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As one of Australia's most successful supermodels, **Robyn Lawley** isn't afraid to use her voice. Now, the 33-year-old – who became the first “curve” model to appear in *Vogue Australia* – is fighting for change in fashion, one catwalk at a time. Taking aim at toxic diet culture and unattainable representations of beauty in the industry as well as on social media, the New York-based Lawley tells *Stellar*: “I find it horrifying. It's really dangerous. There are no limitations”

Photography STEVEN CHEE Styling IRENE TSOLAKAS
Interview NADIA SALEMME

In an era when fashion's obsession with rail-thin supermodels reigned, Robyn Lawley was an OG of body positivity. “My 30s are so much different to when I started – the confidence,” the now 33-year-old tells *Stellar*. “When you're 16... whatever they told me, I'd believe it. And if you're [told you're] not good enough, you believe those mentalities. I think [about] Instagram and social media... TikTok filters, even... [Imagining their impact], my head just blows up.”

Lawley's 2011 appearance in *Vogue Australia* as the magazine's first ever “plus-size” (now known as “curve”) model helped to reshape the way the industry looked at women who didn't fit the typical model mould. Earlier that year, the then 21-year-old Aussie had starred on the cover of *Italian Vogue*, just as a cohort of fellow curve models that included the UK's Sophie Dahl and America's rising star Kate Upton were also changing the face – and body – of fashion.

While fronting campaigns for Ralph Lauren, Mango and H&M, Lawley also became a regular star of the annual *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue after featuring as its first “plus-size” rookie in 2015. But her shake-up of the industry has extended far beyond her own successes. As well as headlining the first size-inclusive runway show at last year's Afterpay Australian Fashion Week, the New York-based Lawley has long been a critic of US lingerie giant Victoria's Secret and the absence of body diversity among its models, particularly in the aftermath of its 2018 fashion show – which was widely criticised for its lack of inclusivity – and the offensive comments made by the company's then chief marketing officer Ed Razek about plus-size and transgender models, for which he later apologised.

So what, *Stellar* asks, was her reaction to the recent announcement that Victoria's Secret plans to revive its fashion show this year, after a four-year hiatus?

“I rolled my eyes massively,” Lawley says of the news, while also recalling her outrage at the last show. “I thought, why didn't they include curve [models] in the 2018 show? It was like they reverted to skinnier [models]... I was just furious. I knew girls who were going through [castings for the show], personal friends who were starving themselves; I knew the situation on an inside level. It was making me more angry. They weren't fit and healthy, they were starving. [The show is] making this pedestal for teenage girls.

“That's why I said what I said [back then],” she explains. “If you say that kind of stuff, as a model, you get blacklisted – so it's a hard line to walk.”

And it seems that Victoria's Secret listened to its critics, with parent company L Brands overhauling its image to feature size-inclusivity and diverse models. “It's good that they've changed,” Lawley tells *Stellar*. “I think [the show] is definitely going to be the girls they're using now. It will be diverse; that's what I would assume they would do.”

Body positivity is a message that Lawley not only spreads among her 272,000 Instagram followers but also to her eight-year-old daughter, Ripley, whom she shares with her long-time partner, US lawyer Everest Schmidt. “[My daughter] has to see me confident in my body,” she says of her 188cm and size 12-14 frame. “I just want her to feel confident.” Asked if there has been one career moment that stands out as a making (or breaking) her own self-esteem, Lawley laughs. “I got sent down a runway in a G-string once,” she recalls. “I'm like, ‘oh my God! You just own it.’”

But she admits that self-confidence hasn't always come so easy, particularly at the start of her career. While growing up in the Sydney suburb of Gurraveen, Lawley landed her big break modelling for *Dolly* magazine at the age of 16. But it wasn't long before she found herself being bullied online “really heavily for not having a stupid thigh gap. I was featured on a thigh-gap website – and I didn't have a thigh gap. They were just, like, bullying [me]. I was 21 [and I] wrote an article [called ‘Why The Dangerous Thigh Gap Trend Makes Me Mad’],” she recalls. “[Trolls] can get nasty and they can get under your skin. Sometimes I comment back, sometimes I block them.”

And what you see of the model on social media is still the real deal. “I stay away from [photo-editing app] FaceTune – it's scary; I find it horrifying,” she says. “It's really dangerous. There are no limitations. It's this added pressure of everyone having this clear skin [and] f'cking huge lashes... Who has got the time for those faces? I hate it and I don't do it.”

While beauty has always been more than skin deep for Lawley, the life-threatening health issues she's suffered in recent years turned her health focus inwards. Following Ripley's birth, the model was diagnosed with the chronic autoimmune disease lupus as well as a rare condition called antiphospholipid syndrome, which causes blood clotting.

Lawley turned to a vegan diet to help manage her health, and recently signed with Australian brand Inika Organic – which makes cruelty-free and vegan cosmetics and skincare products – as both a brand ambassador and a judge for its sustainability grant initiative People With Purpose.

“What you put on your skin really matters to me,” she explains. “I went into the fashion world in New York going, ‘I'll wear whatever, I'll do whatever.’ [But] veganism... saved my life, I feel like I owe it. And as a curve model, I've never

had the ability to do make-up [modelling]; [it's] a new level.”

While Lawley says the modelling world is in “such a different era” to when she started out, and that toxic ideas around weight are slowly becoming outdated, she believes there's still a lot to be done. “I want it to be more size diverse and age diverse... The day will come, I hope.”

Reflecting on the super-thin models seen on the recent runways in Paris and Milan, Lawley notes: “My body size is still a challenge in this industry. We have diversity, finally,

included in those runways, but it's like the token ‘curve’ girl. We wanted to see it levelled out – we're wearing the clothes. I'm sick and tired of seeing these anorexic models sent down the runway. It's not healthy and it's not right.

“Your body is your house, basically,” she points out. “I've suffered so many health problems, nearly died so many times and woken up in [so many] hospitals that I don't care about any stupid diet. It's put my head in a different perspective.” ★
For details of *People With Purpose*, visit inikaorganic.com.



AHEAD OF THE CURVE
(from top) Robyn Lawley hitting the runway for The Curve Edit show at Afterpay Australian Fashion Week in Sydney last year; with her daughter Ripley in 2021.



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ROBYN WEARS
(this page) GUCCI blazer, gucci.com/au; SKIMS underwear, davidjones.com; TIFFANY & CO necklace, tiffany.com.au; (opposite) CHRISTOPHER ESBER shirt, theiconic.com.au; LEVI'S jeans, levis.com.au; SKIMS underwear, as before; TIFFANY & CO earrings (hoops), as before; GUCCI earrings (crosses) as before

This photo shoot was produced in partnership with Inika Organic

HAIR: RICHARD KAVANAGH USING REDKEN. MAKE-UP: KRISTYAN LOW USING SISEY PARIS. OTHER PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; INSTAGRAM: @ROBYNLAWLEY