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Sky-High Style: An Overview and Research Agenda on Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry from a Gender Perspective

Çok-Yüksek Stil: Havayolu Endüstrisinde Estetik Emek Üzerine Cinsiyet Perspektifinden Bir Derleme ve Araştırma Önerileri



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Abstract

Aesthetic labour is a significant concept that has been examined in several fields, including sociology, psychology, management, and organisational behaviour. Aesthetic labour, which is closely related to emotional labour, refers to companies' deliberate actions regarding employees' appearances in the context of recruiting, career advancement, performance assessments, and compensation, all of which are aligned with established standards. The service sector recognises aesthetic labour as a vital component of the marketing mix and service quality, with current research highlighting its gendered characteristics. Research on the antecedents and consequences of aesthetic labour, specifically within the airline industry, remains limited, despite its examination in various occupations. This study investigates the determiners and outcomes of aesthetic labour through a gender lens and provides suggestions for future research on the airline industry. This study reveals that although organisations use aesthetic labour as a crucial strategic tool, it could also result in individual and organisational outcomes, including stress, burnout, and discrimination. This study is expected to be a valuable guide for decision makers in the airline industry, human resource experts, industrial and organisational psychologists and researchers.

Öz

Estetik emek, sosyoloji, psikoloji, yönetim ve örgütsel davranış gibi birçok alanda incelenmiş önemli bir kavramdır. Duygusal emekle yakından ilişkili olan estetik emek, çalışanların görünüşleriyle ilgili olarak şirketlerin işe alım, kariyer ilerlemesi, performans değerlendirmeleri ve ücretlendirme gibi süreçlerde belirlenen standartlara uygun olarak gerçekleştirdiği kasıtlı eylemleri ifade eder. Hizmet sektörü, estetik emeği pazarlama karmasının ve hizmet kalitesinin önemli bir unsuru olarak kabul etmekte olup, mevcut araştırmalar bu emeğin cinsiyetle bağlantılı özelliklerini vurgulamaktadır. Estetik emeğin havayolu endüstrisindeki öncülleri ve sonuçlarına dair araştırmalar, diğer mesleklerde incelenmesine rağmen sınırlı kalmıştır. Bu çalışma, estetik emeğin belirleyicilerini ve sonuçlarını cinsiyet perspektifinden inceleyerek havayolu çalışanlarına yönelik gelecekteki araştırmalar için öneriler sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma için veriler, Temmuz 2024 ile Eylül 2024 arasında akademik arama motorları Google Scholar ve TR Dizin dahil olmak üzere iki büyük akademik veritabanı olan Scopus ve Web of Science'da kapsamlı bir literatür taraması yapılarak elde edilmiştir. Arama, "estetik emek", "havayolu endüstrisi", "cinsiyet", "cinsiyetlendirilmiş emek", "kabin ekibi" ve "uçuş görevlileri" gibi belirli anahtar kelimelerden oluşan kapsamlı bir set kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yalnızca Türkçe ve İngilizce olarak hakemli akademik makaleler dikkate alınmıştır. Bu çalışma, şirketlerin estetik emeği önemli bir stratejik araç olarak kullanmasına rağmen, stres, tükenmişlik ve ayrımcılık gibi bireysel ve örgütsel sonuçlara yol açabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Keywords

Aesthetic Labour · Gender Roles · Airline Industry · Cabin Crew · Flight Attendants

Anahtar Kelimeler

Estetik Emek · Cinsiyet Rollerini · Havayolu Endüstrisi · Kabin Ekibi · Uçuş Görevlileri



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Sky-High Style: An Overview and Research Agenda on Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry from a Gender Perspective

“Man is the measure of all things,” ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras, emphasising the central role of human knowledge and value judgments. In our social lives, particularly in professional settings, agreements are often based on explicit or implicit agreements and certain established rules. These norms determine how employees should appear and shape external appearance standards dictated by organisations. This has led to the development of widely accepted dress codes across various professions as part of vocational identity and organisational culture (Dellinger, 2002). Dress codes not only represent the organisation and the individual’s membership within the group, but they also develop a sense of belonging. However, for employees, aesthetic labour could often be exhausting and even draining (Yeşilyurt, 2022).

Aesthetic labour typically emerges in industries such as hospitality, retail, and airlines, where direct interaction with customers is significant. Aesthetic labour refers to the recruitment, management, and direction of employees based on their physical appearance (Witz et al., 2003). Factors influencing aesthetic labour include organisational culture and branding (Warhurst et al., 2000), industry norms (Nickson et al., 2003), customer expectations (Witz et al., 2003), and national culture with gender norms (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). Aesthetic labour is linked to certain norms regarding employee apparel, body language, hairstyle, and makeup. In industries where aesthetic labour is essential, employees must comply with these standards as organisations aim to improve customer satisfaction and business success through the physical appearance of their employees. Consequently, adverse effects, such as stress, burnout (Hochschild, 1983), decreased job satisfaction (Pettinger, 2004), and discrimination (Williams & Connell, 2010), could arise among employees. Moreover, aesthetic labour is a sociological concept that focuses on how specific appearances obtain value in the workplace and what these appearances mean in terms of social stratification. Mears (2014), aesthetic labour is inherently linked to beauty and thus intersects with class, race, and gender. Aesthetic labour refers to the recruitment, management, and direction of employees based on appearance (Witz et al., 2003).

Gender norms significantly impact the shaping of aesthetic labour, frequently promoting prejudices within organisations and among customers. Research indicates that female employees are generally anticipated to exhibit feminine traits (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). Furthermore, several studies indicate that the demands of aesthetic labour are greater for women than for men, resulting in double standards that could negatively impact women’s career advancement (Williams & Connell, 2010). The gender-specific aspect of aesthetic requirements intensifies the pressure on women in many vocational fields. The economic value of appearance and beauty is an important topic in social science research. Mears (2014) highlighted not only which markets assign economic value to beauty and under what conditions, but also how beauty is shaped by power dynamics. Recent research on aesthetic labour has examined several occupational categories, including freelancers (Vonk, 2021), academics (Lipton, 2021), social media influencers (McFarlane & Samsioe, 2020), and ballerinas (Robinson, 2021). Vonk’s (2021) highlighted that aesthetic labour is gendered and can draw undesired male attention, leading to concerns and criticism. In a Lipton (2021) study involving academics, it was shown that academics determine the necessity of conforming to particular image expectations. Furthermore, academics are expected to participate in self-branding not only through presentations in physical settings but also in virtual domains (Lipton, 2020).

Considering that gender is an inseparable element of aesthetic labour, the aim of this study is to examine aesthetic labour from a gender perspective and seek to answer the following question: *“What is the current status of aesthetic labour among airline industry employees from a gender perspective?”* To address this

question, the study offers an overview based on previous studies and presents recommendations for future conceptual and empirical research. This study makes two important contributions to aviation research. First, this study provides an overview of aesthetic labour from a gender perspective within the airline industry, a topic that has received limited attention. Second, this study underscores the antecedents and possible outcomes for airline employees regarding aesthetic labour in addition to propose recommendations for future research. This study presents an overview of aesthetic labour within the airline sector from a gender perspective, providing significant insights for airline employees, management, and academics in human resources and industrial psychology.

Theoretical Framework

Definition of Aesthetic Labour

Aesthetic labour has evolved into a distinct concept, diverging from the notion of emotional labour, which is a popular topic in sociological studies. Business and management fields and industrial psychology have studied the economic implications of physical appearance. In business research, aesthetic labour emerged from observations in the hotel and retail industries, where job advertisements often featured explicit requirements regarding appearance (Karlsson et al., 2012). Aesthetic labour refers to the procedures adopted in recruiting and training personnel based on their physical appearance, aiming to demonstrate both pleasant personalities and attractive looks (Witz et al., 2003).

Various sectors, especially those involving frontline employees who have close contact with customers, integrate aesthetic labour as a significant concept into their marketing and human resources strategies. In industries such as hospitality and airlines, aesthetic labour is crucial for effectively representing both the brand and the product or service, enhancing service quality, and strengthening the organisational perception of aesthetics. Furthermore, the presence of aesthetic labour has a significant impact on how customers perceive service quality and satisfaction. Uniformity in service provider appearance is particularly influential in this regard (Pounders et al., 2015). However, extreme aesthetic norms can negatively impact employees' physical appearance and self-representation, causing pressure to adhere to beauty norms (Mann & Rawat, 2023).

Well-dressed, smiling salespeople have replaced the 19th century workforce, characterised by dirt and sweat, indicating a transformation in the perception of labour (Sanders, 2006). Aesthetic labour refers to the managerial manipulation of an employee's appearance (Pounders et al., 2015). In other words, aesthetic labour is also understood as the employer's effort to align employees' appearance and physical attributes with organisational aesthetic norms. Because the customer's impact on profitability is significant in the service sector, employers attempt to control the interaction between frontline employees and customers (Leidner, 2006). Aesthetic labour extends beyond appearance; it encompasses the voice. More specifically, it involves not only employees' attire and body language but also how they speak, sound, or even smell. Aesthetic labour involves the five senses: vision, hearing, taste, smell, and sensation. As a result, the interpretation of knowledge regarding senses triggers emotional reactions in a group of people, particularly customers (Karlsson et al., 2012).

In today's environment, the appearance of employees is predominantly dictated by organisations and customers. The key factors shaping aesthetic labour include modern work practises, organisational context, customer expectations, and gender roles. Furthermore, the prevailing notions of modern work and ideals of the modern world closely tie expectations regarding how employees should look. The organisational context significantly shapes employees' perceptions of their physical appearance. Organisations often explicitly

establish dress codes, and in their absence, they expect employees to infer appropriate appearance by observing others in the workplace (Lewis & Aune, 2023).

Aesthetic labour is also linked to the concept of embodied capital. The notion of “*embodied cultural capital*” suggests that the physical body could be used as an important resource to improve job opportunities and earnings (Warhurst et al., 2000). Aesthetic labour has been studied various organisational contexts, with the fashion industry yielding the most disturbing findings. For instance, Fixsen et al.’s (2023) study emphasises the commercialisation of the body, objectification, and its harmful influence on models, including the development of eating disorders. Additionally, aesthetic labour is context-bound and interacts with local culture, adapting to its norms and values. Lewis and Aune’s (2023) observed that in religious work contexts, women are expected to adhere to a modest style of dress.

Emotional labour is a key determinant of aesthetic labour. In her research on flight attendants, Hochschild (1983:7) described emotional labour as the deliberate control of emotions to produce identifiable and observable body language and facial expressions. The same study revealed an interesting finding: the expectation was that flight attendants, especially women, would assume a dual role. This role included being protective, similar to a traditional mother, and simultaneously maintaining an alluring feminine presence. In other words, traditional notions of femininity are particularly dominant in the airline industry, especially among female employees. This is a signal of the gendered nature of aesthetic labour, putting more demands on women than men.

Understanding how aesthetic labour functions within organisations is crucial. Studies on aesthetic labour often reference the Social Comparison Theory (SCT), which suggests that employees align themselves with industry and workplace expectations (Pounders et al., 2015). The SCT individuals evaluate their abilities, appearance, and behaviours by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). According to this theory, individuals form their self-concept by comparing themselves to others, which can determine their position within the social hierarchy. This is because the primary goal of employees engaged in aesthetic labour is to present an image that aligns with a company’s brand identity. According to SCT, people engage in self-comparisons with others, which can impact a brand’s perceived worth. The presence of visually appealing and professional employees can increase the quality and prestige of a brand, thus creating a favourable impact on customer perceptions. Furthermore, research has indicated that women are more susceptible to appearance-related expectations than men, which allows SCT to explain the gendered nature of aesthetic labour. The gendered nature of aesthetic labour will be reviewed in the following section.

Gender Dynamics in Aesthetic Labour

In the service economy, the physical body can function as an instrument or asset to improve social and economic outcomes, such as employment opportunities and career advancement (Lovell, 2000). The practise of aesthetic labour is gendered and includes the idea that achieving a decent appearance is primarily the responsibility of women (Tyler & Taylor 1998). Social structures have made gender a more influential factor for women, leading to the view that beauty is a more valuable form of capital for women than men (Martin & George, 2006). In this context, the investments employees make in their appearance may vary according to gender.

Generally speaking, feminist theory assumes that societies construct traditional gender roles to uphold hierarchical relationships. For instance, Butler (2006) offered a critical analysis of conventional essentialist perspectives on gender, which view males and females as inherent in hierarchical duality. This dichotomy asserts that males and their masculine attributes are superior to women and their feminine attributes. This perspective is also believed to be the dominant understanding of the airline industry. For instance, female



flight attendants are typically required to have a specific look and attitude that conforms to traditional ideals of femininity, whereas male pilots are generally associated with authority and technical expertise, which represent masculine qualities (Hochschild, 1983).

Numerous studies highlight the significance of physical appearance in business environments from a gender perspective. Warhurst and Nickson (2007) asserted that the retail and tourism sectors employ women more frequently than men. This is often attributed to the expectation that women will appear warmer and more attractive, serving as the face of marketing and branding. Aesthetic labour, outlined by Williams and Connell (2010), refers to the expectation that service workers possess both physical attractiveness and appropriate abilities for their profession. The authors state that the desired aesthetic of many high-end retail establishments is characterised by a middle class and traditionally gendered appearance. Kukkonen et al. (2024) examined gender differences in the labour market in terms of physical attractiveness. Their findings revealed that physical attractiveness yields more favourable socioeconomic outcomes for women and men. However, this study revealed that women's physical attractiveness can have both positive and negative consequences. In other words, physical appearance does not always lead to positive outcomes.

Although male bodies may also serve as symbols of capital, women's physiques are more commonly used to denote male rank (Skeggs, 2004). Otis (2011) investigated how women's bodies and identities adjust to align with the class and gender expectations of customers in China. An important observation is that organisations adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of the local community when recruiting aesthetic labour. According to Maers (2014), certain aspects of aesthetic labour that increase gender inequality in women. One such example is the female body's reinforcement of traditional gender roles. On the other hand, women are often seen as more suitable for frontline positions in aesthetic labour, while men are more suitable for managerial roles. As a result, women may be disadvantaged in terms of status and salary.

The use of the physical characteristics of female employees in airline marketing initiatives has a long history. During the 1950s, increased competition among airlines necessitated more aggressive airline service marketing. Safety and gender emerged as key promotional factors in these campaigns (Hanlon, 2017). Research has indicated that the portrayal of women in advertising by United States of America (USA) airlines was biased towards a certain gender, with a particular focus on male consumers (Noon & Blyton, 1997). Similarly, promotional campaigns for Taiwanese and Vietnamese airlines have linked the physical attractiveness of women with the level of service provided (Hamermersh, 2011). Moreover, Thai female flight attendants have achieved an iconic reputation and are subject to limitations in choosing a particular physical appearance style (Ayuttacorn, 2016).

The gender-related outcomes of aesthetic labour have been examined across cultures. Hutson (2024) conducted a study in the United States that revealed that pregnant women often attempt to conceal their pregnancies during the first trimester at work. Hutson introduced the concept of the "silent shift," suggesting that there is a distinct period during which employees focus on hiding and coping with their condition. When pregnant women fail to conceal their pregnancies, colleagues often react negatively, perceiving pregnancy as incongruent with the ideal employee appearance expectations. Moreover, maintaining a pleasant appearance requires self-care, careful clothing, and a healthy body. However, self-care and the selection of attire directly affect one's professional appearance. Towns (2024) redefined women's time spent on their clothing, hair, and accessories for work not as capital but as labour. In his research on U.S. ambassadors, Towns found that women invest more effort into their appearance than men. In Yeşilyurt Temel's (2023) study with employees from Turkey, it was found that a female employee returning to work after maternity leave opted for a Brazilian blow dry because she could not straighten her hair every morning. This is a clear

example of the gendered nature of aesthetic labour, where domestic demands placed extra pressure on women to invest in their professional appearance.

Aesthetic labour within the airline sector has been studied by some researchers (Spiess & Waring, 2005; Taylor & Tyler, 2002; Ren, 2017). Understanding the different groups within airline organisations is crucial for comprehending the role of aesthetic labour in this context. Specifically, the flight deck, where pilots operate, and the cabin, where flight attendants and passengers interact, are the two primary areas of focus. Research on aesthetic labour often emphasises the direct contact of cabin crew members with passengers, making them key representatives of the airline (Hochschild, 1983). In the airline industry, aesthetic labour extends beyond mere physical appearance. For instance, although an employee may be expected to present themselves well, their physical appearance does not play a fundamental role in the core aspects of their job. Instead, they are required to perform specific duties while adhering to certain standards.

Ayuttacorn's (2016) study on Thai airline employees found that women are required to adhere strictly to physical appearance standards and are often hesitant to make minor changes to their appearance. Ren's (2017) research on airline employees in China revealed that aesthetic labour varies by gender and context. The study highlights that women are required to perform aesthetic labour in Chinese airlines, whereas men are not. Considering these findings, it is evident that aesthetic labour, as observed in various sectors, including the airline industry, exhibits a gendered dimension. This study explores the concept of aesthetic labour from a gender perspective and provides an overview of existing research on the airline sector. The findings of this review will be discussed in the following sections.

Method

The present study uses an overview methodology to offer a thorough examination of aesthetic labour within the airline industry, with a specific emphasis on gender-related aspects. The proposed approach is specifically developed to integrate current literature, especially recognise significant themes, and emphasise areas that require further investigation.

The data for this study were obtained by performing a comprehensive literature search across two major academic databases, Scopus and Web of Science, including the academic search engines Google Scholar and TR Dizin, between July 2024 and September 2024. The search was carried out by employing a comprehensive set of specific keywords, such as "*aesthetic labor*," "*airline industry*," "*gender*," "*gendered labor*," "*cabin crew*," and "*flight attendants*." Consideration was given only to peer-reviewed academic papers in Turkish and English.

The Current State of Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry

The practise of aesthetic labour delivers favourable results for consumers (Tsaour et al., 2015). Nevertheless, there appears to be a lack of research on the individual consequences of aesthetic labour for employees. Aesthetic labour represents an additional effort beyond the primary tasks that employees must perform. When employees engage in aesthetic labour, their physical appearance and clothing choices become essential components of their value proposition. Managers have authority over frontline service providers' visual standards, guaranteeing a consistent aesthetic that aligns with the regulations of the organisation (Pounders et al., 2015).

According to Spies and Waring (2005), aesthetic labour in the airline industry can lead to ethical issues and an unstable long-term commercial strategy. Similarly, in the service sector, women's appearance is often considered a component of the marketing mix, positioning the female workforce in a strategic role (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). Smith et al. (2023) found that airlines actively engage in the regulation and

shaping the appearance of flight attendants. In addition, pursuing a career as a flight attendant is often associated with young women and is linked to the notion of elegance. However, an important question arises regarding whether the effort expended to meet aesthetic labour standards surpasses the effort invested in developing intellectual competencies. Table 1 provides examples of studies examining aesthetic labour within the airline industry.

Table 1
Studies on Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry

Author/Year	Focus	Country	Main findings
Taylor and Tyler (2000)	Emotional in the airline industry	United Kingdom	Aesthetic labour is gendered.
Spiess and Waring (2005)	Aesthetic Labour as a Marketing Strategy	Australia, Malaysia	The use of aesthetic labour qualities in the marketing mix could be problematic.
Waring (2011)	Aesthetic Labour and Discrimination	Singapore	There is a need for discrimination legislation regarding aesthetic labour.
Ren (2017)	Women's Aesthetic Labour in the Airline Industry	China	Aesthetic labour is gendered and context-bound.
Yang (2017)	Aesthetic Labour Practise in Vocational Education	Taiwan	Norms shape aesthetic labour
Yang et al. (2019)	Aesthetic Labour Perceptions of Cabin Attendants	Taiwan	Professional competencies were more important than aesthetic competencies.
Can et al. (2023)	Regulatory Role of Gender in the Relationship Of Aesthetic Labour And Intent To Leave	Türkiye	Aesthetic labour is gendered.
Luoh and Tsaur (2024)	A Scale development of Aesthetic Labour for Hotels and Airlines	Taiwan	Aesthetic labour is e multidimensional construct.

Source: Provided by the author based on a literature review.

Research on aesthetic labour in the context of the airline industry is limited. However, aesthetic labour is sometimes discussed within the category of emotional labour. Tylor and Tyler's (2000) determined that aesthetic labour is an emotional dimension of work where flight attendants feel forced to appear attractive and exceed passengers' expectations. Additionally, the necessity of making eye contact and a constant smile with all the passengers was emphasised.

Spiess and Aring (2005) presented analyses of the status of aesthetic labour among airline employees in different countries. Australian airlines portray female flight attendants as some of the world's most beautiful crew. In Asia, the aesthetic organisational culture is significant for airlines, and cabin crew members often have very similar physical characteristics. The attire, makeup, walking style, scent, hair, and smile of the cabin crew members are all associated with aesthetic labour and contribute to an exciting flight experience (p. 202).

Waring (2011) critically examined businesses' efforts to prefer more aesthetically desirable appearances. This study argues that strategies designed to benefit employees' aesthetic qualities can be exclusionary and potentially harmful to organisations. Additionally, it emphasises the need for legal regulations in this area. Ren's (2017) study on the airline industry in China observed that women's appearance and body shape were given more importance than their educational background. Researchers even determined that the airline's organisational culture heavily relied on beauty and aesthetic values. The same study also revealed that women experienced aesthetic labour more frequently than men. Furthermore, Yang's (2017) study in Taiwan examined customers' experiences with aesthetic labour in four main categories: professional, rational,

emotional, and interactive. These findings indicate that aesthetic labour has a multidimensional structure. Also, Luoh and Tsaur (2024) have developed an aesthetic labour scale that can be used in the hotel and airline industries. The validation of this measurement tool will allow the assessment of the multifaceted nature of aesthetic labour.

Numerous recent studies have indicated that aesthetic labour is a gender-sensitive phenomenon. Smith et al. (2023) suggested that airlines reinforce the image of the ideal worker through organisational power. This study, involving three different airline companies, revealed that organisational rules, peer surveillance and self-surveillance control the aesthetic labour of female flight attendants. Smith et al. (2023) also obtained interesting findings by analysing the social media posts of companies in the aviation industry. The analysis revealed that airlines generally use feminine visuals that support specific image stereotypes of their female employees. A study on flight attendants in Turkey revealed that gender serves as a moderating factor in the relationship between aesthetic labour and turnover intention (Can et al., 2023). One of the study's most notable findings is that as women's efforts in aesthetic labour increase, their intention to leave the job also increases. Therefore, the airline industry, which also uses female cabin crew as marketing elements, further highlights the gender-sensitive nature of aesthetic labour. In the following section, in addition to the studies mentioned above, the antecedents and consequences of aesthetic labour specific to the airline industry will be presented, drawing on theories related to emotional labour and empirical studies conducted in other sectors.

Antecedents and Consequences of Aesthetic Labour in Airline Industry

Previously, aesthetic labour was examined in the context of marketing and human resources strategies in the airline industry (Pettinger, 2004; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). However, numerous aspects still require further investigation. This section discusses the potential determiners and outcomes of aesthetic labour on employees and organisational outcomes, with a focus on gender differences. In this discussion, examples from both the airline industry and other service sectors are referenced to illustrate the potential impact and outcomes of aesthetic labour.

In the airline industry, national cultural norms and gender roles are significant antecedents of aesthetic labour (Smith et al., 2023). However, for flight attendants, not only local cultural norms but also global beauty standards play a crucial role (Elias et al., 2017). For instance, elements such as changing hairstyles over time, the use of cosmetic procedures, and the rise of social media, which foster social comparison, could influence organisational norms and affect employees' aesthetic perceptions. Additionally, organisational aesthetic perceptions are closely linked to local culture. For instance, Emirates expects female cabin crew to dress more modestly, but in Europe and America, people prefer tighter-fitting clothing (Lewis & Aune, 2023; Otis, 2011).

Job descriptions and role expectations are another critical aspect of the status of aesthetic labour in organisations (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Studies in this field suggest that organisations expect cabin crew to possess technical and soft skills. In other words, adhering to role expectations involves both behaviour and appearance, which are complementary elements. Additionally, organisational policies and procedures are important determinants of aesthetic labour. Recruitment policies are closely linked to aesthetic labour in the airline sector. Kim and Park (2014) conducted a study with Korean Airlines cabin crew members and revealed that aesthetic labour elements, such as self-image and professional etiquette, are among the competency components considered during recruitment.

Sector-specific trends driven by airline company competition can influence aesthetic labour. In the service sector, the concept of aesthetics is an important component of brand equity (Mahadin et al., 2023).

For instance, companies could be inspired by one another's employee uniforms or other appearance-based marketing strategies. It is already well-known that airline companies frequently use aesthetic labour in their promotional efforts (Ren, 2017). Therefore, by analysing the marketing strategies and advertisements of airline companies, it is possible to understand the gender dynamics related to aesthetic labour.

Peer surveillance is a significant determinant of aesthetic labour. For instance, Yeşilyurt Temel's (2023) study of Turkish bank employees revealed that emotional labour contributes to gender-based discrimination, clearly demonstrating a surveillance mechanism in this context. Furthermore, the study emphasised the exploitation of aesthetic labour, specifically targeting female employees in private banks. An important aspect of aesthetic labour is peer surveillance. Peer surveillance involves warning a peer who does not conform to the expected standards of appearance or reporting them to authorities. Peer surveillance can also be considered a pressure mechanism. Because peer surveillance serves as an additional monitoring tool for businesses, it enhances the sustainability of aesthetic labour. However, the relationships between peer surveillance and trust among colleagues and emotional and physical exhaustion can also be explored. There may also be different moderators that influence peer surveillance outcomes. For instance, an employee who sees conformity to aesthetic expectations as an integral part of their job might perceive peer surveillance positively. For instance, they might be pleased if a colleague corrects something they overlooked about their attire. Thus, aesthetic labour in the airline industry is shaped by a combination of global, local, organisational, group, and individual determinants.

The effects of aesthetic labour could be observed from two perspectives: organisational and individual. As previously mentioned, from an organisational perspective, aesthetic labour entails employees adhering to expected appearance standards and recruiting and rewarding those capable of meeting these standards. On the organisational level, aesthetic labour plays an instrumental role in enhancing service quality (Witz et al., 2003). Aesthetic labour has significant organisational outcomes, including its contribution to brand image and reputation (Spiess & Waring, 2005). In the highly competitive airline industry, a brand image is critical for passengers. Due to the unique nature of air travel, passengers want to feel safe and secure, and airline services are often associated with high levels of service quality. Airlines use aesthetic labour as a key strategic tool in this context. Airline companies cultivate an aesthetic culture, believing that the positive contribution of aesthetic labour to brand image and reputation enhances their competitive edge (Hanlon, 2017). Employees' appearance, behaviour, and service delivery are integral to conveying an airline's brand identity. The aesthetic standards set by airlines ensure that passengers perceive an airline as not only safe and reliable but also elegant and professional (Smith et al., 2023). This strategic use of aesthetic labour allows airlines to differentiate themselves from competitors while maintaining a prestigious brand reputation.

Researchers have explored the individual outcomes of aesthetic labour through gender and feminist lenses. These studies highlight how women, particularly in the airline industry, must exert more effort than men to meet aesthetic expectations (Maers, 2014; Smith et al., 2023). Feminist theory emphasises the disproportionate aesthetic demands placed on women, demonstrating that compliance with these expectations requires significantly more effort for female employees than their male counterparts (Ayuttacorn, 2016). Specifically, female employees may encounter diminished self-esteem as a result of their continued expectation to conform to societal and organisational beauty norms, which could lead to stress and anxiety. Another possible issue is the exploitation of the female body through objectification in advertising campaigns (Fixsen et al., 2023). Such circumstances could encourage female employees to resort to cosmetic procedures or excessive use of beauty products, thus compromising their mental and physical well-being. Moreover, as previous studies have shown, since aesthetic elements are more emphasised for women, they

may have difficulty attaining higher positions, and focusing on excessive aesthetic labour could become a career barrier for them.

As previously mentioned, for cabin crew, aesthetic labour extends beyond hair, makeup, and attire; it also encompasses elements such as a warm smile, a friendly atmosphere, and a sense of safety during a flight. These factors can enhance customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Okabe, 2017), which, in turn, can positively impact sales. Additionally, aesthetic labour can foster a sense of unity among employees, strengthen group cohesion, and contribute positively to teamwork. However, despite these positive effects, undesirable outcomes related to aesthetic labour may also arise. Undefined organisational rules could lead to overstepping aesthetic labour boundaries. For instance, employees may take aesthetic labour a step further, turning appearance into a competitive mechanism among colleagues (Yeşilyurt Temel, 2023). In the long term, this could have a negative impact on individual well-being and teamwork.

One of the dark sides of aesthetic labour is related to ethnic background. Walters (2017) conducted research in the clothing retail sector and revealed that managers often favour and reward white employees while intentionally including diverse individuals to enhance the brand's perceived image. This demonstrates that aesthetic labour encompasses not only physical appearance but also elements of discrimination and injustice related to ethnic origin. Moreover, in diversity studies, intentionally constructing a multicultural image may present challenges. "Tokenism" emerges when diversity promotion focuses exclusively on appearance. Tokenism refers to the strategy of superficially or symbolically including various individuals or groups without implementing significant or substantial adjustments to address fundamental problems of inequality or prejudice (Wright & Taylor, 1998). Young and James' (2001) study of flight attendants observed that token status negatively affects job satisfaction and organisational attachment. Consequently, customers who believe that a company's focus on diversity is deceptive could negatively impact the company's reputation. This could lead to negative publicity and negatively impact customer satisfaction.

Some studies have suggested that there are problematic aspects of aesthetic labour for individuals. Hochschild (1983:17) argued that to perform their jobs effectively, individuals must psychologically disengage from their emotions and emotional labour. Thus, detachment from emotions during work can result in feelings of alienation and emotional exhaustion. As noted by Mears (2014), aesthetic labour should be viewed not as a form of capital but as a type of labour. In other words, it reflects the mental and physical effort expended by employees. Therefore, given that aesthetic standards demand significant time and energy from workers, the constant pressure to conform to them can lead to increased stress and burnout among employees. Yeşilyurt's (2022) revealed that the most frequently linked employee outcome to aesthetic labour in tourism literature is emotional exhaustion. When aesthetic labour becomes a formal part of work, continuous peer comparison takes place, which could have potential negative consequences. These factors also include body dissatisfaction, constant efforts to maintain a certain weight, low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety.

Focusing intensely on employees' appearance in recruitment and promotion processes could lead to overlooking how well employees perform their job duties, potentially undermining organisational justice. Moreover, an intense and disproportionate emphasis on aesthetic elements could reinforce organisational gender stereotypes. Over time, this may result in legal and ethical issues, potentially bringing the organisation into conflict with its employees on legal grounds. Additionally, previous research has shown that aesthetic labour could negatively impact employee intentions to leave their jobs. In their study with flight attendants, Cho et al. (2014) found that role stressors significantly impact turnover intentions through emotional exhaustion. In addition, previous research in the service sector has revealed that aesthetic labour has negative effects on frontline employees and decreases their level of work engagement (Tsaur & Hsieh, 2020).



Research on emotional labour provides useful insights into the difficulties employees face because both entail the execution of responsibilities that necessitate the regulation of one's appearance and emotions to fulfil expectations provided by the organisation. For instance, Hu et al. (2017) showed that emotional labour is a mediator in the relationship between misbehaving air passengers and emotional exhaustion among cabin crew members. In this context, it is possible to see the examination of aesthetic elements as a subdimension of emotional labour in relation to employee attitudes.

Discussion

This study reviews the concept of aesthetic labour within the airline industry from a gender perspective and explains its various determinants and potential outcomes. This section presents recommendations for future research and organisations. Nevertheless, since several studies tend to emphasise aspects that are unfavourable to female employees, it is also advisable to conduct exploratory studies from the male viewpoint on aesthetic labour as well. Studies on aesthetic labour in the aviation sector have traditionally focused on female employees, although men might also face issues linked to appearance and peer surveillance. For instance, while society typically expects women to maintain a feminine appearance, men may experience pressure to conform to a masculine ideal, potentially leading to stress. In Yeşilyurt Temel's (2023) study, male employees emphasised that key elements of aesthetic labour, such as clean, ironed, and properly fitted clothes, were crucial factors in increasing sales. Exploring how aesthetic labour is defined for men in organisations and understanding their emotional experiences at work can provide a more comprehensive assessment of gender roles in the aviation industry.

A more detailed examination of these cultural differences is recommended. Peer surveillance can be examined in terms of organisational culture. The way in which colleagues give feedback on appearance could either motivate employees or cause stress. Furthermore, depending on how it is implemented, peer surveillance can increase competitiveness or exclude individuals. Investigating the mechanisms of peer surveillance and organisational culture with regard to aesthetic labour in airlines could reveal significant insights as a distinct research topic. Furthermore, examining the role of aesthetic labour in the airline industry from different theoretical perspectives could provide a more thorough understanding. Although SCT and feminist theory are frequently employed in aesthetic labour research, examining aesthetic labour from different theoretical perspectives can offer new insights. For instance, the outcomes of aesthetic labour could be examined from the perspective of Job Demands-Resources Theory (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Previous research has investigated emotional labour in the context of cabin crew from the JD-R viewpoint (Heuven & Bakker, 2006; Schiffinger et al., 2020). In job descriptions for cabin crew, responsibilities typically include safety checks, emergency response, enforcing regulations, passenger assistance, and communication. In addition, a friendly and comfortable atmosphere is expected for aircraft. Yelgin and Ergün (2021) examined the job demands of Turkish airline cabin crew members. Their research revealed that physical and emotional requirements are sub-dimensions of job demands within the category of individual factors. Additionally, future studies could benefit from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) to explore how airline employees define their professional identities within the context of aesthetic labour since apparel, body language, and behavioural patterns are important components of identity.

It is recommended that organisations initially examine policies regarding aesthetic labour. The determination of whether these standards establish equitable expectations for both women and men is crucial. Moreover, it would be advantageous to conduct a critical analysis of whether these standards contribute to any possibility of discrimination. In addition, it is recommended to prioritise the enhancement of awareness regarding aesthetic labour in training programmes and to offer new perspectives for both employees and managers to successfully address and eliminate gender biases. By employing team-based training, role-

playing, and simulation techniques, it is possible to convert peer comparisons from a control mechanism into a support mechanism, thereby reducing the negative effects of aesthetic labour. Furthermore, it is recommended to analyse performance metrics and thoroughly investigate the impact of aesthetic factors on performance assessments for all employees. Research suggests that because of the increased level of gendered aesthetic demands for women (Ren, 2017), it is important to increase awareness and prevent these opinions from negatively affecting women's career progression.

Various methodological paradigms can potentially be used to investigate aesthetic labour, particularly in the airline industry. Because national and organisational culture are among the determinants of aesthetic labour (Lewis & Aune, 2023; Otis, 2011), studies conducted in different geographic regions are important for comparative analysis of these findings. Moreover, research on how globalisation, changing gender perceptions and social media shape aesthetic perceptions could yield interesting insights. Qualitative research can explore personal narratives and shed light on the transformative impact of globalisation on aesthetic labour. Survey-based quantitative research methodologies can also facilitate statistical analysis to explore gender inequalities. Furthermore, the case study approach can be used to analyse the specific outcomes of aesthetic treatments resulting from individual or organisational factors. This approach can reveal previously overlooked aspects of discrimination, pressure, and extreme conditions in the airline industry. In addition, it is recommended that organisational documents and information from social media advertising be included as supplemental resources in future research.

This study was primarily based on data from several databases. Future research could benefit from a more systematic review. Another limitation could be the potential neglect of aesthetic elements given their frequent inclusion in emotional labour studies. Thus, the keywords used during the initial search may have been insufficient. Despite these limitations, this research provides a general overview of aesthetic labour in the airline industry from a gender perspective, offering valuable insights for airline employees, managers, and researchers in fields such as human resources and industrial psychology.



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