

# Local Africa Wants Full Figures as West Wants Size Zero

ACCRA (Reuters)—Skinny African girls may get to strut on Western catwalks, but the heavier ones have to stay at home.

This is the message being delivered to the 500 or so Ghanaians who have registered with the country's only international modeling agency, Exopa.

"A lot of them want to go. But not everyone has the chance to go because of the size the Europeans want them to be," said Exopa's Ghanaian director Sima Ibrahim.

As models on Western catwalks get thinner and thinner, their hungry look has sparked noisy debate about the pressure this places on girls and women to achieve perfection, even if perfection means Size Zero, the smallest American dress size, the equivalent to a British size four.

In Africa, rolls of flesh are usually seen as a sign of wealth and status, not of ill health.

Few aspire to a skinny look, as those who look starved and ill too often are that way through misfortune, not choice.

But just as Africa's youth find themselves choosing between Western music and clothes and those rooted in their own tradition, they are now faced with two opposing

images of beauty—the Western ideal of an ever thinner frame and the African one of a buxom and well-rounded figure.

Nowhere is this debate clearer than in the African fashion industry.

Those who want to make it as a fashion model in the West are well aware they need to conform to Western sizes.

"Those that come here who are skinny, they know they want to go international. The others, they know they are big, they want a job here in Ghana," said Exopa's Ibrahim.

## Curves

Few Africans want to see a super skinny model, said Sylvia Owori, who runs Uganda's Zipex models.

"I think most Ugandans would be disgusted. They'd think she'd just come out of the village and she was malnourished," said Owori.

On the street and in African clubs and bars, it is still the bigger girls who are likely to get attention.

A big cheer goes up when a "nice, shapely African model" takes to the stage in a fashion show, said Santa Anzo, director of Uganda's Arapapa clothes and model agency, which specializes in plus-size models.

Some international clothing brands are changing their sizes to match the realities of the African fashion market.

The South African wing of Levi Strauss & Co launched a roomier pair of its famed red label jeans after African women told researchers they liked the brand but couldn't fit into the skinny designs aimed at Westerners.

"Young African women are increasingly proud of their body shape and are celebrating it in fashion. There is a marked confidence in African identity compared to 5–10 years ago, and while young Africans are making use of international brands they want to maintain their sense of being African," said Levi's South Africa managing director Mike Joubert.

## Fashion Dollars

But the rewards on offer in Europe can make weight loss worthwhile for ambitious models.

Ghanaian fashion models stumble out of bed for up to \$200 a day. Those who make it to Europe get 1,000 euros (\$1,360) per half day.

Batting the lashes of her feline eyes and toying with her gold slip-

pers, the naturally skinny 20-year-old Mimi Mensah says she has wanted to be a model since she was 14.

"I just have the passion for it. I have the flair. And if I am not mistaken, I don't look bad," she said.

"When you are on the catwalk, all eyes are on you. You feel you are on top of the world. It makes you feel great."

Six feet, 1 inch (1.85 meters), with a 25.5 inch (64.8 cm) waist, Mimi has already modeled in Europe and she knows that is where she wants to be.



Rajesh Jantals/AFP/Getty Images

**MORE IS MORE:** A well-rounded South African model displays an outfit during Durban Fashion Week.

"Back home, people think bigger people are attractive. I am aiming internationally, so if I am here, and people don't think I am attractive, it doesn't bother me," she said.

But Mensah also questions the Size Zero trend.

"I don't think that is healthy. Most of them starve," she said.

Some people do aspire to Western ideals, said Uganda's Owori.

"It is starting to change now. It used to be that you had to be big and curvy but now people watch TV and read Western magazines and they want to be like the girls they see

there," she said.

## Business of Fashion

But still, there are few African models who would purposely lose weight, and many relish their food, say model agencies across the continent.

Slim Alberta Arhin, 21, has her hopes pinned on an international modeling career, but still loves her kenkey, a fermented corn dish which is a staple of Ghanaian diet.

"I like myself the way I am. I am a Christian. God made everyone dif-

ferent. Don't starve yourself to make someone happy or to be on a runway. It is wrong," said Arhin.

For those who do pursue perfection in the form of a smaller clothes size, the irony is that for many men, the super-skinny are not objects of desire but simply mannequins who decorate the shop window of a multi-billion dollar fashion business.

"It is a business. Almost every man I know, the skinny models, it is nice to take them somewhere. If it comes to really having a relationship, they prefer to have bigger people," said Exopa's Ibrahim.



Rodger Bosch/AFP/Getty Images

**INTO AFRICA:** Tanzanian designer Mustafa Hassanali shows traditional African aesthetics at the Cape Town Fashion Week, South Africa's premier fashion event.

## U.S. Survey Shows What Not to Wear to Work

NEW YORK (Reuters)—Shopping for summer clothes to wear to work? Forget the tank tops and lose the flip-flops.

A new survey showed tank tops and visible underwear are the biggest fashion faux pas on the job, according to Monster, an online job and recruiting site, which compiled more than 18,000 responses to an online poll.

Results were released this week by Monster, whose parent company is Monster Worldwide Inc.

Flip-flop sandals weighed in next on the list of fashion mistakes, followed by Hawaiian prints and shorts, it said.

What you wear at work speaks volumes, said Norma Gaffin, director of content at Monster, based in Maynard, Massachusetts.

"Do you want to look like you're 14? How seriously are people going to take you if they can see your bra? Or if you're wearing flip-flops, and they can hear you walking down the hall before you get there?" she said.

"If you want more responsibility and more autonomy, you're going to be taken more seriously if you're dressing appropriately," she said.

Gaffin, who in her role at Monster provides advice to job seekers, says she tells people undergoing job interviews by telephone to dress profes-

sionally, even at home.

"You will have a different demeanor if you're wearing your pajamas versus if you're wearing clothes. If those things are reflected over the voice when people can't see you, what is it reflecting when they can?" she said.

The results of the survey were based on 18,178 votes cast by Monster users from March 23 to April 2.

Monster runs a series of online polls to gauge users' opinions on a variety of topics relating to careers, the economy, and the workplace. Only one vote per user is counted toward the final tabulation, it said.

## The Perfect Link to a Great Look

By MICHELLE CARLSON  
Epoch Times Australia Staff

Whenever I shake hands with a man and a twinkle from his sleeve catches my eye, I'm impressed—he's wearing cuff links. There is something distinctive about a man that does. Whether it is a miniature airplane, little golf balls, or gold squares, it is a fashion statement of its own.

As my stylish male friend shared with me, "Cuff links are the only type of jewelry that you can play with and express yourself." Albeit he was referring to a professional, working environment where flashy jewelry worn by a man may be taboo, cuff links are about expressing one's individuality and personal style.

Cuff links are the perfect accessory to make a casual shirt look more elegant or to add a splash of color. With a variety of styles available, it is easy to pick and choose a set to match the mood of the moment or a special occasion. They range from simple studs to ostentatious

platinum and diamond settings, from figurines to vintage cuffs from the Victorian era. The creativity in designing cuff links is limitless.

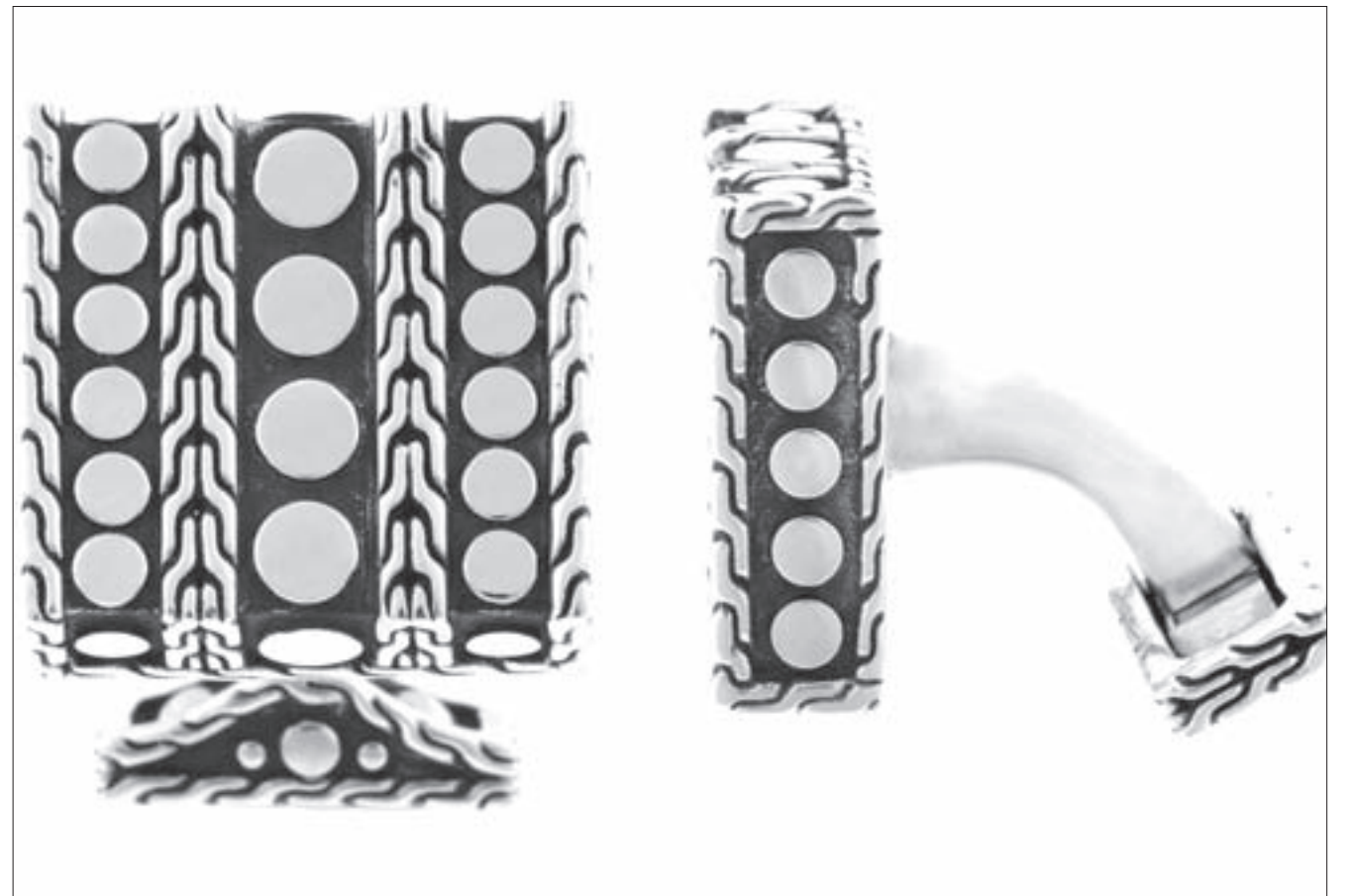
Nathan Tim, a purveyor of handmade cuff links made of murano glass and stainless steel, has a selection of designs that are original and modern. Each cuff link is crafted by hand giving each piece its uniqueness. Not only are they well-designed, but they are also representative of the perfect merger of traditional Venetian glassmaking and contemporary styles. The breadth of colors vary from classic black and white in the Seduction Collection to vibrant red, oranges, and greens in the Spice Collection. There are delicate floral appliques in Bouquet and playful panache found in the Harlequin pieces.

For sterling silver lovers, cuff links from the John Hardy Kali Collection, which draws its inspiration from the stones lined along the river beds in Bali, are the answer. The stone-shaped outlines are whimsical, alluring, and carry the signature style of John Hardy.

Another John Hardy signature is the Dot motif. The Nuansa Collection offers round and square cuff links using this motif, with dots of sterling silver and 18 karat gold. This rich and elegant new evolution of the Dot motif is inspired by the ancient temple architecture of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

A more traditional touch would be enamel cuff links. From their first introduction in the middle of the 18th century to today, enamel cuff links have been popular among distinguished gentlemen. Enamel maintains a smooth surface and is able to hold brilliant colors. Tiffany & Co has a selection of enamel cuff links that are elegant, sophisticated, and timeless. Whether patterned in stripes, plaids, criss-cross or basket weaves, the enamel cuff links continue to be a classic and refined look.

Considering the copious styles, it is hard to pick a favorite. But without a doubt, cuff links have proven to withstand the test of time as a fashion work of art. And ultimately, are debonair to wear.



Courtesy of John Hardy

**SOMETHING FOR GENTLEMEN:** Men's Silver and Gold Dot cuff links from the Nuansa Collection by John Hardy