

INDUSTRY STANDARDS

A look at appearance and gender norms across industries

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As trends come and go and times change, the standards within industries do the same. The typical worker in any role changes repeatedly, whether in appearance or skills, leaving some students unsure of what expectations they will face in their future careers.

MODELING

An industry that has perpetuated high, selective standards is the modeling industry, known for its preference for tall, slim figures with Eurocentric features. This partiality towards such features leads many prospective models to rethink their career plans or lose their passion for modeling entirely. However, efforts to become more inclusive have been somewhat effective, giving hope to those who may not fit the “model body” stereotype.

Senior Jamie Chong, who started modeling two years ago, recalls her struggle to find an agency that would sign her because of her petite build. At the time, agencies still followed many strict height and size requirements, but they were taking gradual steps to be more inclusive. Working as a model, though, Chong witnessed much performative activism in the name of this so-called inclusivity.

“I’ve seen many agencies and fashion brands pride themselves in being diverse solely because they check off the box of having one curvy model or one Asian model, while the rest of their rosters or campaigns remain homogenous with tall, skinny, Eurocentric-looking models,” Chong said.

However, she notes that some industry leaders are starting to dismantle this standard, and inclusivity has increased significantly in the last couple of years. For instance, Rihanna’s Savage X Fenty Show in 2019 featured numerous models representing various demographics.

“I think the defining moment that gave me hope for diversity in the industry was witnessing how Rihanna’s show completely swept away the infamous Victo-

ria’s Secret Fashion Show by casting models of all races, sizes, heights, and gender identities,” Chong said.

She acknowledges that while brands have not always been mindful of the body dysmorphia, low self-esteem, and eating disorders that their practices promote, they are taking steps towards diversity and body positivity to mitigate the damage they caused in the past.

“It’s heartening to see more and more industry professionals now stepping up to prioritize diversity and come to realize that people want to see other people that look like them, rather than people they want to look like,” Chong said.

This awakening to inclusivity is completely different from what former model and Salt Agency CEO and Director Madeleine Almering encountered in the ‘90s. Now that the industry has become so much more inclusive, she finds it satisfying to see how the industry’s improvement, now prioritizing a model’s personality and brand being over looks.

“Now, I find that personality plays 50% in the role of whether or not somebody gets signed to an agency,” Almering said. “It’s not just, ‘Are they a pretty person?’ but, ‘Are they a nice person too?’ [and] ‘Do they have a good personality?’ Back in the ‘90s, that didn’t matter. It was just, ‘Are they tall, or if they’re 5’9” for a female [and] 6 feet tall for a male.’”

While modeling remains a beauty-based career field, many people have been excited to see these changes enacted over time. Almering notices that now, the line between influencers and models has been blurred, as influencers can now use their platforms to inspire other people, even though most of them aren’t picture-perfect supermodels.

“In New York, you couldn’t walk in the door, if you were under 5’9” before,” she said. “Now in New York, they have petite divisions at certain agencies, and they’ll take a model that’s 5’5” [if] she’s an influencer as well.”

Almering’s agency contributed to the move towards inclusivity as well, and part of it is designated for influencers that do not fit the traditional standards. She hopes to provide more room for freedom—with the models and with the public.

“Half of my agency is the lifestyle [and] commercial board. Lifestyle and commercial print has become huge since the ‘90s, and that means you don’t have to be a certain

40% BELIEVE DANCERS
MUST BE THIN TO HAVE
SUCCESSFUL CAREERS

32% BELIEVE MODELS
MUST BE THIN TO HAVE
SUCCESSFUL CAREERS

27% BELIEVE FEMALE TEACHERS
WHO WEAR MAKE UP ARE
TAKEN LESS SERIOUSLY

height, you don't have to be a certain age, and you don't have to be a certain weight," Almering said.

Modeling standards are moving in a positive direction in a victory for those who have wanted to see themselves represented by models of their race or body type on the screen for so long. While eliminating physical requirements in modeling entirely may be impossible, agencies are making a visible effort to make these standards more flexible.

STEM

Women have always been underrepresented in the STEM field, but despite this, many of them, including Neelima Budim, the director of software engineering at Cox Automotive, have gone on to prove their worth through hard work. Since becoming a successful engineer, Budim has watched as other young women felt held back by the lack of gender equality in the industry. Because of the backlash that girls in STEM face, she believes encouraging them to further their careers is extremely important, and her position at Cox Automotive allows her to do just that. Budim and her colleagues provide resources and opportunities for high school girls who want to pursue STEM careers and prepare them for the stigma they may have to face in the field.

"Especially [in] our department, there are quite a few folks who dedicate their time to volunteer for coding for girls, feminine technology with girls, [and] job shadowing," she said.

Compared to other more physically demanding jobs, she sees her specialty, computer science, as a field where women can really demonstrate their capabilities because the only thing that matters is how many errors a programmer's code contains and whether they can fix said errors, regardless of whether they are male or female.

"In computer science, you're just using your intellectual skills, and you're learning the ability to write code, so there isn't any field out there that speaks better to equality," Budim said.

While she has witnessed no intentional discouragement towards girls in STEM, she believes there are people in the U.S. who harbor an implicit bias against women.

"I don't think it is intentional. I feel like everybody has good intentions," Budim

said. "It's just that unconscious bias that you have, not even thinking about certain things that may make other people feel like they're less qualified or that they don't know what they may be talking about."

As an immigrant, Budim immediately noticed the lack of interest in STEM among women in the US, recalling how few females there were when she was working towards her master's degree in software engineering. Even out of these women, she found the majority were foreigners, not those born in the US.

"It didn't pose a barrier [for me], but for maybe girls that grew up here, they may be noticing those subtle, subtle messages, and maybe that's probably why they are taken aback and not showing that interest in this field," Budim says.

Michelle Heo, vice president and engineering head of Northview's Robotics team, the TechnoTitans, has experienced first-hand this implicit bias against girls in STEM. Over the past two years, she has worked to reduce gender disparities within the TechnoTitans.

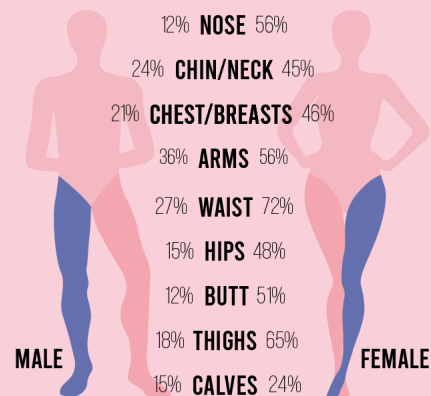
During Heo's first year on the team, she noticed gender stereotypes played a part in determining students' roles. While boys were allowed to work hands-on with the robots, girls were often assigned clerical tasks, like paperwork to their dismay, even as the year progressed.

"I initially signed up to help build the robot, and for the majority of my freshman season, I spent minimal time helping build mechanisms and instead organized the tools and wrote documents for our safety program," Heo said. "I was assigned these tasks while my male counterparts were allowed to work under the upperclassmen, helping them build robots while I strayed further and further from what I wanted to do."

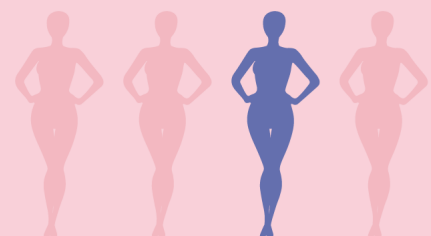
After being subject to this discrimination, Heo advocated for gender equality among the team towards the end of her freshman year, initiating training and pushing for better treatment of girls. While STEM workers of both genders are expected to be responsible and motivated, she sees a clear difference between how women and men are perceived.

"In regard to STEM fields, women, for a long time and even today, aren't seen as the driving forces or leaders in these fields," Heo said. "The typical 'female' standard, a woman who is motherly, organized, a good listener over a good leader, dominates the minds of many people, and though this seems like some ancient standard, it is still prevalent today."

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THEIR APPEARANCE

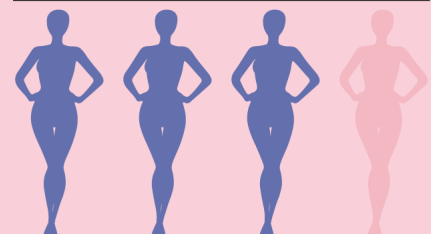


6 OUT OF 10 OF STUDENTS BELIEVE NORTHVIEW HIGH SCHOOL DOES NOT SUPPORT THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH BODY IMAGE ISSUES ENOUGH

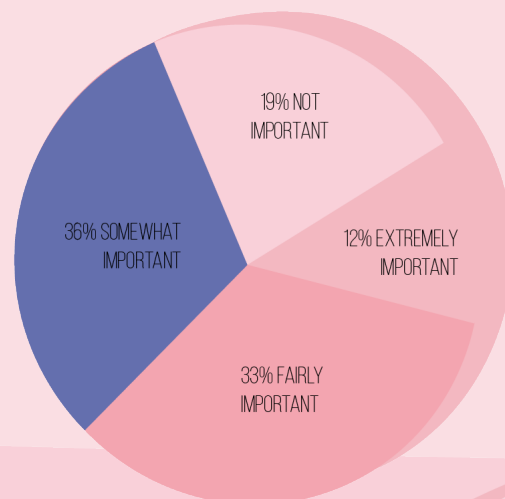


1 OUT OF 4 STUDENTS HAS HAD AN EATING DISORDER

9 OUT OF 10 STUDENTS WHO HAD AN EATING DISORDER DID NOT SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP



HOW IMPORTANT DO STUDENTS BELIEVE APPEARANCE IS IN THE FIELD OF THEIR INTEREST?



62% BELIEVE CONVENTIONALLY ATTRACTIVE WOMEN ARE TAKEN LESS SERIOUSLY IN STEM FIELDS

INFORMATION FROM A SURVEY OF 178 NHS STUDENTS