

CASTING CALL

By Abby Fortin

The modeling industry is glamorous and mysterious to an outsider, but it isn't all catwalks and free flights.

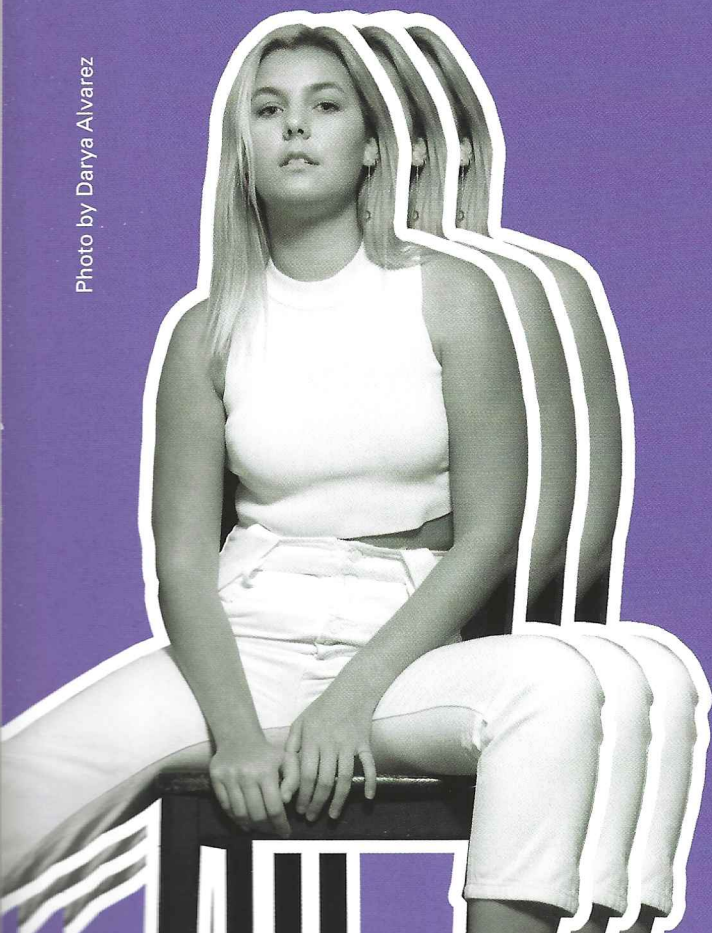
Many models experience underrepresentation, mistreatment and harassment, a side of the job that has hardly been publicized until recently, and many people in the profession are standing up to create change.

Caroline Fish, a Penn State senior and veteran model, started out in the industry when she was about 15 years old. After she was signed to Marilyn Agency in May 2015, she moved from southern New Jersey to New York City to live in an apartment with other models and to work without the commute.

"Diversity in the modeling industry is moving in a positive direction," Caroline says. "I don't think it is quite there yet, but it is making strides. It all starts with the brand itself, as well. The people who are in charge are the ones who are going to cast and hire the models."

Caroline uses the example of Victoria's Secret's recent shifts to show how change can begin with those in power. The former chief marketing officer of the mega-famous lingerie brand, Ed Razek, once implied he would never cast transgender models in the show. Following Razek's retirement, the company recently hired their first transgender model.

Photo by Danya Alvarez



"Times are changing and brands and companies are starting to realize that inclusivity is incredibly important when they are trying to appeal to customers," says Addie Sasaki, a first-year Penn State student who signed her first official modeling contract this summer.

People have begun to realize that the truest form of beauty is that of natural women and men and the fashion and modeling industries are starting to follow suit. Gone are the days when the runway was exclusive to 6-foot women with 23-inch waists and tiny noses — diversity is being demanded by both experts and fashion lovers around the world. Not only does the incorporation of more and more diversity into runway shows and ad campaigns show that these styles are meant for everyone, but it also helps to smash the decades-old idea that there is one specific way people should look.

"People with all different body types, identities and skin colors have been able to pursue modeling and other careers in the fashion industry due to this society of inclusivity," Addie says about the changing atmosphere in the industry.

For years and years, teen models as young as 14 have had the spotlight turned on them, showing an unattainable standard for beauty and youthfulness that is simply unrealistic for many girls and women. Although the modeling industry may be making strides toward inclusion and diversity, models are still facing unfair treatment at the hands of many higher-ups in the industry. The #MeToo movement, which gained notoriety in recent years, is focused on acknowledging the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault, especially within the entertainment industry.

At his death, veteran designer Karl Lagerfeld was remembered as a remarkable creative who helped many models reach their potential and strengthen their careers. A lesser known side of the late designer showed his disrespectful opinions of the models who walked in his shows. In an interview with Numéro Magazine close to the time of his death, Lagerfeld spoke out in disagreement with the #MeToo movement. In a controversial statement, he shared that he believed models should "join a nunnery," if they don't want to be mistreated in the industry. He also said, "If you don't want your pants pulled about, don't become a model."

To hear such a contentious statement come from a beloved industry star can be unnerving, and definitely leads us to wonder whether feminism and fashion could ever really mix. However, with the growing acceptance, within the industry, it seems that fashion and modeling may be changing for the better.

"The #MeToo movement is beyond important in the modeling industry," says Caroline. "When you are younger, as most models are, you are so afraid to speak up." Since Addie has only been in the industry for a short period of time, her experience at the hands of industry higher-ups is limited. However, she already recognizes that models who weren't born into the industry are not treated as well as those who were.

From the start of the #MeToo movement, social media has played a key role in helping models regain lost confidence and expose photographers and other players in the industry who have treated them unfairly or inappropriately. Instagram accounts like @diet_prada have become outlets to tell the stories of mistreated models, and in many cases, those who are exposed for their unprofessional actions have been fired after their stories have gone viral. For models, this life-changing movement has made an incredible difference in the way they go about their day-to-day work.

"Girls are now able to tell their agents about a client or a photographer who puts them in an uncomfortable position without getting backlash or affecting their careers," Addie says.

The #MeToo movement brought to light many unspoken issues present in the entertainment industries and has reached individuals all over the world, allowing them to speak out against the harassment they have faced in silence. ■