new desire to be thin



John Prescott admitted that he previously suffered from bulimia



An unlikely fashion icon, Pete Doherty has been a pioneer of Dior Homme's skinny aesthetic



Russel Brand pours his slender frame into his trademark skinny women's jeans