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Does SIZE matter?

... and does anyone know what a size 12 is these days, anyway? We decided to get out there and investigate

Magazines are often asked why we use such "skinny" models, when the average Aussie woman is a size 14. At *Cosmo*, we've been using size 6-16 models in every issue (including this one!) since we introduced our Body Love philosophy in 1996. But it hasn't been easy. Here's why:

Sportsgirl's joined with The Butterfly Foundation to tackle body image issues and eating disorders in women. What are they doing? Sportsgirl aims to recruit bubbly, friendly staff of any size and stocks sizes 6-16 to reflect demand from customers. More info at www.sportsgirl.com.au.

long before their new-season ranges hit stores, fashion designers make one "sample" range to be used in magazine fashion shoots, so we can show you what's hot right this second. In Australia, the universal sample size is a 10, which is why most magazines use models of this dress size – they fit into the supplied clothes.

"Problems often arise when using models of all sizes, because we photograph our fashion stories three months in advance, which means we have to use samples," says *Cosmo* fashion editor Nicole Adolphe. "If we used clothes that were available in stores at the time (in a range of sizes), our readers couldn't buy them when the mag actually came out – they would have come off the shelves by then."

Another problem we face? "Some fashion labels don't like their stuff to be modelled by 'real people'," says Nicole. "These labels prefer their samples to be used on professional models, because they believe the fit is better and therefore they'll sell more clothes. That's why at *Cosmo*, we tend to use labels that we know will be happy for us to feature their product in any way," says Nicole. You only have to look through our fashion pages to know who they are.

In this shoot, we set out to prove that you don't have to be the "sample" size to be beautiful. But if we shot 17 women of different heights,

weights and shapes, why did the majority (13, actually) of the women all fit into the sample size 10 clothes? That certainly got us scratching our heads ... and we figured out the answer is all to do with vanity sizing.

Vanity sizing: the facts

Why is it that in one shop you're a roomy size 10, while in another shop (10 minutes later!) you're bulging out of size-14 pants? It's all the fault of "vanity sizing", where designers add fabric to clothes, without changing the size on the tag, so you feel good in what you're trying on.

Since there aren't strict sizing standards here, each designer can "pick and choose" sizing, which can cause major confusion for shoppers. Sure, slipping into a size 12 when you're usually a 14 gives a surge of validation, but are designers doing us any favours by letting us think we're thinner than we are? Or are they simply trying to "skinny-trick" us into buying their brand?

Should Aussie clothing sizes be standardised by law? Vote, and have your say on our discussion boards, at www.cosmopolitan.com.au/discussionboard.aspx.

A 2005 Revising Sizing study at the University of South Australia found that women are mostly unaware of the fact that they are often two sizes bigger than what it says on their dress tag. But, why do we allow ourselves to be "skinny-tricked" when rationally we know we can't possibly have lost a kilo since the last store we visited minutes ago?

Tony Banister, director of fashion trend forecasting company, Scout, says: "Brands disguise the fact that their standard size blocks – the original pattern specifications to which garments are manufactured – have 'grown' so customers can feel 'comfortable', or so a size-12 woman can fit into a size 10." Hmm, seems many women are willing to ignore reality, purely because downsizing makes them feel more confident about their bodies ...