

EO Files (January 2010)

“Things We Do, People We Meet - Reflections in Brief”

Who’s the Prettiest of Them All?

Every now and then we receive feedback from the public expressing their concerns on issues related to equal opportunities. One such issue that keeps coming up is the common perception towards physical beauty and the effect it has on people.

People belonging to different races have different features, complexion and characteristics. Likewise, people with disabilities may also have different appearance or features. People of different age group and body structure also look different. Everybody has his/her own unique beauty or characteristic. However, consciously or unconsciously, people have developed certain perceptions towards beauty, which could be very subjective. While not everyone may meet the “requirements” of perfect beauty in a society, everyone deserves to live life with dignity.

Unfortunately, some people pay too much attention to beauty and appearance and, therefore, those who do not conform to those established “requirements” are stereotyped. Stereotyping based on appearance sometimes leads to discrimination against people who do not meet the so-called “requirements” of physical beauty, which is unfair.

Idealized or commercialized beauty standards can be highly damaging. It puts tremendous physical and psychological pressure on the youth to fit into today’s concept of ideal beauty, failing which they lose their self-esteem and confidence. Very often we read news about young celebrities succumbing to anorexia and bulimia. This is having an impact on our society too. According to Hong Kong Eating Disorder Association Limited (HEDA), eating disorder is on rise among Hong Kong girls, with above 50% in 16-25 age group.

Portrayal of women in media isn’t helping too. Every day we are exposed to unrealistic body images and “pre-defined beauty”. From TV commercials, movies, magazine covers to advertisements, we only see thin, fair and perfect models. This leads young people to compare

themselves with the models. A survey conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) last year revealed that advertisements, magazine covers and newspapers reinforced gender stereotypes of women and led to belief that women are valued by their physical appearance

(<http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/GraphicsFolder/ShowContent.aspx?ItemID=8263>)

We are highly alarmed by this trend of according higher importance to appearance than talent and inner qualities. “Misconceived” public perception has negative effect on people and often leads to wrong judgment. If we start assessing people only by their appearance, this will become an accepted norm in society. Those with potential or inner quality but lacking in so-called physical beauty would then be marginalized and would not get equal opportunities for developing their potential. This can be highly demoralizing and discouraging. We strongly believe that every individual should have equal access to opportunities irrespective of their background, social situation, race, physical ability, health condition or appearance. Whether or not they meet the perceived “requirements” of physical appearance or beauty, every individual has his/her own unique abilities. Instead of wasting time focusing on irrelevant factors such as good appearance and external beauty, we should try to appreciate the uniqueness in people and respect their capabilities, character, strength and inner beauty.

The EOC is mandated by law to administer the anti-discrimination ordinances of Hong Kong and promote social integration and equal opportunities. We believe that respecting and supporting one another is the key to a better society. We have stepped up our efforts to promote equal opportunities to all by raising awareness on the importance of inclusion and acceptance in Hong Kong through our promotional and outreach activities. As the new year begins, we hope more people will take this opportunity to reflect on our social values and embrace diversity.

Related online resources:

News Releases

2009/06/09 - [Thematic Household Survey on Racial Acceptance](#)

2008/10/03 - [The Study on Public Perception of Portrayal of Female Gender in the Hong Kong Media](#)

EOC articles from “[THINGS WE DO, PEOPLE WE MEET - Reflections in Brief](#)”

2009/12 - [Mainstreaming people with disabilities](#)

2008/03 - [Discrimination Hurts: In Memory of Li Ching \(1\)](#)

2008/03 - [Indecent photos on the Internet \(1\) -- In Perspective](#)

17/04/2009 - [Gender Equality and Gender Respect – Media and Societal Culture, Where Do We Go from Here?” Seminar](#)

Videos on the EOC YouTube Channel

[“Gender & Media Seminar - Video Highlights \(Part 1\)”](#) (Chinese only)

[“Gender & Media Seminar - Video Highlights \(Part 2\)”](#) (Chinese only)

[“On the Way”](#)