

The Role of Aesthetic Labor in Human Resource Management Practices: A Qualitative Study¹

İnsan Kaynakları Yönetimi Uygulamalarında Estetik Emegın Rolü: Nitel Bir Araştırma

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of aesthetic labor in human resource management practices and to present a descriptive framework of aesthetic labor experiences. The study, which adopted a phenomenological design, focused on cabin officers, sales consultants, human resources managers and store managers in the aviation and retail sectors. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, by phone or online video chat. Content analysis method was used in the research. The findings of the study are presented under the themes of "selection", "employee training", "disciplinary practices", "performance evaluation", "employee rewarding" and "dismissal". As a result of the research, it was observed that candidates were evaluated according to aesthetic criteria determined for their appearance, speaking style and demeanor in recruitment interviews. In order to improve aesthetic effort, employees are given trainings on hair, make-up, grooming, uniforms and customers. Disciplinary practices, supervision and warnings are experienced intensively.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetic Labour; Human Resource Management; Interactive Service Works; Qualitative Research

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, insan kaynakları yönetimi uygulamalarında estetik emegın rolünün incelenmesi ve estetik emek deneyimlerine ilişkin betimsel bir çerçeve sunulmasıdır. Fenomenoloji deseninin benimsendiğı çalışmada, havacılık ve perakende sektörlerindeki kabin memurları, satış danışmanları ve insan kaynakları yöneticileri ile mağaza yöneticilerine odaklanılmıştır. Araştırmada, amaçlı örnekleme yöntemlerinden ölçüt, maksimum çeşitlilik ve kartopu örnekleme stratejileri kullanılmıştır ve mülakatlar yüz yüze, telefonla veya çevrim içi görüntülü konuşma şeklinde yapılmıştır. Araştırmada, içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın bulguları "seçim", "çalışan eğitimi", "disiplin uygulamaları", "performans değerlendirme", "çalışan ödüllendirme" ve "işten çıkarma" temaları ile sunulmuştur. Araştırma sonucunda; adayların işe alım mülakatlarında görünüm, konuşma tarzı, tavırlarıyla ilgili belirlenen estetik kriterlere göre değerlendirildiğı görülmüştür. Estetik emegı geliştirme amacıyla çalışanlara saç, makyaj, bakım, üniforma ve müşterilerle ilgili eğitimler verilmektedir. Disiplin uygulamaları, gözetim ve uyarıların yoğun şekilde deneyimlendiğı ortaya çıkmıştır.

ANAHTAR KELİMELELER

Estetik Emek; İnsan Kaynakları Yönetimi; Etkileşimli Hizmet İşleri; Nitel Araştırma.

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INTRODUCTION

The main reason for the reflection of aesthetics, whose roots are as old as the history of humanity, on working life and gaining importance in organizational terms is seen as the expectations and wishes of customers. Aiming to appeal to the visual and auditory senses of customers, businesses have turned control over the bodies, speech, voice tones and attitudes of employees (Seçer, 2016: 38; Nickson, Warhurst, & Dutton, 2005: 197-198). In areas where aesthetic standards are adopted, the construction of the organizational body takes place through uniforms, make-up, diet and certain surveillance tools (Hancock & Tyler, 2000: 123).

The problem of the research is how aesthetic labor plays a role in human resource management practices and how to describe the experiences of aesthetic labor in working life. This study aims to contribute to the field in various aspects. When the related literature (Warhurst et al., 2000; Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Ren, 2017) is examined, it is seen that aesthetic labor is mostly examined in human resource management practices such as recruitment, training and development, so the role of this form of labor in HRM practices is clarified and the gap in the field is tried to be filled. The aim of this study is to examine the role of aesthetic labor in human resource management practices and to provide a descriptive framework for aesthetic labor experiences. It is aimed to describe the phenomenon of aesthetic labor on a holistic basis. Describing the phenomenon of aesthetic labor in the context of the experiences of employees and managers sheds light on the service sector and academic studies in this field by presenting a picture of this phenomenon in working life.

Wolkowitz (2006) stated that there are not enough studies on the views and attitudes of employees towards aesthetic labor (2006: 98). Tsaur and Tang (2013) mentioned that the results of aesthetic labor from the perspective of employees have not been clarified in the relevant literature (2013: 19). In this study, it is attempted to reveal how aesthetic labor is made sense of by employees, their views on rules, warnings and supervision mechanisms, and their lived experiences.

In the first part of the study, the theoretical framework related to aesthetic labor and human resource management has been examined. In the next section, detailed information about the methodology is explained. The findings of the research are presented with themes. In the last section, the results and limitations of the research are mentioned.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Aesthetic Labor and Human Resource Management

Although the roots of aesthetics are as old as the history of mankind, the reflection of aesthetics on working relations and its gaining importance in the organizational context are largely recent (Seçer, 2016: 38). Concerns about the appearance and demeanor of employees began with the imposition of certain dress codes and grooming standards on frontline workers greeting customers in luxury department stores (Williams and Connell, 2010: 353). According to historian Susan Benson, the main reason for this was customers' accusations of a lack of respect for the appearance and demeanor of saleswomen in service delivery. Particularly for picky customers, saleswomen who look unattractive, dress poorly, have a strange style, and appear disorganized and sloppy can be offensive (Benson, 1986: 26).

Particularly in the service sector, strategies for institutionalizing customer-related practices have led to greater control over the labor processes of employees who interact face-to-face with customers. Employers have attempted to organize the labor of service sector workers to appeal to the cultural tastes of their target customers (Otis, 2008: 18).

Physical attractiveness has an important place in business environments involving face-to-face communication with customers, where the idea of "pretty is good" is the driving force, and employers look for certain stylized qualities in potential employees (Dashper, 2013: 142; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972).

The phenomenon of aesthetic labor, which is at the focus of these searches, was first introduced by Chris Warhurst, Dennis Nickson, Anne Witz and Marie Cullen in their study "Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work: Some Case Study Evidence from the 'New' Glasgow" (2000). In the service sector, businesses face different and complex problems in managing service delivery where employee and customer interaction takes place. The solution to the problems is possible only if the personalities of the employees are suitable for the job. Such changes and problems in the service sector require the development of new approaches to practices related to the recruitment, training and management of employees (Warhurst, et al., 2000: 3).

Studies on aesthetic labor are largely based on Bourdieu's Distinction 1984. In this study, Bourdieu tries to explain class differences in a wide range of aesthetic tastes and lifestyles through habitus (Swartz, 2018: 155). Bourdieu considers habitus as the sociality that materializes into the body (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2003: 119). The aesthetic capacity and qualities of employees can be explained by Bourdieu's concept of dispositions

related to language, dress code, attitude, style, size and shape of the body (Warhurst et al., 2000: 6). Employers prefer to hire employees who already embody a certain habitus (Williams and Connell, 2010: 352). Aesthetic labor skills and qualities constructed by age, gender and class are also a certain reflection of social and cultural capital (Pettinger, 2004: 177).

Aesthetic labor is defined as the commercialization of the physical characteristics, attitudes and behaviors that employees possess and exhibit from the moment they apply for a job by employers through recruitment, training and development activities in the name of aesthetic service provision (Warhurst, et al., 2000: 4). Businesses can organize certain qualities and skills of their employees to appeal to the visual and auditory senses of customers. Employee qualities such as "looking good and speaking well" provide a competitive advantage in service delivery and thus employees become an embodiment of the company image and an intrinsic part of tangible products (Nickson, Warhurst, Dutton, 2005: 197- 198). Employees who are aesthetically designed are made suitable for providing a stylish service to customers (Warhurst, et al., 2000: 4). Aesthetic labor includes certain qualities such as beauty, performance and polite behavior (Quinn, 2008: 83)

According to Dean (2005), aesthetic labor refers to the performances that arise from employers' need to convey certain meanings through employees' appearance (2005: 762). Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) focus on the appearance component of aesthetic labor and define the concept as the use of employees' appearance in projecting organizational image to customers (2006: 775). Warhurst and Nickson (2007) explained aesthetic labor as the employment of employees with desirable bodily dispositions. The embodied qualities of employees are developed and transformed through recruitment, training, supervision and disciplinary practices by employers aiming to gain competitive advantage (2007: 107). Aesthetic labor can be defined as the ability of employees to appeal to customers with visual (Pettinger, 2004; Tsaur & Tang, 2013; Wu, 2020; Vonk, 2021), auditory (Ramjattan, 2019; Timming, 2016) and behavioral (Nickson, Warhurst, & Dutton, 2005; Williams & Connell, 2010) components.

As mentioned in the definition of the concept, studies on aesthetic labor have generally focused on the themes of recruitment and employee training (Nickson, Warhurst, Dutton, 2005; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Tsaur & Tang, 2013). Spiess and Waring (2005), evaluating the focus on human resource management practices from a different perspective, point to work environments where employees' aesthetic labor performance is supported by specific HR practices. The difficulty of detailing aesthetic labor and its obligations in employment contracts means that management needs high employee commitment to elicit this form of labor. For example, cabin crew can develop control over their appearance, speech and tone of voice. This control needs to be carefully maintained by management through HRM practices to keep employees motivated.

In interactive service jobs, businesses force employees to change their identities and use their appearance, emotions, personality, physical and intellectual capacities in line with business policies (Leidner, 1991: 155-156). The aesthetic qualities of candidates are very important in the recruitment of employees who interact face-to-face with customers. In the aviation industry, where aesthetic concerns are most intense, it is known that the female body is examined as a potential aesthetic artifact in cabin crew recruitment. There are various reasons based on aesthetic qualities for the refusal of candidates to enter training programs. Many reasons such as the candidate being too old, having blemished skin, having too short or unkempt hair, having chubby legs are effective in the elimination (Hancock and Tyler, 2000: 118-119).

After the recruitment process, organizations continue to shape employees through training and development activities in order for them to display the desired appearance and demeanor (Warhurst et al., 2000: 12). In his study titled "Fast Food, Fast Talk", Leidner (1993) examines the orientation trainings given to McDonald's employees. These trainings begin by informing employees about the dress code and other rules regarding their personal appearance.

The examination of the gendering and shaping of work has gained momentum as disciplinary practices and surveillance have moved out of the paradigm of production and into the cultural sphere. The phenomenon of surveillance has thus expanded from focusing on the actions of workers to monitoring their attitudes, bodies and bodily fluids (Deetz, 1998 cited in Strangleman and Warren, 2015: 199). In addition to uniform and grooming rules, service sector employees are also held responsible for fulfilling obligations related to hair, make-up and shoes (Hancock & Tyler, 2000: 119).

Various criteria are considered in evaluating the aesthetic labor performance of employees in the service sector. Özer (2004), in his study examining the performance evaluations of salespeople in terms of customers, mentioned various criteria such as appearance, smile and communication with customers (2004: 171-172). Hall and Broek (2012) stated that aesthetic skills such as appearance, presentation and adherence to dress standards are evaluated in employee performance evaluations (2012: 98-99).

Regarding the rewarding of employees, Hall and Broek (2011) stated that aesthetic labor does not bring any premium to employees except the opportunity to buy discounted products and supported the criticism that this form of labor brings high wages (2011: 99-100).

According to Adkins (1995), one of the most important controls and regulations on the appearance of employees is the regulation on the mandatory wearing of uniforms. If the employee wears the uniform incorrectly or improperly during the work process, it may constitute grounds for dismissal. In jobs with face-to-face communication with customers where appearance codes are dominant, improper make-up and repetition of this situation despite warnings may lead to dismissal of the employee.

1.2. Literature Review

Hancock and Tyler (2000), in their study examining the recruitment, training and supervision of cabin crew, state that aesthetic roles, which are an important part of the labour process in the aviation industry, are considered to be related to the feminine nature of cabin crew. The success of displaying these aesthetic roles is achieved by the employees' adherence to the aesthetic codes adopted in the current sector and society in general, as well as the aesthetic prescriptions determined organizationally (2000: 115, 125-126).

Wu et al. (2020) conducted a study in the hospitality sector with the idea that the effect of aesthetic labour on customers and potential employees has not been sufficiently examined in studies on aesthetic labour. As a result of the study, it was revealed that the static appearance of employees such as clothing style, make-up, and physical characteristics affect customers. On the other hand, it is stated that the characteristics of the employee such as making eye contact and smiling in interactions affect both managers and potential employees (2020: 1, 5, 8).

According to Ren (2017), the employment of female employees who look attractive to customers and display the right behaviors to influence customers' feelings supports the production of a distinctive organizational image (2017: 397).

Hall and Broek (2011), in their study examining the importance of aesthetic labour in fashion stores, argue that the elements that constitute looking good and speaking correctly may vary depending on the brand's strategy, characteristics and market (2011: 99-100).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Questions

- *How is aesthetic labor experienced in selection practices?*
- *What training do employees receive on the development of aesthetic labor?*
- *What are the experiences of employees and managers regarding appearance rules and disciplinary practices?*
- *According to which criteria are employees' aesthetic labor performances evaluated?*
- *What are the rewarding practices regarding the aesthetic labor performance of employees?*
- *How is aesthetic labor experienced in dismissal practices?*

2.2. Research Design

The focus of this qualitative research is based on the idea of describing and interpreting experiences related to aesthetic labor. Based on this idea, phenomenology design was adopted in the research.

Phenomenology aims to reveal and describe the lived experiences of individuals. In phenomenological studies, the idea of gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning and nature of our daily experiences is important (Van Manen, 1990: 9-10). Phenomenological study explains "the shared meaning of several people's lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept" (Creswell, 2018: 77). The main data collection tool of phenomenological research is the interview. The "interaction, flexibility and probing through probes" that interviews offer to researchers enable them to uncover meanings related to the phenomenon under study (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018: 71).

2.3. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of human resources managers, store managers, female cabin officers and sales consultants who work/worked in one of the aviation and retail sectors in Turkey. There is a uniform or dress code application in the organization where the participants work. All of the participants in managerial positions took part in recruitment interviews. In the research, care was taken to ensure that the managers and employees were experienced people who knew the rules, characteristics and challenges in the relevant sector.

In this study, people of different ages, genders, professions and positions were reached through purposive sampling (Berg and Lune, 2015: 71). In order to achieve the purpose of the research, certain criteria (criteria) were taken into consideration in the inclusion of the participants: (a) working/working in one of the aviation and retail sectors; (b) working/working in one of the positions of cabin officer, sales consultant, human resources manager or store manager in the relevant sectors; (c) having at least one year of experience in the relevant sector.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Sector	Aviation	12
	Retail	11
Position	Cabin Attendant	7
	Sales Consultant	5
	Human Resources Manager	5
	Store Manager	6

Within the scope of the research, interviews were conducted with a total of 23 participants, including 7 cabin crew members, 5 sales consultants and 11 managers. The ages of the participants ranged between 22 and 58. It was observed that the participant with the least experience had 1 year of experience and the participant with the most experience had 25 years of experience.

2.4. Interview Guide

In the preparation of the interview questions, the relevant literature, especially the studies of Warhurst et al. (2000), Van Maanen (1991), Hall and Broek (2011) were utilized. The interview questions were clarified over time by taking notes from the related studies.

The semi-structured interview form was reviewed by the supervisor and corrected in terms of language and expression. Then, the form was evaluated by the members of the thesis monitoring committee. Thus, the interview form was finalized in terms of content and form. In the interview form, questions for employees and questions for managers were organized separately. In order to deepen the subject in the interviews, the researcher also asked the participants probing questions such as “Can you talk about your experiences about this?”, “How did you feel about this situation?” First, a pilot study was conducted during the research process. Interviews were conducted intensively in January-March 2021 in the form of face-to-face, telephone and online video calls. A total of 23 interviews were conducted with 19 participants via telephone, 3 participants via online video chat and 1 participant face-to-face. During the interviews, the researcher first introduced herself and gave general information about the subject of the research to the participants. It was stated that the real names of the participants and the names of the organizations they worked for would be kept confidential.

2.5. Data Validation

One of the most commonly applied strategies to increase the internal validity or credibility of a study is the triangulation technique (Merriam, 2015: 205). In this study, by following the data-based triangulation strategy, interviews were conducted with managers as well as employees who experienced the phenomenon of aesthetic labor and the credibility of the research was tried to be increased. The inter-coder consensus strategy, which is expressed as coding by more than one person in analyzing the transcribed data, is used for consistency in qualitative research (Creswell, 2018: 253). All coding was examined by another expert and consensus was tried to be reached.

2.6. Data Analysis

In this study, the data were analyzed using content analysis. Patton (2018) described content analysis as an effort to make sense of the data in order to identify basic consistency and meanings. The basic meanings revealed by content analysis form themes (2018: 453). With content analysis, the researcher tries to show how the participants make sense of the social world and makes an effort to better understand the words of the deciphered texts (Berg & Lune, 2015: 386).

In the data analysis process, in the first stage, the data obtained in the research were deciphered and a code booklet was developed. Subcategories and categories were then created by analyzing the data through open coding and axial coding. As a basic process, Saldana's (2019) code-subcategory-category-theme flowchart was adopted in organizing the codes (2019: 14). In qualitative research, description and direct quotation are of fundamental importance (Patton, 2018: 503). In the study, experiences were described in depth

by quoting the participants. In this study, Maxqda 2020 Analytcs Pro program was used to visualize and present the data. In the final stage of the analysis process, the themes were interpreted and evaluated with comparisons from the relevant literature.

3. RESULTS

Human resources management practices were examined within the framework of aesthetic labor phenomenon and codes, categories and themes were created. Selection, training, disciplinary practices, performance evaluation, employee rewarding, dismissal were identified as themes and presented in the model map. The findings were described and interpreted in detail with direct quotations from the participants.

Figure 1. Model Map



Theme 1: selection

Selection processes and experiences in these processes are one of the main areas of investigation of the aesthetic labor phenomenon. Within the theme of selection, the categories of “appearance of candidates during interviews, type of interview, selection criteria” were identified. The participants stated that they remembered the recruitment interviews very well and described in detail how they went to the interviews that day prepared for the interviews in such a way that the researcher could visualize them. Kamelya, 36 years old cabin crew member, underlined the importance of the first impression: “Manners, make-up... The colors of aviation are blue and navy blue. First impression is important. Visuality is very, very important”.

In sectors such as aviation and retail that involve face-to-face communication with customers, smiling faces and a submissive attitude are very important due to the importance of customer satisfaction. Therefore, during the interviews, the interviewers tried to observe the reactions of the candidates by making sentences that would stress them in various ways. It can be said that stress interviews and competency-based interviews are especially common.

“Being friendly is very important in our profession, so I was paying special attention. I knew beforehand that one of the interviewers would do things to demotivate you. When I first entered, one of the interviewers said, "Do we have to see your 32 teeth?". I kept smiling without lowering my mood. The other person kept smiling too, but if I had pouted, maybe they would have evaluated me differently.” (Mine, 22 years old cabin attendant)

The category of selection criteria was examined in three subcategories: “criteria related to appearance”, “criteria related to attitude and behavior”, “criteria related to speaking style, tone of voice and accent”. Appearance-related criteria determined in recruitment processes regarding the appearance of candidates constitute one of the main components of aesthetic labor. Based on the experiences of managers and employees, this subcategory, in which fourteen codes were identified as weight, height, tattoos, scars, moles, clothing, being well-groomed, not having crooked legs, clean appearance, beauty, hair style, products looking good on the employee, being presentable, makeup and appearance of teeth, offers a broad perspective on the aesthetic standards applied in cabin attendant and sales consultant jobs.

Manolya, a 41-year-old store manager, stated that she prefers thin candidates in interviews, while Nihal, a 39-year-old store manager, stated that customers want to see thin employees in terms of visual appearance, so she tends in this direction. Mine (22-year-old cabin attendant) drank liters of water and worked hard to gain weight in order not to be eliminated in the recruitment interview.

The fact that the candidates are aware that they will wear uniforms in their jobs and their tendency to wear classic clothes such as suits are evaluated by the interviewees.

“Some may come with a very sporty outfit. “I don't like wearing a suit”, he said. That candidate was evaluated negatively. They should come with an awareness of their appearance. We expect him/her to give us the image that he/she is suitable for that uniform. Some candidates may be a very good candidate, but they may show up wearing jeans, sneakers, etc. When you look at them from the outside, they don't give the impression that they are coming for an interview. (Şule, 30 years old Human Resources Supervisor)

Hairstyles of the candidates are also evaluated by the interviewers during the interviews. Pelin emphasized the importance of a hairstyle in line with the store's image and signaled that a candidate with a hairstyle outside this image could be eliminated.

“Of course, everyone has a style and concept. I would not apply to a company like ... if I wear piercings and dye my hair colorfully like this. Because their staff recruitment and customer quality and audience are certain, I would apply to stores that are more suitable, that will suit that concept, that will suit my style. Image is really important. I would not apply to a store that sells stylish and luxury products in such a way.” (Pelin, 33 years old sales consultant)

Participants generally emphasized the key role of friendliness in recruitment. A smiling face is seen as important for welcoming and satisfying customers as well as creating a positive image for them.

Smiling face is our top priority. If he is a cool candidate without smiling, cold, sullen, we eliminate him from the very beginning.” (Poyraz, 40 years old HR Business Partner)

In interactive service jobs, an aggressive attitude is undesirable and cocky attitudes are not welcome. Candidates with a high ego and reflecting this to the jury may also cause a negative impression. Since the politeness of employees is important for customer satisfaction, attention is also paid to this in recruitment interviews.

In cabin attendant and sales consultant jobs, the auditory senses of customers also need to be addressed and these criteria are taken into consideration in recruitment. Candidates should have proper diction, should not speak by rounding words and should not have an excessively high-pitched voice. The reason for this is to ensure that customers can understand the warnings as well as to satisfy them. Manolya, a 41-year-old store manager, stated that people with accents are not preferred for the sales consultant position. This may be due to the concern that customers will not be able to understand accented employees very clearly.

Theme 2: training

The study revealed that employees are subjected to certain trainings for the development of aesthetic labor. There are eight sub-categories in the category of training topics: training on hair, make-up and grooming; training on diction, pronunciation and body language; training on personal image and appearance; training on uniforms; training on walking, sitting and standing; training on customers; training on service; and training on courtesy.

Participants are generally subjected to practical trainings on how to do their hair according to appearance standards, as well as how to apply make-up. Because, as will be mentioned in the following sections, there are quite detailed rules about hair and make-up that employees must follow.

“I do the orientation of new employees. How should you dress? How should the hair be? You should wear make-up in a stylish way, without exaggerating, etc. I give orientation.” (Nisan, 32 years old store manager)

It is also seen that the issue of how to address customers is frequently mentioned in the trainings. Pelin, a sales consultant, contributed by sharing that she had a very understandable training experience on how to address customers.

“You may be right, but after you get into an argument with the customer, you will be in the wrong position.’ These were said in the trainings. It was a very explanatory and very good training process.” (Pelin, 33 years old sales consultant)

Theme 3: disciplinary practices

It was revealed how basic management tools such as control and surveillance gain an appearance through aesthetic labor. The participants' intensive experiences and aesthetic appearance standards related to this theme were tried to be described and pictured in a way to be visualized in the reader's eyes. Uniform rules, weight control, daily appearance checks, manager and peer feedback, and reflective body were identified as categories.

Uniforms have an important place in achieving aesthetic appearance as a part of brand image.

"Uniform rules are standardized in writing in a book called a handbook. It will not stick to you. It will always be ironed and clean. Outside of work, we cannot go to a restaurant and eat in our uniforms." (Menekşe, 34 years old cabin attendant).

Müjgan, 53 years old store manager, stated that there are a series of rules regarding uniforms. Employees are required to bring their uniforms with them. Employees who did not comply with the rules regarding uniforms faced various sanctions such as not being allowed on the aisle and being sent home. Müjgan expresses the disciplinary practices in luxury stores as follows:

"We don't take him to the aisle with a wrinkled uniform, greasy hair and head. We make him use his tea break and lunch break and make sure he takes care of it. If she has an excuse, of course she irons her uniform. We fix her hair and make-up and take her to the aisle." (Müjgan, 53 years old store manager)

"We have a standardization chief in our company. He checks them before every flight." (İpek, 40 years old human resources director). The standardization chief mentioned by İpek conducts routine appearance checks before the flight. Unsuitable cabin crew can be reported. It is possible to say that in the cabin crew job, where employees can frequently report each other about appearance, control practices are highly adopted.

Participants in the study stated that employees who want to pass weight checks can starve themselves for a few days, and employees who are under the specified weight can put stones in their pockets in order to appear heavier. Aylin said that there are also employees who undergo liposuction operations in order to pass weight controls. All these are noteworthy findings in terms of showing the hidden aspects of aesthetic labor practices that are not discussed much. Female employees have developed a series of defense mechanisms against weight controls and this has created a new area of conflict in the labor process.

"If you are under a certain weight, if you weigh less than your height, the company doesn't want you to take unpaid leave. This is a new practice for a few years. Before that, the first practice was for those who were overweight." (Aylin, 35 years old cabin attendant)

"There is a weight check every year. When the measurements come back, I go on a strict diet and lose weight again." (Çağla, 34 years old cabin attendant)

Employees' bodies are monitored by their coworkers and managers throughout the day, kept under surveillance with various expressions, and feedback is given to employees. Mine explained that she also heard criticism from her colleagues about her appearance and that this situation caused tension.

"Our No. 1 colleague said, "Your nose is a bit big. You need aesthetics." It was just a jab. It really happened like that. I said, "I don't see anything in my nose." (Mine, 22 years old cabin attendant)

"If we wipe our lipstick off our lips, "Oh, your lipstick is gone. Freshen it up a bit." After lunch breaks and tea breaks, we had to refresh our lipstick and blush. It had already become our routine we were doing it. We had self-control. We had secret customers. Every customer who came through the door was a potential secret customer for us. That's why we were paying attention, and those who weren't were warned. At that moment, for example, there were warnings such as "Should we iron your jacket now?" to a friend who took off his jacket because of the heat." (Yasemin, 43 years old sales consultant)

It is understood from Yasemin's statements that another subject of surveillance is mystery shoppers. The participant stated that every customer who comes to the store can be a mystery shopper, so they have to pay attention to their appearance. As a result of the surveillance, employees who are considered to be non-compliant in terms of appearance, demeanor and speaking style can be reported, receive written or verbal warnings, and feedback can be written about them. Managers tend to control the appearance of employees at all times through observation and follow-ups.

The way employees reflect the brand image through their bodies, their experiences of checking their appearance by constantly looking in the mirror during the day, and the suggestions of managers about looking beautiful were described in the "reflective body" category.

"Cabin crew are the mirror of airline companies." (Doruk, 49 years old human resources director)

"We need to be well-groomed. We are the mirror of the other person. The customer looks at us first while shopping. How did she do her makeup? Is she well-groomed? If I have done a bad make-up, he says that he is trying to sell me a product but he doesn't know how to do make-up." (Reyhan, 37 years old sales consultant)

"Because we are like the showcase of the brand. It is as if we are reflecting ... there. Since we reflect it, we are its mirror, I think they want us to dress accordingly." (Hilal, 39 years old sales consultant)

Make-up, uniforms and hairstyles of female employees have gained instrumental function in reflecting the brand image.

Theme 4: performance evaluation

The performance evaluation criteria revealed in the research are important in terms of showing the aesthetic labor performances that businesses expect from their employees. Personal care, uniform, communication with customers and appearance categories were identified.

Poyraz (40 years old, human resources business partner) mentioned uniform integrity as a performance evaluation criterion as well as the evaluation process. As a result of the report card issued every three months, employees who are below average are called for an interview.

“All of these are shown graphically on those report cards. At the end of each flight, the cabin supervisor evaluates you in every aspect. Your appearance, your attitude, your knowledge. Your helpfulness to passengers. These are published as performance reports every 3 months.” (Menekşe, 34 years old cabin attendant)

“We have evaluation criteria. These include items such as appearance, uniform, personal care.” (Çağla, 34 years old cabin attendant)

“We fill out a performance evaluation form every 6 months. Does he pay attention to his appearance?” (Nisan, 32 years old store manager)

Whether employees pay attention to their appearance or not is evaluated periodically by cabin supervisors or store managers. Personal grooming of employees is one of the most important aesthetic labor performances that businesses attach great importance to from recruitment onwards. In the previous themes, it was mentioned that attention was paid to well-groomed candidates and various personal care trainings were provided to employees. Personal care of employees is included in aesthetic labor performance as one of the basic components of appearance standards.

Theme 5: employee rewarding

It was revealed that aesthetic labor does not have a direct contribution to the wages received by employees, but employees are rewarded, especially through non-monetary reward systems.

“He already made an agreement with ... on this issue. ... even issued a special series. ... set up a booth in our team room. For product promotion for make-up application. They made special pricing and stuff like that. I didn't buy it, I didn't prefer it, but many friends did. There are all kinds of deals. There is even a laser agreement. It offers everything.” (Aylin, 35 years old cabin attendant)

“I have never used it, but there are a lot of discounts on makeup.” (Gamze, 30 years old cabin attendant)

In the development and promotion of aesthetic labor, it has been observed that enterprises provide discounts to their employees by cooperating with certain brands in areas related to care and beauty. Participants explained that the organization they work for offers them special discounts in various areas such as make-up, laser hair removal and nail care. All these discount opportunities support employees to look well-groomed.

The study revealed that employees who achieve success with their aesthetic labor performance can also be rewarded with thank you letters. The practice of thank-you letters is one of the categories in the rewarding theme in which the participants expressed the highest number of opinions.

“There is a thank you system in our company. Feedback (feedback) also comes from the customer. When it comes, we reward our colleagues with thanks. You know that thank you letters are not enough. When there are promotion processes, we sit and look at those thank you letters. Our promotion system is a bit different. Someone who receives so many thank you letters is of course appreciated by the pursers and is nominated as a candidate for supervisor. It is a good criterion.” (İpek, 40 years old human resources director)

As a non-monetary rewarding system, thank you letters indirectly affect the careers of employees at the promotion stage and are important in this context.

Theme 6: dismissal

Businesses demand aesthetic labor from their employees in the context of certain organizational policies, set rules about it, provide training to employees on the subject and strictly monitor their aesthetic labor performance. Employees who do not comply with the rules regarding aesthetic labor may receive verbal or written warnings according to the business procedure. Participants generally expressed the process they went through before the dismissal decision in this way.

“This person is told “Don't come with a wrinkled shirt”, “Wear make-up” every time, and if he/she doesn't, and if this is always the case on every flight, he/she is warned beforehand. If it becomes a vicious circle of warning, training, warning again, they can be dismissed.” (Şule, 30 years old human resources supervisor)

Employees who do not comply with appearance standards and do not fulfill aesthetic labor demands through mechanisms such as warnings and training can be dismissed.

“We had an employee whom we gave a warning and later dismissed. I was telling him, “This won't work. If you want, let her go.” She wore the same outfit for three days and four days in a row. Finally, I said, “This is not going to end well.” Last time at work, the store opened at 10:00 and he didn't show up until 12:00. She didn't answer her phone calls. No one is fired for this reason. She's not contributing in any way. That's her capacity. That's why we parted ways.” (Akin, 41-year-old store manager)

Akin said, “He started to not pay much attention to his personal care. You work in a jewelry store. She was gathering her hair with a rubber band” and underlined that she warned the employee many times. Nihal, 39 years old store manager, stated that she warned the employee who came to the store without grooming many times and finally fired her. Emphasizing that they serve an upper-class customer base, the participant emphasized that hair, make-up and smell are important, and thinks that the employee should be aware that they represent the brand. In addition to appearance, it was also found that the way employees talk to customers is also effective in dismissal. The participant clearly demonstrated the position and power of customers in the service sector with the statement “Even if the customer throws a vase at your head, the customer is a benefactor”

In the statements of the participants, the emphasis on “the employee starting to harm the organization” and “damaging the brand perception” is noteworthy. It has been revealed that employees’ attitudes towards customers, communication with customers, and tone of voice are very important in dismissal decisions.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study is to examine the role of aesthetic labor in human resource management practices and to present a descriptive framework of aesthetic labor experiences. For the purpose of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with cabin attendant, human resources managers, sales consultants and store managers working in the aviation and retail sectors who intensively experience the phenomenon of aesthetic labor, and the data were analyzed by content analysis method.

The results of the study revealed the role of aesthetic labor in selection, employee training, performance evaluation, employee rewarding and dismissal practices. Disciplinary practices, supervision, rules, written and verbal warnings were found to be important parts of aesthetic labor experiences.

Stephen (2007) considers the selection of “suitable” candidates in selection as the beginning of the supervision and oversight process (2007: 75). In general, it can be said that peer supervision and customer complaints are important components of aesthetic labor experiences as well as supervision by managers (Tyler and Abbott: 1998: 440; Vonk, 2021: 213-227; Lan, 2001: 103). Employees voluntarily undertake aesthetic labor demands and internalize the rules for this. Hall and Broek (2012) argued that what constitutes “looking good and speaking right” may vary according to the market, strategy, location, and brand characteristics (2012: 99). As a result of this study, it was seen that aesthetic labor practices, especially the rules related to appearance, vary according to the brand and sector.

Theoretical Implications and Managerial Implications

In both sectors where the study was conducted, customer satisfaction and continuity are ensured from an organizational perspective through aesthetic labour demands for cabin crew and sales consultants. In addition, brand value is increased and the brand is well represented with aesthetic labour. Wu et al. (2020) evaluate the results of aesthetic labour in the context of customers and state that brand value is the cornerstone of aesthetic labour experiences. The researchers emphasized that the appearance and actions of employees are important in supporting and damaging brand equity and emphasized the importance of, for example, uniforms in brand equity (2020: 9). Tsaur, Luoh and Syue (2015) stated that with the aesthetic labour exhibited by employees, customers' positive feelings towards the brand can be developed and customers will be attracted (2015: 124).

Hall and Broek (2012) argued that what constitutes “looking good and speaking right” may vary according to the market, strategy, location and characteristics of the brand (2012: 99). As a result of this study, it was seen that aesthetic labour practices, especially the rules related to appearance, vary according to the brand and sector.

Employees who exhibit aesthetic labor may face various health problems, and they may experience intense stress during weight control and make intense efforts to harmonize their appearance with the rules of the company by resorting to dieting and liposuction. The necessity to look well-groomed and attentive affects employees outside of work as well; employees may feel obliged to wear make-up and grooming, and may feel a sense of incompleteness when they do not wear make-up. Warnings about employees' weight in order to look good for customers make dieting an important part of their lives, blurring the lines between work and non-work time and increasing their aesthetic labor burden. It is understandable for employees to pay attention to

hygiene issues, but the fact that even their own personal choices such as perfume can be subject to manager warnings and customer complaints shows that the boundaries of aesthetic labor are blurred. Therefore, it is thought that all these negative situations should be taken into consideration in determining the rules.

In the service sector, which includes interactive service jobs where aesthetic labour is very important in terms of customer satisfaction, it is recommended that material rewards should be implemented and disseminated in order to support these forms of labour of employees.

Various suggestions have also been made for practitioners in the related sector. The importance of receiving suggestions and feedback from employees in the design and determination of uniforms has emerged. Therefore, it is suggested that the opinions of the employees should also be evaluated. It was observed that there were problems with the fabric of some uniforms and employees were uncomfortable with this situation. It is thought that details about the fabric should be taken into consideration in the process of designing uniforms. It has been observed that female employees in jobs where wearing high heels is compulsory experience various health problems such as varicose veins, calluses, back pain and back pain. For this reason, it is foreseen that it would be beneficial for employees to be free to wear flat shoes such as ballet flats or to be given the opportunity to choose. It can be suggested that the hair loss, varicose veins, back pain, calluses and skin problems that employees experience due to the appearance-related requirements of their jobs should be reviewed by the enterprises in terms of occupational health and safety.

In the service sector, which includes interactive service jobs where aesthetic labor is very important in terms of customer satisfaction, it is recommended that material rewards should be implemented and expanded in order to support these forms of labor of employees.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

The researcher had difficulties in reaching the participants, especially those in managerial positions. The number of participants in the study was limited, and the researcher had difficulty scheduling interviews with the participants.

In the study, it was observed that customers' evaluations were one of the main elements in aesthetic labor processes and that the participants often looked at the events from the customers' perspective. It was concluded that customer complaints and suggestions were taken into account in determining the rules and that customers had control over the aesthetic labor processes of employees. Therefore, it is recommended to include customers in the research group for future studies.

In this phenomenological study, female employees who intensively experience aesthetic labor were identified as participants. In the study, it was observed that appearance rules such as coming to work every day clean-shaven and wearing a tie were set for male employees. In addition to these, it was observed that some customers were uncomfortable with the arm hair of male employees, so male employees were required to wear long-sleeved shirts. Therefore, it is recommended for researchers to examine the issue of aesthetic labor in terms of male employees.

This study was conducted in the aviation and retail sectors. For future studies, researchers may suggest that aesthetic labor can also be examined in the hospitality and entertainment sectors.

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