"Make-upping" the Suppression": A Qualitative Inquiry in the Modelling Industry in Sri Lanka

A.K.K.R. Jayathilaka[1], K.P.B. Karunarathne[2], M.T.S Perera[3] and P.S. Dissanayake[4]

[1]*Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka*
[2]*Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka*
[3]*Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka*
[4]*Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka*

[3]*Corresponding Author: tharindusandaruwan@sjp.ac.lk*

ABSTRACT

Because of the rational job environment throughout the industrial period, where emotions would interfere with good judgment, workplace emotions were neglected. The idea of emotional labour, where people traded their emotions for money, has grown significantly with the rise of the service economy. More specifically, in order to enhance job results in the modelling industry, academics are starting to look into how companies manage emotions. Despite the stigma and preconceptions, the sector still endures as a result of the culture that has developed in the Sri Lankan environment, it is rapidly expanding. However, this industry receives relatively little consideration when it comes to performing research. Combining these two, the primary research question of this study attempts to answer is how the Sri Lankan models carry out emotional labour. By employing convenience sampling to choose a sample of female graduates, a series of eight (08) interviews were included since the researchers felt that they were knowledgeable about the phenomenon. Using thematic analysis, the two main themes were found to be "Charming Clients: Turning on the Fascination" and "Building Impressions: Replicating It." Despite the fact that the results were largely consistent with the global context, there were hints of the culture's influence in Sri Lanka. The researcher hopes to draw the conclusion that changing women's perceptions of modelling as a viable career path is necessary.

Keywords: emotional labour, modelling, modelling industry, sri lanka

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the universe of modelling, there is a variety of modelling types; from glamour modelling, to fitness modelling, through to bikini modelling, fine-art, commercial print modelling and body parts modelling. Legally, a professional model is a person who, "performs modelling services for; or consents in writing to the transfer of his or her exclusive legal right to the use of his or her name, portrait, picture or image, for advertising purposes or for the purposes of trade" (Wissinger, 2007, p. 251). Being a model is always much more than posturing for a photo or walking the fashion runway. Beauty, style or glamour will be the product used for promotion, a commercial campaign or even a piece of art. Model will be the person catching people's eyes for them to notice a particular message and/or information wanted from the company that has hired the model.

Hochschild introduced the concept of emotional labour, where scholars have been developed the concept further. Emotional labour is the "effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions" according to Morris and Feldman (1996, p. 98), or in Arlie Hochschild's (1983, p. 7 as cited in Wissinger, 2007, p. 259) well known definition, the effort to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain an outward appearance that produces the proper state of mind in others". Models do emotional labour because "the work of modelling requires the creation of illusions and because emotional labour allows them to resist the stereotype of being just a pretty face and a slim body" (Mears & Finlay, 2005, p. 335). Accordingly, models do perform emotional labour as they manage emotions while performing at work in order to fulfil the job needs. This attempt is to explain whether the models perform emotional labour and why.

The reason for studying the models is to illuminate an aspect of emotional labour that has received little attention in the sociologic literature (Mears & Finlay, 2005). Even though few researches have been carried on the area of emotional labour and modelling industry/models, researches on the Sri Lankan context are rather rare. Bridging the gap in literature the study

endeavours to find answers for the question of 'how the Sri Lankan models perform emotional labour' as still the Sri Lankan modelling industry is in the infant stage compared to the global modelling industry.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotions play a major role in any of our life domains; thereby involving workplace is not exceptional. In industrialized society emotions were ignored in organisational setting (Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman,1998; Putnam & Mumby, 1992) by dint of specific reasons such as emotions concerned as the impediment to instrumental goal of the business organisations (Tran, 1998), subjectivity nature of emotions make them hard to measure (Arvey, Renz, & Watson, 1998) and emotions considered as irrational(Grandey,2000). With the emergence of service based society to effectively perform duties at workplace the hidden role of emotions put forth by Hochschild, an American sociologist. By relying on the dramaturgical perspective Hochschild (1979) defined emotional labour as the labour needs to express desired emotions which are required by or to align with organisational rules during service interaction. Through the seminal work of Hochschild- the Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feelings- firmly opposed the way of commodification of emotions in the form of customer service. Although the emotional labour employed by the flight attendant and debt collectors were discussed in Hochschild's thesis nowadays the various forms of emotional labour have been studied namely studies of schoolteachers, psychotherapists, holiday representatives, call Centre workers, nurses, Disneyland workers, retail and childcare workers, , bar staff, waiters and many others (Steinberg & Figart, 1999; Bolton, 2005). By reflecting upon each of studies they implicitly complied with exploitative and subordinated nature of emotional labour in various degrees in which explicit condemnation of emotional labour revealed by Hochschild. In Witz et al.'s (2003) expanded Hochschild' thesis by adding new dimension to emotional labour called 'aesthetic labour' which commodifies service workers' appearance and sexuality as 'display'. Another development of emotional labour can be seen as adding feminist dimension to emotional labour which centres on the socially reproduced, gendered commodification of emotion in organisations, and on the related feminisation of most service work (Colley, 2006).

According to Hochschild (1979) emotional labour is more than the physical and mental labour discussed by Marx (1975) which is concerned as a result of a coordination of mind and arm, mind and finger, and mind and shoulder. She asserted that the human cost of performing emotional labour is harmful because labour needs to suppress or induce her/his true feeling in order to exhibit outward appearance which produces expected state in the consumer's mind demanded by the organisation he/she works. Therefore, she defines 'emotional labour' as managing emotions at workplace for wage. In contrast, managing emotions in the private sphere of our lives, such as amongst family, friends and etc. refers as 'emotional work'. The process of emotional labour at workplace takes places due to two reasons. First, the one of unique characteristic of services- consumer act as a co-producer of service- makes consumer more powerful than a worker in the organisation. Thus, consumer always frames as right party even they are either wrong or misbehaved. Second, the quality of services delivered is determined by emotional display of employees which is governed by codified rules imposed by management. Hochschild (1979) proposed that emotional labour occurs in two forms at the workplace; surface acting and deep acting. In surface acting, the frontline employees need to be expressed feelings although they did not really feel whereas in deep acting, employees induce to exhibit feelings while allowing themselves to truly feel in that way. Hochschild (1979) points out that tricking the emotions of employees in order to perform in required manner by management over long periods will lead to emotive dissonance which is a conflict rising between what is really felt with what has to be feigned. However, the ultimate outcome of the emotional labour process is that the worker becomes alienated from his/her self. In other words, the management is estranged the emotions of frontline workers in terms of forming, timing, giving and withdrawal of feelings, moods and their display through their formal ownership and control.

Models work in a fascinating "space of liminality, in which the boundaries between images and reality are often blurred" (Wissinger, 2007, p. 250). Looking in from the outside, the job of modelling seems fairly simple (Wissinger, 2007). He or she will transfer the right to their image "directly to a retail store, manufacturer, an advertising agency, a photographer, or a publishing company" (Wissinger, 2007, p. 251). The 'services' in question include "the appearance by a professional model in photographic sessions or the engagement of such model in live, filmed or taped modelling performance for remuneration" (Wissinger, 2007, p. 251). In other words, models appear in person, or in photographs, either in advertisements or to promote commercial transactions (Wissinger, 2007).

Models engage in delicate forms of commodifying themselves, to create an appearance that will sell on the model market (Wissinger, 2009). In so doing, "they work to appear as if they live 'the life', grooming to produce a fashionable 'look', wearing the most fashionable clothes, going to the most fashionable parties" (Wissinger, 2009, p.274). Turning her body into an object to be criticized and worked on is one way in which a model can increase her chances of getting a job (Mears & Finlay, 2005). Another is by using her personality or charm to persuade agents and clients—to engage in emotional labour (Mears & Finlay, 2005). Persuading agents and clients is not the only reason for their emotional labour as they also do it

because the work of modelling requires the creation of deceptions and because emotional labour allows them to counterattack the stereotype of being just a pretty face and a slim body (Mears & Finlay, 2005). Wissinger, (2009) in her study, states that even after they work to produce a 'desirable image', in the field or network they have to maintain the image in the 'quasi-professional social settings'. Further she elaborates that "in so doing, models and their peers contribute to the subtle ways branding now gets done, insofar as it plays on meaning by association, in which a mood or feeling can be attached to a product simply by getting it into the hands of a culturally attractive crowd, such as the one found in the modelling world" (p. 292). Therefore, it can be argued that emotional labour makes them stronger in the career.

III.   METHODOLOGY

Series of interviews was the research methodology incorporated. In the research semi-structured interviews were conducted as many scholars have stated that a semi structured interview is a verbal interchange of ideas and interpretations in between interviewee and interviewer. In which the interviewer wants to elicit information from another person through inquiring questions (Clifford et al., 2016). Through this method the researcher was able to clarify the areas that were vague in nature by paving path for an open discussion. Even though a list of predetermined questions was prepared beforehand, these semi structured interviews are offering the researches the chance to explore issues in which they feel important (Clifford et al., 2016). Hence, this method became an advantage, for the researcher to direct and change the interview process when the participants were deviating from the research objectives.

Since the population of the study is models in Sri Lanka, the sample consisted of eight (08) young female graduate models between age of 24 and 28 who are actively engaged in modelling industry. Only the female models were incorporated into the study as the researcher believes that there are fewer jobs available which are significantly less than their female peers (Entwistle, 2002). All the eight (08) participants are 'runway models', where three (03) of them were also 'commercial models'. When selecting the sample researcher incorporated convenience sampling due to the prevailing condition in the country. The reason for selecting graduate models was due to the researcher's perception that the graduates might have a higher level of understanding and explanation capacity on the considered topic. Apart from the primary data collection, magazines, journals, scholarly books and other data sources were referred in order to gather additional data.

Thematic analysis was used, in order to analyse the data, as this had been used widely in qualitative approach to research (Nowell at al., 2017). Further, thematic analysis facilitated to analyse the data, as it enables to compare different concepts that have mentioned by the participants. It is stated that thematic analysis is identifying themes or patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process towards the final outcome was familiarizing with data, Generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There the researcher identified two main themes and patterns within the collected data. The two themes are 'charming clients: turning on the fascination' and 'building impressions: replicating it'. Under the first theme, how models win the clients are discussed in the means of being polite or friendly, gifting, flattering and adopting to client's personality. The second theme addressed how models create illusions where models fake their emotions, personal satisfaction and feelings.

IV.   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Charming Clients: Turning on the Fascination

Models engage in 'strategic friendliness' toward agents, bookers, clients, and photographers (Mears & Finlay, 2005). Strategic Friendliness as per Mears and Finlay (2005) is a form of emotional manipulation of another person, using friendliness, politeness, and tact, to achieve a desired outcome. All the participants agreed on the fact that they are being polite and friendly with the clients, with an unconscious intention of maintaining a better relationship for the future benefits. Few models expressed that even though they will not be working with the same client again, for the sake of their reputation they act the same. Only two of the participants were bold enough to say that they do it purposefully, which involves bringing in gifts to the clients, once the work is finished.

Even though flattering or criticized them without damaging the relationship is common in other modelling contexts like USA, from the findings such pattern was not identified relating to Sri Lankan context. As well as per the researcher's perception this might be a result of the Sri Lankan culture, where high power distance is embedded within (Irfan, 2016). Where people are still afraid to criticize to the face and rather prefer to talk behind the back. But joking and flattering clients are common even in the Sri Lankan modelling industry. The same was mentioned by Mears and Finlay (2005) where having a chat or making a joke or using a little bit of the sense of humor to are common while working with different clients.

Adapted the behaviour to the client's personality is another way of charming clients. The participants expressed that 'More energy!', 'Give it to me!', 'I've got to see the fire in your eyes!', 'Where is the mood!', 'Show the fierce' are few of the commands which the models often heard from clients. Models are often admonished to produce energy in this way (Wissinger,

2007). Always, the models' work is more physically expressive than verbal; successful models can be exquisite communicators without saying a word (Wissinger, 2007). No matter how frustrated the model might be about being rejected or about any other difficulties she might be experiencing, she had to put on a bright, cheerful face each time she walked into a go-see (Mears & Finlay, 2005). The models also believe that their personality or energy, even though it is faked, will be revealed in their work.

Building Impressions: Persevering It

Models have to act, that is, express in their faces and bodies the feelings that the client and photographer want to associate with the particular product that is being modelled (Mears & Finlay, 2005). When inquiring about any physical discomfort while modelling the product the answer of all the full time models were 'Yes', one stated that she is used to it, 'I always look forward to it (physical discomfort)'. As per the participants' view the part times models have not come across such discomforts yet in their career. The discomfort was in terms of climate, size of the dresses, no sit downs, and privacy. They were afraid of speaking out as they feared of losing future opportunities. These feelings expressed at work may be quite different from a model's true feelings, particularly if the acting requires her to assume a difficult or uncomfortable position (Mears & Finlay, 2005).

What the researcher found most fascinating about the models' work is that in order to thrive, most models have to develop special sense about the energy they work with. In so doing, they become attuned to shifts in energy occurring below the surface of awareness (Wissinger, 2007). No matter how uncomfortable a model may be, it is crucial for the job (and her career) that she accept the discomfort and mask her true feelings—at least while she is working (Mears & Finlay, 2005). The models admitted that they eventually learn to focus on other things whenever they encounter discomfort. Not only that they try to focus on the work going on while mesmerizing about the future career they have to achieve ahead.

A significant finding of the study is that the models do emotional labour not only for the material benefits, but also for their personal satisfaction. They try to create dignity in the industry by masking the feelings and emotions facially and physically. It is always expressed explicitly in the industry that the clients need to be able to identify that special something within a person (Gunawardhana, 2017). It is not just about finding a pretty face; it's about finding the perfect balance, that it is needed to be found people that are willing to walk that extra mile and work hard to become a personality in this industry (Gunawardhana, 2017). Even the participants believe that other than being beautiful, the extra energy is needed to make them standout.

The participants stated that they were initially very awkward about approaching modelling, but later tried give it a solid try. Accordingly, the worst that could happen was that they didn't enjoy it. They admit that they have learnt and grown so much, where that awkward early ages are long gone (Munagamage, 2020). They love learning how this narration is best expressed and progresses (Munagamage, 2020). They are enjoying the fact that in each assignment, they get to be someone else and do something new. The significance of models' emotional labour is that it realizes twin goals: the manipulation of others and the assertion of their own worth (Mears & Finlay, 2005).

V.   CONCLUSION

According to the data collected and analysed the foremost challenge they face is dealing with the stigma and stereotypes around modelling. According to the researchers observations and the contextual experience this is due to the cultural conventional. Unfortunately, the general opinion in Sri Lanka is that modelling is not a legitimate career option and for women, it should be changed. The mind-set has to change and it is the new generation that must continue to communicate to the public that modelling should be considered seriously and that it is certainly a worthy professional choice. The Sri Lankan culture is not very accepting of Sri Lankan female models; community look down on, underestimate, and trivialise. As per the researcher's observation and participants' responses it was realized how much work and sacrifice is required to do this job. Thus the mentality should be reformed and should continue to work to set it straight.

The major limitation that the researcher faced is that only few aspects were addressed. The intention of the study is to explore how the Sri Lankan models perform emotional labour. The researcher suggests for the future researchers to address the same question in the aspects which the researcher was not able to achieve due to the restrictions and limitations faced as a young female. Also by moving further since there is a lack of research study done relating to emotional labour performed in the Sri Lankan context there is a gap remaining to be filled with respect to the other industries.

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