PERCEPTION OF THAI EMPLOYEES ON THE INFLUENCE OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND GROOMING ON NONVERBAL INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

[1]PIRAKORN SEEKHEM, [2]PATIPARN TIPSANGWAN

[1,2]Naresuan University International College, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand
E-mail: [1]pirakorn.seekhem@nu.ac.th, [2]patiparnt58@gmail.com

Abstract - The purposes of this study were to find out the perception of Thai employees working for Ocean Life Insurance Public Company Limited Head Office in Bangkok, Thailand, on the influence of physical appearance (skin color and weight) and grooming (clothing and accessories) on non-verbal interpersonal communication, and perception of how physical appearance and grooming affect professional opportunities. This study utilized a quantitative method by using questionnaires as data collection instrument. The sample group was 269 employees working for the head office. The findings showed that the physical appearance and grooming hardly affected on non-verbal interpersonal communication among Thai employees and on professional opportunities.

Index Terms - Grooming, Non-Verbal Interpersonal Communication, Physical Appearance, Professional Opportunities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Racism issues have been seen since the past. Well–known Holocaust of Adolf Hitler could be one of those examples. Until the present days, the fact that white people have higher opportunity than black people is still true in some organizations. According to Banerji (2006), "Dark–skinned African–Americans face a distinct disadvantage when applying for jobs, as compared to lighter–skinned applicants." According to C. Little, Benedict C. Jones, and Lisa M. DeBruine (2011), "Being more or less attractive has important social consequences and people do generally agree on who is and who is not attractive" (p.1651).

Catherine M. Daters also believed "Society recognizes the role of clothing as a communicator of information during social interaction and as an aid in the establishment of self–identity" (p.45). Currently, there are people with different races, nationalities, and appearances working in companies located in Thailand. Each has different attitudes toward himself and other people according to many factors including physical appearance and grooming. This study focused on the influence of skin color and weight which are considered as some of physical appearances, and clothing and accessories which are parts of grooming. This study investigated the perception of Thai employees in the Ocean life Insurance Plc Head Office on the influence of physical appearance and grooming on non-verbal interpersonal communication, and how physical appearance and grooming affect professional opportunities.

Moreover, this research will benefit new graduates in their future career and young professional in their current career if they are about to work or working in Thailand.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Physical Appearance

The physical appearance is an important factor that tends to affect the relationship between people in the society. In a research regarding face appearance, C. Little, C. Jones, M. DeBruine (2011) said that "Face preferences affect a diverse range of critical social outcomes, from mate about platonic relationships to hiring decisions and decisions about social exchange" (p.1638). Besides, G. Brunello, B. D' Hombres (2007) said that "Excessive body weight, or obesity (defined as BMI > 30), has been shown to be a handicap to social advancement, especially for women" (p.2).

Skin color is a big element of human appearance that tends to affect relationships of people in the society. Skin color discrimination is one of those complications we have seen in global society. In Thailand, most Thai people believe that fair skin, unlike dark skin, can help people build up their confidence. T. Joel Wade (1996) said in his report that "Fair-skinned females were expected to have higher self-esteem and self-ratings of attractiveness than dark-skinned females" (p.358). In Asian cultures, people believe that whiteness or white skin is an important factor for making female beauty. According to Eric P.H. Li Hjm. Rwb. Jk. (2008), "Whiteness" or having white skin is considered an important element in constructing female beauty in Asian cultures" (p.444).

B. Grooming

Ritu Mahajan (2007) pointed out that "Our society is obsessed with appearance. Both men and women, recognizing the value of an attractive appearance, constantly strive to improve their looks" (p.166). The same study has also shown that beyond facial characteristics, society measures people's appearance on variables such as grooming, dress, and use of

cosmetics. Ritu Mahajan (2007) mentioned that "Those who do not measure up to society's norms of aesthetics, appearance, and grooming are often perceived as lazy, incompetent, and less productive" (p.165). Therefore, it is not only these implicit biases affect social interactions, but they also affect one's opportunity to obtain employment.

C. Non-verbal Interpersonal Communication

Ashish Kumar Tiwari (2015) said that "Communication is the only tool to bridge to gap between individuals" (p.109). According to this researcher, there have only a fraction of the message people send and receive by exchanging of interpersonal communication verbally. The study showed that between 70 to 90% of the entire communication spectrum is nonverbal. The same study also revealed that facial expressions and body language are the most common way of nonverbal communication. According to Ashish Kumar Tiwari (2015), personal appearance is a sort of communication which gives the first impression; however, people can change their appearance by changing their clothing, styles, hairstyles, and other accessories or artifacts. Interestingly, the appearance does include the health of the body such as clean nails, and the cleanliness of clothing or grooming such as shiny shoes and being appropriately dressed. In interpersonal communication and especially at workplace, people always communicate with others by using both verbal and nonverbal forms. They do not only use one of these ways. Ashish Kumar Tiwari (2015) said that "In the workplace, people interact with each other throughout the workday using verbal and nonverbal communication" (p.113). Essentially, the way that people send and receive the nonverbal message is as important as verbal dialogue.

III. METHODS

A. Participants

The participants of this study were Thai employees in the head office of Ocean life Insurance Plc who were males or females between 20 to 60 years old with a work experience of 6 months or longer, and an educational background from vocational certification to higher.

B. Population and Sampling Technique

Due to the number of Thai employees at Ocean Life Insurance Plc in Bangkok, Thailand in April 2018 was 1,135 people, the researcher calculated the total sample size of population by using Yamane's formula with the confidence level at 95% and the acceptable sampling error 0.05%. The number of participants was 296 people. The convenience sampling method was used for selecting 296 Thai employees in the head office of the company. Those include males and females who were between 20 to 60 years old and have a 6-month or longer work experience.

C. Research Instrument

In this research, 4–part questionnaires were utilized as the instrument to collect data from the participants. The first part was the general information of Thai employees including gender, age, education level, work experience. The second part was the perception of employee on physical appearance, part three the perception of employee on grooming, and part four the perception of employee on the effect of appearance and grooming on professional opportunities.

D. Data Collection and Data Processing

Questionnaires were distributed to 296 Thai employees working at the head office of Ocean Life Insurance Plc. Those employees had 10 – 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The researcher provided a box for the participants to put the questionnaire after they finished filling in the answer. After all questionnaires were collected, the results were decoded into statistical numbers. The decoded numbers were analyzed by computer software.

E. Analysis Method

In this research, descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data. The demographic data of participants were analyzed by the percentage and frequency, and the opinion levels of the perception were 5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The data regarding how physical appearance and grooming affect nonverbal interpersonal communication among Thai employees at Ocean Life Insurance Plc, and how those affect their professional opportunities, were processed by the Standard Deviation (SD) and Mean.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Part One – Demographics of Participants: The results showed that 35.5% of respondents were males and 64.5% were females. More than one third of respondents (38.9%) were between 31-40 years old, 36.5% were 20-30 years old, and 11.1% were 51-60 years old. In terms of educational background, 77.0% of respondents graduated with a bachelor degree and 17.2% graduated with a master degree. Only 3.7% graduated with a high vocational certificate and 1.4% graduated with a vocational certificate. There were only 0.7% of respondents that graduated with a doctoral degree. Moreover, a large number of respondents (45.6%) had more than 5-year work experience, 18.9% had 3-4 year work experience, and there were only 9.1% who had 1-2 year work experience.

Part Two – Perception of employees: The average opinion levels of participants regarding skin color and its effect on non-verbal interpersonal communication in five aspects were interpreted as strongly disagreed to disagree ($\bar{x}$=1.70 with S.D.=0.899, $\bar{x}$=1.72 with S.D.=0.828, $\bar{x}$=1.68 with S.D.=0.841, $\bar{x}$=1.65 with S.D.=0.785, and $\bar{x}$=1.59 with S.D.=0.797). The data

revealed that most participants (more than 80% in all questions) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements: (1) "Skin color is the main factor affecting the contact with colleagues." (2) "The colleagues often show cold facial expression and do not smile with their interlocutors who have dark skin more than others who do not while talking." (3) "The colleagues often stand and sit by spacing from the interlocutors who have dark skin more than others who do not while talking." (4) "Employees with dark skin are often shown dissatisfied facial expressions by the colleagues when they ask for help or liaison more than others who have white skin." and (5) "Employees with dark skin are often improperly behaved by the colleagues more than others who have white skin."

Part Three – Perception of employees: The average opinion levels of participants regarding weight and its effect on non-verbal interpersonal communication in five aspects were interpreted as strongly disagreed to disagree, ($\overline{x}$=1.78 with S.D.=0.822, $\overline{x}$=1.75 with S.D.=0.860, $\overline{x}$=1.78 with S.D.=0.910, $\overline{x}$=1.69 with S.D.=0.776, and $\overline{x}$=1.70 with S.D.=0.903). The data revealed that most participants (more than 80% in all questions) either disagreed or strongly disagreed these statements: (1) "Weight is the main factor affecting the contact with colleagues." (2) "The colleagues often show cold facial expression and do not smile with their interlocutors who have heavyset body shape more than others who do not while talking." (3) "The colleagues often stand and sit by spacing from the interlocutors who have heavyset body shape more than others who do not while talking." (4) "Employees with heavyset body shape are often shown dissatisfied facial expressions by the colleagues when they ask for help or liaison more than others who have white skin." and (5) "Employees with heavyset body shape are often improperly behaved by the colleagues more than others who have white skin."

Part Four – Perception of employees: The average opinion levels of participants regarding clothing and its effect on non-verbal interpersonal communication in five aspects were interpreted as strongly disagreed to neutral ($\overline{x}$=2.28 with S.D.=1.018, $\overline{x}$=2.14 with S.D.=1.025, $\overline{x}$=2.02 with S.D.=0.978, $\overline{x}$=2.13 with S.D.=0.955, and $\overline{x}$=1.96 with S.D.=0.918). The data revealed that most participants (more than 60% in all questions) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements (1) "Clothing is the main factor affecting the contact with colleagues." (2) "The colleagues often show cold facial expression and do not smile with their interlocutors who do not dress properly more than others who dress properly while talking." (3) "The colleagues often stand and sit by spacing from the interlocutors who do not dress properly more than others who dress properly while talking." (4) "Employees who do not dress properly are often shown dissatisfied facial expressions by the colleagues when they ask for help or liaison more than others who dress properly." and (5) "Employees who do not dress properly are often improperly behaved by the colleagues more than others who dress properly."

Part Five – Perception of employees: The average opinion levels of participants regarding shoes, bag, accessories and their effect on non-verbal interpersonal communication in five aspects were interpreted as strongly disagreed to disagree ($\overline{x}$=1.97 with S.D.=0.913, $\overline{x}$=1.91 with S.D.=0.927, $\overline{x}$=1.85 with S.D.=0.893, $\overline{x}$=1.84 with S.D.=0.959, and $\overline{x}$=1.71 with S.D.=0.885). The data revealed that most participants (more than 70% in all questions) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements: (1) "Shoes, bag, accessories are the main factors affecting the contact with colleagues." (2) "The colleagues often show cold facial expression and do not smile with their interlocutors who do not use brand name shoes, bag, accessories more than others who use while talking." (3) "The colleagues often stand and sit by spacing from the interlocutors who do not use brand name shoes, bag, accessories more than others who use while talking." (4) "Employees who do not use brand name shoes, bag, accessories are often shown dissatisfied facial expressions by the colleagues when they ask for help or liaison more than others who use." and (5) "Employees who do not use brand name shoes, bag, accessories are often improperly behaved by the colleagues more than others who use."

Part Six – Perception of employees: The average opinion levels of participants regarding physical appearance and its effect on professional opportunities in four aspects were interpreted as strongly disagreed to disagree, ($\overline{x}$=1.89 with S.D.=0.971, $\overline{x}$=1.81 with S.D.=0.960, $\overline{x}$=1.74 with S.D.=0.855, $\overline{x}$=1.75 with S.D.=0.928). The data revealed that most participants (more than 70% in all questions) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that (1) "Employees who have white and healthy skin will have a better chance to be promoted than others who do not." (2) "Employees who have thin body shape will have a better chance to be promoted than others who do not." (3) "Employees who have white and healthy skin will be more positively evaluated and promoted than others who do not." and (4) "Employees who have thin body shape will be more positively evaluated and promoted than others who do not."

Part Seven – Perception of employees: The average opinion levels of participants regarding grooming and its effect on professional opportunities in four aspects were interpreted as strongly disagreed to neutral, ($\overline{x}$=2.66 with S.D.=1.106, $\overline{x}$=1.83 with S.D.=0.965, $\overline{x}$=2.50 with S.D.=1.141, $\overline{x}$=1.77 with S.D.=0.928). The data revealed that most participants (more than 80%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed in question (2) and (3) which were "Employees who use brand name shoes, bag, and accessories will have a better chance to be promoted than others who do not." and "Employees who use brand name shoes, bag, and accessories will be more positively evaluated and

promoted than others who do not." Moreover, with a smaller number of participants, more than 40% either disagreed or strongly disagreed in question (1) "Employees who dress properly will have a better chance to be promoted than others who do not," and more than 50% either disagreed or strongly disagreed in question (3) "Employees who dress properly will be more positively evaluated and promoted than others who do not."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

According to the gathered, analyzed and interpreted data which was collected from 296 respondents who were Thai male and female employees, whose ages were between 20 and 60 years old, the result showed that the physical appearance (skin color and weight) and grooming (clothing and accessories) hardly affected non–verbal interpersonal communication among Thai employees working at the head office of Ocean Life Insurance Plc. Moreover, the physical appearance and grooming also hardly affected professional opportunities of Thai employees working at the head office of this company.

B. Recommendations

Further study in this topic on a group or groups of the expatriate respondents is recommended in order to explore the perception of the foreigners working in Thailand or for Thai companies. The target company of this study is only one company in Bangkok, so the further research should investigate the employees' perception in companies in larger and various areas such in other provinces or regions. Moreover, the comparison of perceptions between Thai and international companies will be thought-provoking. Additionally, the mixed method of research data collection including quantitative and qualitative methods will help future researchers draw more in-depth findings from the respondents.

REFERENCES

[1] Brunello, G., & d'Hombres, B. (2007). Does body weight affect wages?: Evidence from Europe. Economics & Human Biology, 5(1), 1-19.

[2] Carr, D., & Friedman, M. A. (2006). Body Weight and the Quality of Interpersonal Relationships. Social Psychology Quarterly,69(2), 127-149. doi:10.1177/019027250606900202

[3] C. T. (2015). Re: What is racism in Thailand like? [Web log comment]. Retrieved October 12, 2018, from https://www.quora.com/What-is-racism-in-Thailand-like-I-was-wondering-which-races-Thais-preferred-the-most-Whites-and-Orientals-are-probably-at-the-top-do-they-prefer-Indians-to-blacks-Does-skin-colour-matter-Do-they-still-hate-Muslims

[4] Chittiphalangsri, P. (2017, July 24). **"ไทยแลนด์" แดนเหยียดผิว จริงหรือ**? –**จจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย**. Retrieved October 12, 2018, from https://www.chula.ac.th/cuinside/2512/

[5] Drake, M. F., & Ford, I. M. (1979). Adolescent clothing and adjustment. Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 7(5), 283-291.

[6] Daters, C. M. (1990). Importance of clothing and self-esteem among adolescents. Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 8(3), 45-50.

[7] Fisher, S. (1986). Development and structure of the body image. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

[8] Feinberg, R. A., Mataro, L., & Burroughs, W. J. (1992). Clothing and social identity. Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 11(1), 18-23.

[9] Fiske, A. P. (1992). The four elementary forms of sociality: framework for a unified theory of social relations. Psychological review, 99(4), 689.

[10] Gómez Cervantes, A., & Kim, C. (2015). Male immigrants with darker skin have fewer job opportunities than women and those with lighter skin. USApp-American Politics and Policy Blog.

[11] Han, E., Norton, E. C., & Powell, L. M. (2011). Direct and indirect effects of body weight on adult wages. Economics & Human Biology, 9(4), 381-392.

[12] Harrison, M. S., & Thomas, K. M. (2009). The hidden prejudice in selection: A research investigation on skin color bias. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 39(1), 134-168.

[13] Herring, C. (2009). Does diversity pay?: Race, gender, and the business case for diversity. American Sociological Review, 74(2), 208-224.

[14] Li, E. P., Min, H. J., & Belk, R. W. (2008). Skin lightening and beauty in four Asian cultures. ACR North American Advances.

[15] Little, A. C., Jones, B. C., & DeBruine, L. M. (2011). Facial attractiveness: evolutionary based research. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 366(1571), 1638-1659.

[16] Lipman, V. (2018). How Your Clothes Can Help You Get Promoted. Retrieved October 12, 2018, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/victorlipman/2018/06/08/how-your-clothes-can-help-you-get-promoted/#251153f17e47

[17] MacGillivray, M. S., & Wilson, J. D. (1997). Clothing and appearance among early, middle and late adolescents. Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 15(1), 43-49.

[18] Madell, R. (2012). Your Looks and Your Job: Does Appearance Affect Advancement?.

[19] Mahajan, R. (2007). The naked truth: Appearance discrimination, employment, and the law. Asian Am. LJ, 14, 165.

[20] McQuail, D., & Windahl, S. (2015). Communication models for the study of mass communications. Routledge.

[21] Onwuachi-Willig, A. (2007). The admission of legacy blacks. Vand. L. Rev., 60, 1138.

[22] Popkins, N. C. (1998). Natural characteristics that influence environment: How physical appearance affects personality. Retrieved September, 7, 2010.

[23] Thianthai, C. (2006). Influential sources affecting Bangkok adolescent body image perceptions. International journal of adolescent medicine and health, 18(4), 633-642.

[24] Tiwari, A. K. (2016). Non-verbal communication-an essence of interpersonal relationship at workplace. Management Insight, 11(2).

[25] Wade, T. J., & Bielitz, S. (2005). The differential effect of skin color on attractiveness, personality evaluations, and perceived life success of African Americans. Journal of Black Psychology, 31(3), 215-236.

[26] Wade, T. J. (1996). The relationships between skin color and self-perceived global, physical, and sexual attractiveness, and self-esteem for African Americans. Journal of Black Psychology, 22(3), 358-373.

[27] Wang, H. (2009). Nonverbal communication and the effect on interpersonal communication. Asian Social Science, 5(11), 155.

★★★