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“Charming Eyes”: Exploring Agency through the Beauty and Makeup Practices of Salesladies in Metropolitan Manila’s Department Stores

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“Charming Eyes”

Exploring Agency through the Beauty and Makeup Practices of Salesladies in Metropolitan Manila’s Department Stores

An examination of the role and meaning of beauty and makeup practices among the salesladies of Metropolitan Manila’s department stores brings forth a worker-centered analysis of “agency” using the notion of “charming eyes.” Here, we find an intimate blending of the practices of working as a saleslady: how compliance with the company’s “appearance rules” and “beauty standards” serve the interests of retail businesses and are not merely expressions of individuality. Simultaneously, this analysis addresses concerns about working and pursuing their goals, desires, and aspirations in life. Through the ethnographic approach, this study was comprehensively contextualized through the everyday lived experiences of acting subjects within the setting, thereby capturing their rich voices. Data sources include interviews, life narratives, observations, photo documentation, material object analysis, and secondary research. I argue that the emergence of “agency” is context specific: to reveal “agency” is to understand the context and how practices correspond with the limits and possibilities therein. The salesladies’ “agency” was manifested in the beauty and makeup practices as they enacted work with their respective mobility—social, cultural, economic—projects in mind. This view subverts the usual low-pay, low-status, and low-prestige associations of the occupation. As a counter-narrative, the article shows a specific group of workers making sense of their work conditions as they try to meaningfully engage its constraints and transform their lives on their terms (Ortner 2006).

KEYWORDS: agency, aesthetic labor, beauty practices, body part labor, capital, “charming eyes,” class, department stores, emotional labor, facework, interactive service work, makeup, Metropolitan Manila, Philippines, retail sales work, salesladies, service interactions, social mobility projects, subjectivities

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the role and meaning of makeup in the everyday lives of Metropolitan Manila's department store salesladies take center stage. While there are several related studies in the domain of the body, gender, and service research (Hochschild 1983; Dellinger and Williams 1997; Kang 2003; McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, and Fabri 2017), most focus on the interactions between workers and customers. There is the limited worker-centered analysis of "agency," which examines encounters with the forces in the work setting and the way these are embodied in specific actions and practices. This gap inspires the primary purpose of this article: exploring agency as it emerges and manifests through the beauty and makeup practices of salesladies.

This ethnographic examination covers the varied meanings of beauty and makeup practices in retail sales, providing a deeper understanding of retail work. It gives critical attention to (1) the roles and expectations of the salesforce to create revenue and (2) how beauty and makeup practices configure in the company's objectives. I provide a detailed presentation of the made-up face to unmask how the salesladies view their practices in connection with the company's targets, their everyday sales interactions, and the constraints and gains of working in retail sales. Through this unmasking, the salesladies expressed anxieties and promises of working in retail, which are intimately woven with beauty and makeup.

The paper disentangles these complex interconnections through the four overlapping objectives delivered in the findings. First is the contextualization of beauty and makeup within "appearance rules" (Nickson et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Warhurst et al. 2012) and "beauty standards" (Bordo 2005; Beausoleil 1994; Wolf 1991), which govern the workers of retail sales. Companies impose policies to maintain the desirable characteristics of their workforce (R. Hall and van den Broek 2012). There are monitoring, reporting, and sanctioning mechanisms to enforce these policies. The second presents the work arrangements—often temporary, seasonal, or contractual—and the anxieties generated among workers. To ease anxieties, beauty and makeup practices boost the confidence of the salesladies to better engage with customers in the sales interaction process.

The third objective builds on the previous two by mainly providing a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of the notion of “charming eyes.” It is comprised of the technical aspects of putting on makeup: the application, tools, products used, and choice of colors and shades. Additionally, it provides the salesladies’ explanations for the specific application of makeup. These vividly illustrate the blending of the workplace forces within the micro-level practices of the face. The fourth and last objective analyzes the gains acquired in deploying “charming eyes.” Despite the not so promising work arrangements, the salesladies share the possible life advancements in retail work.

The article engages Bourdieu’s (1997), Giddens’s (1979), and Ortner’s (1984, 1996, 2006) works on practice theory, particularly the ideas and concepts of the acting subject, agency, power, subjectivity, habitus, and capital. Of these, Ortner’s practice approach (1984, 1996, 2006) was most influential in offering a subject-centered analysis of beauty and makeup while keeping within view the impact of structural arrangements and power dynamics.

The ethnographic research of the lived experiences of fifteen salesladies who worked in Metropolitan Manila’s top department stores informs the article. The study’s participants were pre-selected using several criteria: job designation, rank, work status, experience, and makeup know-how. Some observations and informal conversations occurred while they were working during shop hours. Several in-depth interviews were conducted after work or during their day-off. The study employed purposeful sampling using the snowball technique in inviting informants.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Problematizing beauty and makeup practices are beyond skin deep. Often “trivialized, neglected, ignored, and considered unworthy of scientific investigation” (Dellinger and Williams 1997, 153), the ritualistic use of makeup reveals the life conditions and lived experiences of people. It covers broad fields: body and bodily practices (Mauss 1973; Douglas 1996; Bourdieu 1977; Gimlin 2007); ideals and standards (Bordo 2005; Beausoleil 1994; Wolf 1991; Gangestad and Scheyd 2005); consumption and body cultivation (Lock 1993;

Miller 2006; Hogle 2005; Edmonds 2010); aesthetic and body labor (Kang 2003; Nickson et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007); emotional labor and management (Hochschild 1983); gender making and work (Dellinger and Williams 1997; McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, and Fabri 2017); labor force branding (R. Hall and van den Broek 2012); employee looks and lookism (Warhurst et al. 2012); service industries; and various forms of structure-agency dynamics concerning work (Brumley 2014; Ortner 2006; Paulsen 2013; Kalleberg and Vallas 2018; Guiamet 2019).

In retail sales, landmark writings on the “commercialization of bodies and emotion” (Kang 2003, 821) inform much of the insights on beauty and makeup. Arlie Hochschild’s *The Managed Heart* (1983) remains well-cited for introducing the concepts of “emotional labor” and “feeling rules” in managing emotions for commercial gains. “Aesthetic labor” builds on these and stresses the importance of looks, appearance, attractiveness, or “looking good” and “sounding right” (Warhurst and Nickson 2007, 104) to capture physical and presentational capabilities in “interactive service work”—occupations requiring high levels of interaction in service delivery (Warhurst et al. 2012). The physical qualities and dispositions of workers matter, especially when customer interaction is concerned (Hochschild 1983; Kang 2003; Nickson et al. 2003; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; R. Hall and Van den Broek 2012; Kjerstin Elmen-Gruys 2014).

In these sources, beauty and makeup practices comply with appearance rules or the institutionalized norms and expectations of specific workplaces on looks (Dellinger and Williams 1997). Surveilled (Foucault 1979) as company policy, sanctions ensure workers follow these rules. The “rules” modify the body to emphasize the desirable physical qualities in specific work contexts. For example, Philippine retail prescribes standards on height, complexion, and body type. Assumptions about sexuality and gender (Dellinger and Williams 1997, 153) coincide with the rules, which become a mechanism for gendering the workforce. Therefore, salesladies ascribe to their workplaces’ gendered requirements. In effect, “workers ‘do gender,’ performing tasks in specific ways because the jobs are structured to demand ‘gender displays’” (E. Hall 1993, 331). Thus, the makeup practices of salesladies count as “gender displays” that are part of retail work’s appearance rules.

Feminist discourses scrutinize makeup practices. Themes on “conformity with appearance standards” (Dellinger and Williams 1997, 153) that “control women” (Bordo 2005, 309) proliferate. Foucault’s “docile body” (in Bordo 2005) frames the regimens of beauty, bodyweight management, and even fashion as forms of disciplinary practices that reproduce prevailing power relations. Arguments highlight subservience and subordination to hegemonic ideologies promoting patriarchal and male-centered ideas such as the “beauty myth” (Wolf 1991). Women need to be beautiful and attractive to be desirable. Beholden to external persuasions of beauty, they construct women as passive followers of ideals. When coupled with the appearance rules, women further become objects of control and surveillance. Policies on appearance support the gender ideologies crucial in sustaining the business targets of organizations.

In studying workers, labor and workforce concerns impinge the examination and draws critical attention to structural arrangements, labor relations, and exploitative conditions in worker-centered analyses of agency in practice. The bodies of work on labor, gender, and globalization provide a critical reading on how the strategies to remain competitive impact the workforce. Mills (2003, 41) highlights the “multiple dimensions of labor and gender inequalities in the global economy.” Though not new and discussed heavily in many writings, some need reiteration: hierarchical gendered ideologies and social relations support “capital accumulation” and serve to “cheapen the direct costs of labor” to “ensure the low-cost structure” of industries (44–45). An example is the large-scale hiring of seasonal and cheap labor. Evident in global agri-business, Philippine retail notoriously shares the same business practices found in contractual work arrangements.

This contractualization continues to be a heated labor issue in the Philippines. This practice is known through several names: temporary employment contracts (or TEC, following the European convention), Endo or end of a contract, 5-5-5 or the on-off hiring of the same individual to avoid regularizing them, tempo or temporary hires, casuals, and probationary, among others (Paqueo and Orbeta 2016, 2). For workers, these terms are reduced to their status as regular or not. Their construction of this arrangement centers on well-being: generates anxiety and misery; limits income for basic needs; hinders

economic stability; slows down social mobility; poses “challenges in uplifting” their lives (Tolentino 2017, 46); “are portrayed as a cause of workers’ hardships and exploitation” (Paqueo and Orbeta 2016, 4); the origin of job insecurity for many Filipinos; and more. Estimates of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA 2014) peg 1.3 million non-regular workers (in firms with at least 20 regular workers). The numbers could be much more significant.

Nevertheless, positions on contractualization vary. Labor activists clamor for rights and social justice. The current administration promises to end contractualization. Paqueo and Orbeta (2016, 1) argue on its contribution to “the goal of achieving rapid, inclusive, and sustained economic growth.” Counterintuitively, a survey shows that “workers employed by ‘endo’ contractors appear satisfied with their current jobs.” There are also indications that the provision of the minimum wage, statutory benefits, overtime pay/holiday premiums, and thirteenth month pay keep the workers contented (Paqueo and Orbeta 2016). Mixed claims characterize these positions. Workers’ voices are also absent. Given these, the ethnographic documentation of worker’s perspectives, microlevel experiences, and work-life realities are much needed in illuminating the baffling contradictions of this arrangement.

STATEMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The commercialization of bodies and emotions, appearance rules, aesthetic labor, beauty standards, and macrolevel factors provide a backdrop for understanding the context and situating the significance of the beauty and makeup practices among the salesladies. However, this limits the goal to defining its significance to the workers. The in-depth treatment of industry-specific worker-centered perspectives is vital for covering the diversity of work-life experiences in various settings. With this, the following questions emerge:

1. How do salesladies make sense of and deal with the complex contradictions in their retail work-life?
2. Why do salesladies continue to subject themselves to the commercialization of their bodies and emotions? What gains have the salesladies achieved in retail work?

3. How do beauty and makeup practices configure in work? What can the beauty and makeup practices offer in grasping the salesladies' version of agency?

These external forces and complex processes of structural arrangements and power dynamics intimately penetrate one's life, shaping the worldviews as well as the everyday actions and practices of particular people (Abu-Lughod 1991, 151). Thus, practice theories (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979; Ortner 1984, 1996, 2006) provide a productive framework when examining the interplay of the saleslady's subjective-experience with the external forces and processes surrounding their work-life. Three ideas are worth highlighting.

Foremost, subjects are "knowing" and always "reflect" on their conditions and experiences (Giddens 1979). These contemplations of everyday life generate "a particular structure of feelings" (Ortner 2006) that range from fear, worry, and insecurities to being energetic and lively, among others. The structure of feelings constitutes "subjectivity" or the "ensemble of modes of perceptions, affects, thoughts, desire, and fear" (Ortner 2006, 107), thus, providing an entry point for assessing how people make sense of their worlds.

Second, understanding agency anchors on subjectivity. "Large scale cultural formations" arouse subjectivities to give it a particular form. For instance, flexible arrangements characteristic of most contemporary work settings affect diverse categories of people differently (Ortner 2006, 123). It is crucial to account for the dynamic encounter of the inner states and large-scale formations that acting agents find themselves in to particularize subjective experience and the practice of agency.

Lastly, subjectivity animates, fuels, and enlivens actions and practices as an outcome of points one and two. The distinct subjectivities animating agency allow the salesladies to act intentionally and willfully according to their respective capacities. Their agency cannot be viewed apart from their actions to deliver the business targets, make a living, and achieve their aspirations and desires. The manifestation of their agency is unique because of this peculiar combination; hence, the beauty and makeup practices are not some rote routines in compliance with work to serve the company or customers. These are concrete actions as well for realizing their mobility projects—goals, desires, and aspirations—despite the limitations of their situation.

The article traverses systemic and micro-level analysis in sketching the unique expression of agency. The ethnographic approach productively particularizes the findings. The following research design can provide insights to studies on comparative subject-centered agency across different work practices or settings.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research and writing took place from January to December of 2014. It included nearly one month of pre-field preparation, three months of data gathering, and the remaining period devoted to the analysis, interpretation, and manuscript writing.

Data gathering comprised of three phases. Phase One (the getting-to-know-you phase) provided an overview of the lifeworld, especially those relating to family and pre-saleslady life. Phase Two investigated the makeup-wearing context. It involved describing the work site, employment policies and regulations, and customer interface prescriptions. It also covered an inventory and visual documentation of related makeup activities. Phase Three probed the salesladies' sentiments, desires, and outlook and the connection with their family, work, and life in general.

The informants were fifteen individuals occupying different ranks in several retail companies. Four informants held college degrees and were corporate-level position-holders (China, Grace, Necie, and Marinette); while the ten non-degree holding informants were salesladies. The informants were in their early 20s to their mid-40s. Most of the informants were female with the exception of a male salesclerk who happened to be present during an interview schedule. He offered information that males in their company have instructions to hide skin blemishes like pimples using concealer. The inclusion criteria for the in-depth interviews included job designation and ranking, work status, and experience in any of the top retail players in Metropolitan Manila. The study employed purposeful sampling using the snowball technique in inviting informants.

I decided to focus on the salesladies and construct the policies from their perspective. Two informants were company officers who also contributed to understanding the systems. Of the fifteen

informants, almost half came directly from my network. I solicited the help of a recruiter in establishing a connection with some of the rest.

The study focused on the National Capital Region (NCR) because all the big, top of the line, and competitive retail outlets are located in NCR. The level of competitiveness shapes the work setting as well as the demands placed on workers. Additionally, the top department store players have the most elaborate beauty rules based on my investigation.

The study used the ethnographic approach to achieve three things: (1) produce a deep understanding of the research context, (2) come close to the everyday lived experiences of the acting subjects in this setting, and (3) capture their rich perspectives. Data sources include interviews, life narratives, observations, photo documentation, material object analysis, and secondary research.

Attributes	Specifics
Job Designation and Rank	Saleslady Merchandiser Branch Manager Assistant Supervisor
Work Status/Experience	Currently Working In Between Contracts A Past Worker Who Moved on to Other Jobs or Positions First Timer Multi-Contract Worker
Employer	By Mall: Metropolitan Market Landmark SM By Brand: Bunny Jeans Penshoppe etc.

Table 1. Informant Qualifiers

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Civil Status	Years of Work in Retail	Position During the Time of Research
Nica	F	22	M	2011–2012	Full-Time Housewife
Irma	F	Mid-30s	M	2004 up to time of research	Saleslady (Apparel)
Eunice	F	25	M	2011–2013	Full-Time Housewife
Jessa	F	Mid-40s	M	1985–1999	Executive Assistant (Ad Agency)
Reggie	F	26	M	2006 up to time of research	Saleslady (Apparel)
Abi	F	Early 30s	M	2000 up to time of research	Saleslady (Apparel)
Ara	F	23	S	2010 up to time of research	Saleslady (Socks)
Juliet	F	23	S	2012 up to time of research	Saleslady (Shoes)
Zinnia	F	Mid-30s	M	data not provided	Saleslady (Makeup)
Rudy	M	Early 20s	S	data not provided	Salesman (Shoes)
Jane	F	26	S	2009 up to time of research	Sales Assistant
China	F	29	S	2006 up to time of research	Sales Supervisor
Grace	F	29	M	2011 up to time of research	Saleslady (Infant Wear)
Necie	F	36	M	2000 up to time of research	Branch Manager
Marinette	F	36	M	2000 up to time of research	Manager (Apparel)

Table 2. Profile of Informants

FINDINGS

This section presents the configuration of beauty and makeup practices with work and how it shapes agency. I argue that workplace gender making practices not only dispel work performance anxieties but are essential in achieving various mobility projects (i.e., social, economic, cultural). For the salesladies, retail is an arena for pursuing their goals, desires, and aspirations. Enacting work for these projects subverts the usual low-pay, low-status, and low-prestige associations of their occupation. This counter-narrative showcases a specific group of workers making sense of their work conditions as they meaningfully engage with its limitations according to their terms (Ortner 2006). It demonstrates how “agency” profoundly infuses everyday practices.

Three sections comprise data presentation. It begins with an overview of the gender and work arrangements in retail service work that is informed through secondary data. The second part discusses primary data on the embodiment of beauty and makeup practices to create laboring “charming eyes.” The last part presents the participants’ gains and achievements of working in retail. The narratives, descriptions, and experiences of the salesladies came from the data collected during the research period.

WORK OPPORTUNITIES IN RETAIL

Businesses organize their workforce through hiring patterns, work arrangements, firm policies, labor organization, wealth creation, and company competition. Work organization defines job rankings and positions; while wealth creation and company competition push workers in meeting targets. Businesses define the dynamics and demands of facing workers in their daily work-life. This inescapably impacts the lived experiences of the workers, which consequently form their subjectivities. Thus, knowing the dynamics of the workplace leads to knowledge of worker’s agency.

The retail industry is significant, with gross revenue amounting to billions of pesos (see table 3). It contributes 13% to Philippine GDP. Four corporations are worth mentioning in the Philippines, namely SM Prime Holdings, Inc., Ayala Malls Group, Robinson’s Retail Holdings, Inc., and Rustan’s Group of Companies.¹ The transformation, growth, and expansion of the industry opened opportunities for employment.

THE GENDERING OF RETAIL SALES WORK

The magnitude and projected growth of the retail industry continues to employ many women (Asia Development Bank 2013). In 2017, female service and sales workers employed in private establishments reached 1.72 million (see fig. 1).

Retail ranks high among the list of preferred occupations in the National Skills Registry System (NSRS).² Ranking third, 50,000 women eye this job. In 2018, PhilJobNet registered more than 10,000 job vacancies for shop and market sales workers.³ Figures indicate the notable labor trends in retail sales. Retail employs many workers, and a significant number are women.

Corporation	Indicators (2013)
SM Prime Holdings, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 48 Department Stores 39 Supermarket 93 SaveMore 22 Walter Mart Supermarkets 5 outlets in China (2013) Leasable Retail Space (m²): 7 million Gross Revenues: PHP 180 billion
Ayala Malls Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leasable Retail Space (m²): 1.8 million Gross Revenues: PHP 10.5 billion
Robinson's Retail Holdings, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36 Department Stores 75 Supermarkets 114 DIY Stores 345 Convenience Stores 223 Drug Stores 147 Specialty Store Outlets Leasable Retail Space (m²): 1.07 million Gross Revenues: PHP 67.255 billion
Rustan's Group of Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Department Stores 655 Retail Brand Outlets Known for its "stores-within-a-store" concept, it houses signature, upscale, and high-end fashion brands.

Table 3. Comparative Table of Business Operation⁴

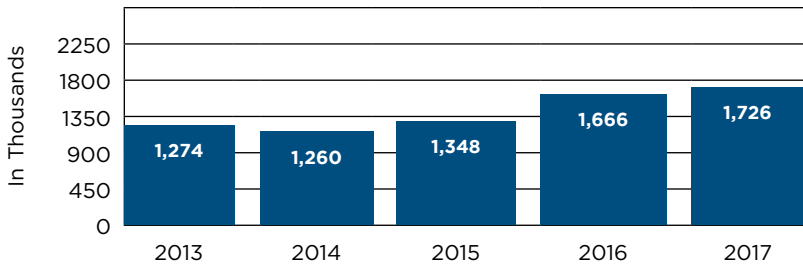


Figure 1. Employed Persons of Private Establishments:
Female Service and Sales Workers 2013 – 2017 (PSA 2018).

HIRING PATTERNS AND WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Hiring practices and assignments of tasks shape the organization of labor in service contexts. (Elmen-Gruys 2004, 103)

In the Philippines, the idea of a one-stop-shop makes department stores a standard element inside shopping malls. These are either mall developer owned and operated or mall partnership arrangements. Malls and department stores generate revenue through leasing spaces to merchants—for example, Levi’s Jeans, Gibi Shoes, Maybelline makeup, and others. Department stores, as the name suggests, are organized into departments, sections, or product categories: the major ones being Men’s Fashion, Women’s Fashion, Infant and Children’s Section, Personal Care and Grooming, Cosmetics, Home, and DIY.

Six general types of work arrangements prevail in most stores (see table 4). These depend on whether they are direct hires of (a) the department store for its in-house products or (b) the merchant, consignor, or brand space lessors. The arrangement can either be regular or contractual. Permanent employees or regular hires have more benefits and privileges. In every hire, salesladies can fall in either of these types.

There are four kinds of direct relations: (a) direct-hire, operator, regular; (b) direct-hire, operator, contractual; (c) direct-hire, merchant, regular; (d) direct-hire, merchant, contractual. Workforce agencies take charge of indirect hires. For a fee, these manage the

hiring, training, and payroll processing of the worker on behalf of the enterprises. The possibility of being regularized is only possible among direct hires. Hires of workforce agencies are all contractual.

	Regular	Contractual
Direct hire-operator	✓	
Direct hire-merchant	✓	✓
Agency-operator		✓
Agency-merchant		✓

Table 4. Six General Types of Employment Arrangements

Contractual, seasonal, or temporary hires can be given work for a minimum of one month and a maximum of five to six months. These short-term hires may be regularized depending on several factors, such as work performance, an endorsement from bosses, and vacancies. Short-term work arrangements motivate salesladies to seek work continuity in several ways. One is through making friends and connections with fellow workers who can be leads in job openings. Others try to please the officers of the department store operator to be absorbed in its roster of regular employees. Contractual arrangements make them aggressive in seeking future work even while still under contract.

According to an informant, one department store follows a 70-30 mix of regular and contractual workers, respectively. Contractual workers help in boosting capacity during peak seasons. There are two sales peaks annually. The school opening every May to June drives the mid-year activities and revenues. The Yuletide season, which begins as early as September and lasts until January of the following year, is the most active and profitable quarter of the year. During these periods, contractual and temporary hires are in demand. Hiring takes place all year round but only on certain days of the week. One can either apply via the workforce agency or the department store operator, merchant, or brand lessor.

BEAUTY AND GENDER DIMENSIONS OF RETAIL WORK

In the performance of work, salesladies interact with customers. They assist in giving product information, offer stocks for fitting, and aid customers in making purchase decisions. Their administrative duties include arranging merchandise displays, monitoring inventory, sorting sales records, and reporting sales activities to the head office. These tasks are simple, easy to learn, and do not require specialized skills. Retail sales work is attractive and promising, especially for women with limited formal education because of the minimum requirement of a high school diploma. Thus, women from the urban poor areas of Metropolitan Manila and the external provinces find retail work enticing. For them, retail work offers better compensation relative to informal work: like being a household helper or tending *sari-sari* stores.

One's educational attainment determines one's work tasks, promotions, and possible regularization. A high school education qualifies one to be an entry-level sales or stock clerk. Salesclerks attend to customer needs in the selling area or shop floor. Stock clerks attend to the inventories and dispensing of the goods in the warehouse. Applicants with two to four years of a college education are qualified to be a cashier, checker, or inventory clerk.

Physical characteristics, age, sex, and beauty standards are likewise part of the qualifications. Males and females between the ages of 18 to 25 years old can apply. Their height should be at least 5 feet 5 inches for males and 5 feet for females. Having smooth skin, a fair complexion, and a bright and pimple-free face is highly desirable. A manager-informant even adds that one goal of the makeup is to cover blemishes and the occasional zit. Even males are encouraged to use concealers when needed. She further adds that "*dapat walang sirang ngipin*" (there should be no visible tooth decay).

In the Philippines, department stores match product lines with the physical attributes and skills of its salesperson. The salesladies in the infant products tend to be much older and more plump than their slimmer counterparts in the jeans or cosmetics section. These counterparts are known to be the prettiest, slimmest, fairest salesladies. Most importantly, they wear the best makeup. The jeans and cosmetics section promote being fashionable and attractive. Thus, there is a need for sales workers to embody these qualities in their "looks."

For female applicants, looks—or what is known in Tagalog as *maganda* (beautiful), *maayos* (put-together), or *maputi* (fair-skinned)—are advantages that offset limited tertiary education. For example, the sibling of 26-year-old informant Jane convinced her to fly to Manila from their Mindanao hometown: “*Lumuwas ka ng Maynila at mabubulok lang ang beauty mo diyan [sa probinsya]*” (Come to Manila rather than waste your beauty there [in the province]). Swayed by her *ate* (older sister), she decided to apply as a saleslady and was Manila-bound within days—all expenses shouldered by her sister. As expected, she passed the screening and got hired. Similarly, Gelai, a family friend, talks about her 18-year-old *ate* planning to apply at a department store in Lucban, Quezon. Gelai confidently said, “*malamang matanggap si Ate pag tumuloy siya mag-apply, maputi kasi siya*” (Ate will probably be hired if she applies because she has fair skin). These statements indicate an awareness of the workplace’s beauty standards. Interestingly, they suggest the overlapping attributes of beauty and fair complexion in defining an attractive look or appearance to qualify for retail work.

Sex distribution varies across sections. Females dominate the sections of personal care, cosmetics, infant and children’s wear, ladies’ wear, jeans, among others. Males are noticeably assigned to hardware, the appliance center, toy’s section, home section, and men’s wear. However, retail work tends to be more associated with women as the tasks are similar to routines performed at home. The tasks do not require much training except perhaps for the appearance rule and customer service. As Jessa said, “*ang pagiging saleslady hindi nangangailangan ng mataas o bonggang degree. Karaniwan taga-tiklop, communication skill, at pag-intindi ng instruction ang basic na kailangan nila*” (You do not need an advanced degree to become a saleslady. Usually, you just fold clothes, and all you need are communication skills so that you can understand instructions correctly). Jessa was already in her mid-40s and had worked in retail from 1985 to 1999. She had to quit college to work due to her father’s accident in the mid-1980s. Later on, she managed to land an executive assistant position in an advertising firm. Retail work offered opportunities for undergraduates like her with minimal to no work experience. The work environment was also much better than her short stint at a trinket factory.

EMBODYING THE “PERFECT FACE” FOR WORK AND THE MAKINGS OF THE “CHARMING EYES”

Embodying the “perfect face” for work is alluring to customers. Upon hiring, there are several orientations and trainings for equipping the workforce to do specific tasks and raise limited skillsets. The standard look and appearance are prime components of the briefing. Informants confirm that the beauty and makeup practices matter at work because this is part of the policy. Interestingly, however, when they talk about the technicalities of beauty and makeup practices, they tend to explain their specificities. They further elaborate on how the face and its focal zone—the “charming eyes”—are utilized in engaging customers in the sales interaction. They narrate how the practices ease anxieties and boost confidence in doing their job. There is intentionality in using “charming eyes.” In this case, intentionality in deploying the “charming eyes” is an exercise of agency following the principles of the practice approach (Ortner 2006).

The girl sitting beside me at our locker—I think she worked at Watson's, a cosmetics and personal care outlet, I was watching her, and she was perfect. The way she did her eyebrows was unique. First, she put an outline, using an eyebrow pencil right above and then right below her brows. After that, she used a brush and started blending.
(Ara, Personal Interview, 2014)

ACQUIRING THE SALESLADY BEAUTY HABITUS: SURVEILLANCE AND VIOLATION

Companies prescribe acceptable makeup applications. Some mandate the use of specific colors for the eye makeup as part of their branding; while others are strict in monitoring their salesladies' appearance. For some, light makeup—using pressed powder, lipstick, some cheek tint, and eyebrow pencil—is acceptable. Alternatively, one company requires “full makeup”—this consists of foundation, complete eye makeup, shaped and enhanced brows, curled lashes, lined upper and lower lash lines, blush on, and lipstick. Using foundation is also encouraged as it holds makeup for longer durations than pressed powder. The company imposes and surveils the practices in compliance with appearance rules and beauty standards.

It is a must to acquire and embody the rules and standards. Not all salesladies knew how to wear makeup upon starting work. Outsiders tend to make fun of their facework, referring to it as *mukhang* clown (clownish), *pulang-pula* (too red), or *parang sinapak* (appears like someone had punched them in the face). *Mga baguhan* (newbies) are inexperienced with makeup and will need assistance. Most women are interested in increasing their makeup application know-how through observing and teaching one another. Although immersion in the work setting develops these skills, companies ensure standardization through the training of new hires. In these orientations, they deliver the policies on grooming, uniform, shoes, hair, and most of all makeup. Periodic refreshers further inculcate these policy-related “looks.” Salesladies need to invest in learning the practices and integrating these into their daily work routines. They must comply with the expectations.

Considered as part of the complete uniform, those who are not yet wearing makeup cannot enter the workplace. One company requiring full makeup designates a dressing room with well-lit vanity mirrors where personnel can comfortably conduct their makeup preparations. Their corridors leading to the selling areas (and which also serve as the exit) have full-length mirrors to encourage self-checking. Makeup must appear newly applied for at least two hours until they can retouch it during their break. Makeup must look freshly applied from the beginning to the end of their shift lest they be reprimanded for non-compliance.



Figure 2. Makeup Kit of an Informant⁵

Management systems ensure obedience. Managers, selling area officers, and old hires continuously remind each other about the “beauty rules.” Lousy makeup application ensures a warning. They are either sent to the locker or back office to rectify the unprepared “work face.” Frequent violations get listed and become part of the “performance” evaluation, which is a basis for regularization or contract renewal. Some receive individual instructions from colleagues or bosses, while others attend refresher courses. Surveillance is accompanied with sanctions so that no one digresses from the standards. With the monitoring systems, workers have integrated the practices as a vital aspect of their saleslady “habitus” (Bourdieu 1977).

There are unintended and deliberate circumstances for non-compliance. Household chores, family obligations, childcare duties, and extra income activities before coming to work tighten the preparation time for makeup. Staying up late as a result of social activities or economic ventures results in rushed mornings, which also impact makeup time. Distance from workplace and traffic also disrupt makeup routines for work. Time constraints affect the quality of makeup application. Although not mentioned, the financial cost likely hampers the purchase of quality makeup tools and products. Lapses show competing concerns that hamper compliance with makeup norms.

On the extreme, some deliberately breach the beauty rules and makeup standards. A department store manager distinguished between “party makeup” and “work makeup.” She elaborates, “*Hindi dapat mukhang attend ng party. Dapat pang office*” (One should not come across like they are off to attend a party. She should wear makeup as if she were going to the office). Some do exaggerate their beauty and makeup as a way of standing out and expressing their identity. In some interviews, putting on makeup is seen as a practice that signals being “sophisticated” and “modern.” Hence, some salesladies experiment on its exaggerated application. The same manager intriguingly remarked, “DM?!” (department manager) upon sharing instances when salesladies overdo their makeup. She seems to treat the deviation—a notable expression of resistance—as a challenge to rank boundaries.

Either way, many devised strategies to skirt the protocols to prevent penalties: avoiding surveillance, appearing “fixed” through minimum makeup, and hiding behind other workers. In gaming the system—that is, skirting or bending the beauty rules through outsmarting the system creating these—the salesladies demonstrate agency.

THE “CHARMING EYES” AND THE LABORS OF SALES WORK

It is challenging to assist [customers] when one is not fixed or wearing makeup. You want to go on your break to have the time to put on cosmetics and makeup. Instead of a jolly greeting, ‘Yes Ma’am? What are you looking for? We have a new stock of that item. What color? What size?’

There is no aggressiveness. When unfixed, unkept, and without proper makeup, one can only muster a dry, bored, and lifeless ‘Yes Ma’am.’ One will not have the confidence to sales talk. (Ara, Personal Interview, 2014)

Beauty and makeup are constitutive of “gender displays” (E. Hall 1993, 331) that ease sales work. With makeup, the face transforms becoming more attractive. This contributes to capturing attention and engaging customers in the sales process. When one is without makeup, the salesladies feel incomplete and unprepared to do the job. They fail to be aggressive in their sales pitch when unarmed by “beauty.” As expressed by Ara, the 23-year-old informant, the unkempt and improper application of makeup makes their service dull and lifeless. Salesladies see this connection between the gender displays of makeup and the practical concerns on the shop floor.

The technicalities of beauty and makeup are complex. These depend on the products, the tools, and the application process. Products are varied. For example, foundation is available in liquid and cake form. Liquid foundation can come in a tube, pump container, or small bottle. It can be applied using the fingers, a sponge, or brush. Cake foundation can be the two-way type, which means that it can either be applied using a dry sponge or using a wet sponge in mimicking the effect of liquid coverage. Similarly, the blush-on, eyeliner, eyebrow pencil, and lip products come in various color palettes, formats, materials, price points, and brands. The tools are usually numerous brushes and sponges, whereas the application process involves the skills, strokes, and blending techniques for face application. These are combined in varied ways to achieve a particular look or effect.



Figure 3. Eyeshadow Palette of an Informant

During the interviews, the importance of “charming eyes” emerges as informants talked extensively on how the specific makeup practices for the eye zone overlap with the meanings of social interaction in the selling area. First, informants express how each part of the eye zone—eyebrows, eyelashes, lash lines, and the lids—is worked carefully to make it attractive. The eye zone should look inviting to draw customers to this section, hence the “charming eyes.” Second, the discussion moves back and forth between the overall and specific impacts of makeup. Several local notions about work emerged in this elaboration. These two illustrate how the social and technical blend into the micro-practices of the face, which impact the customers.

Salesladies describe this impact in terms of work disposition and influence. Work disposition refers to one’s attitude about work—loosely translated in Tagalog as *pagdadala ng sarili sa trabaho*—as well as one’s bearing and behavior toward customers and workmates. Overall, *pagdadala ng sarili sa trabaho* manifests in the presentation of the self at work. Most informants describe behavior as *buhay na buhay* (full of life) to suggest good spirits and a sense of excitement when attending to customers and their needs. Without these positive traits, one gets the labels *patay* (lifeless), *walang buhay* (lackluster), *antukin* (sleepy), and *matamlay* (lacking energy). The lack of *buhay*

or life suggests the absence of vitality to work. *Buhay* is the general disposition of liveliness in the selling area, which is necessary for “pleasing customers.”

Of the different zones of the face, “charming eyes” have the most association with *buhay* because it mostly exhibits liveliness. Thus, according to Eunice—who worked as a saleslady in her early 20s—the eye zone should be given intense attention or *pinapaganda talaga* (you really make it beautiful). With makeup and the transformations it provides, the eyes are *nakaka-akit kahit inaantok* (looks attractive even when you are sleepy). *Antok* (sleepiness) relates to *tamlay* (low energy). Jessa stressed how they do not want to give an impression of being *matamlay* by coming to work without the proper makeup. In the same vein, makeup helps cover up the tired, overworked look from staying up late. On one occasion, one of the salesladies was patting an extra layer of powder under her eyes to conceal signs of *puyat* (staying up late). Makeup also conceals the traces of fatigue from work or a social life. The goal is to look fixed and ready to face work.

These “charming eyes” are created through a focalized use of makeup on the eyebrows and the eyelashes. The eyebrows or *kilay* need to be well-shaped, trimmed, and groomed. Plucking, threading, or shaving using a brow razor removes scattered brow hair to create its manicured state. Further shaping and contouring are achieved through eyebrow makeup. The product outlines and fills up the spaces to achieve the desired shape. Several brushes are needed to properly blend the products for a “natural” look. The *kilay* is enough to look made-up. Zinnia and Ara agreed that “*basta maganda ang kilay, maayos na*” (with well-groomed eyebrows, you are all set), even sans the eyeshadow.

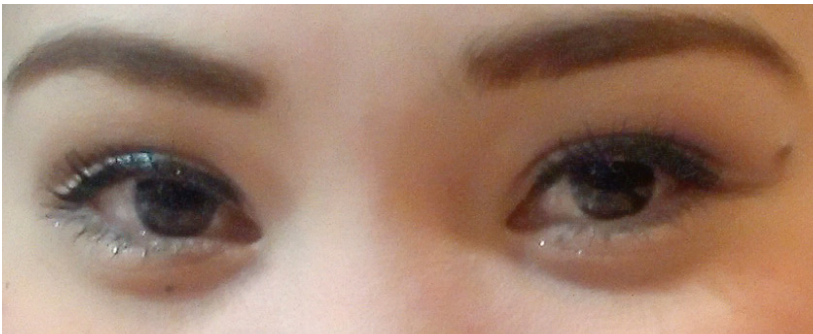


Figure 4. An Informant's “Charming Eyes”

Additionally, the shape and color of the eyebrow makeup enhance approachability. Brown is the preferred color for sketching and enhancing the eyebrows. Reggie explains, “*Pagkilay dapat brown eyebrow pencil ang gamitin. Pag black eyebrow pencil kasi ang ginamit, matapang at masungit ang dating; hindi ka lalapitan ng customer pag ganun*” (One should use a brown eyebrow pencil for contouring. Black eyebrow pencil will make you look unfriendly and stand-offish; no customers will approach you). To be approachable or *madaling lapitan* is to appear friendly and helpful to customers.

The “charming eyes” are further highlighted through the lash lines and eyelashes. Outlining the lash lines using eyeliner or a liquid eye make it appear bigger and more prominent. Extending the lash lines and putting a tail at the corner near the temple further enhances the eyes. The lashes are curled, and the mascara is applied to make the eyes pop (*nakakapagpabuka ng mata*). For extra flair, certain types of mascara can give eyelashes a curled, fanned, lengthened, or thickened effect. This lengthened or thickened effect is achieved through using the salesladies’ staple Supershock and Super Extend Extreme mascara, which are variants of the make-up brand Avon. Accentuating the lash lines and lashes enhances the profile of the eyes.

Charming customers come with retail sales work. For a worker to be competent, the body—in this case, the face or parts of it like the “charming eyes”—needs to be *maayos* or fixed for work. They labor over eye makeup to overcome the discomfort of looking at a stranger and suppress the customer’s instinct to look away. It is in the best interest of the saleslady if (1) from a distance, she is admitted into the prospect’s field of attention and (2) she uses her “charming eyes” to hook the customer and convey expressions of welcome. There are only a few seconds to hold their gaze, send signals of invitation, convince them to approach, and buy what she is offering. Meeting sales quotas and targets can be hard to deliver without the arsenal of selling skills acquired during training. However, the initial stage of capturing customer attention centers on the face that often begins with the gaze, specifically of the “charming eyes.”

Outside of the appearance rules and beauty standards, salesladies deliberately use their “looks, appearance, and attractiveness” (Warhurst and Nickson 2007) beyond meeting sales targets. These qualities dissipate the various anxieties of work. It lessens the burden of customer interaction and helps in performing duties that accomplish the sales quota, which the salesladies equate with their gains.

GAINS: ENACTING AND ACTUALIZING MOBILITY PROJECTS

The gains from retail work come in many forms, primarily income, incentives, and benefits realized on a bi-monthly basis. In the long run, these material gains changed the informants' tastes and lifestyles, which eventually increased their social standing. Accomplishing assignments, participating in activities, attending trainings are some venues for advancing self and identity development. These elevated their cultural capital, which consequently compensated for their undereducation. With these, the salesladies used retail as a staging ground for their mobility projects. They pursued their dreams, aspirations, and desires despite the limits and constraints of their low-ranking position at work.

Because I have experience in [retail department store] selling, I became head of sales. The store was new, and the job was difficult. You have to do everything, from fixing the display gondola to managing staff. It was the same in my next job. My work was more clerical and administrative. I divided my time between two branches where I was in charge of inventory and monitoring of transactions. (Jessa, Personal Interview, 2014)

EARNING MINIMUM WAGE, HITTING THE QUOTA, AND THE ANXIETIES OF WORK

The gains from retail sales work are not limited to income. Gains include statutory work benefits, incentives and bonuses, contract renewal, and others. Discussing the connection between work arrangements, performance metrics, and compensations gives insights on how the material gains are realized. Actual figures tend to vary across firms. Some estimates provide a benchmark on the typical remuneration structure.

Work arrangements define the gains in retail sales. Directly hired regularized workers of one company have the best remuneration package compared to the other employment arrangements (see table 4). The company provides its salesladies with the minimum wage together with other benefits including uniform allowance, emergency cost of

living allowance (ECOLA) adjustment, medical and hospitalization benefits, bonuses, and the company share of Philhealth, SSS, and Pag-IBIG. Directly hired seasonal and contractual workers also receive the minimum wage including their Philhealth, SSS, and Pag-IBIG. This package also applies to the direct hires of the merchants and consignors. Some would give transportation and makeup allowances, but these are more exceptions than the rule. Those hired through the workforce agency have the lowest reported daily wage, sometimes almost half of the minimum. These firms deduct administrative fees or employment processing costs from the wages. Some packages are better than others.

Additionally, incentives are common in retail sales, but there is considerable variability in the schemes used. It is dependent on the sales quota, payment cycles, and the kind of commission itself, whether in cash or in combination with an item. Let us take the case of Reggie who worked as a saleslady for a jeans store. For a quota of Php 800,000 to Php 900,000, the company gives a group a sales incentive of Php 1,800. This amount will be divided equally among the sales personnel. For example, in a group of six, each will get a share of Php 300. On top of the cash incentive, the company also gives each personnel a T-shirt worth Php 900. Together, the share from the cash incentive and the cost of the T-shirt amount to a total incentive of Php 1,200. Based on Reggie's experience, contractual sales personnel are also entitled to the incentives. When she worked as a contractual in the Girl's Teens Wear section, she used to receive Php 500 worth of gift checks when their sales team of 12 met the sales quota of Php 1 million.

However, as mentioned earlier, good sales are seasonal. Marketing activities such as mall events like midnight sales or trade fairs also increase the "foot traffic" of potential buyers and spenders. The extended hours and the intense work from the volume of customers are nevertheless welcome. These events can help deliver the sales quota that bring in the incentives. However, there will be days with meager sales and unattained quotas.

Bad sales days can be quite worrisome for those whose contract renewal depends on meeting the monthly sales quota. Some branches have little foot traffic, and customers are few because it is a newly opened store. Some product lines are slow-moving; the sales ladies who have handled socks swear on the difficulty of meeting the quota for this item. In many instances, customers window shop or simply

cool themselves off with the mall aircon. Sometimes people go to the mall to pass the time or spend on services without buying any item. No matter how aggressive the salesladies are in deploying their “charming eyes” and selling tactics, their looks and skills will be no match when people are few and have no intention of spending money.

For some, especially the regulars, a missed quota means missed extra income or incentives. However, for the contractuals, missed sales quotas can be a perennial source of anxiety, especially when their contract is nearing its ends. Their fear of not being renewed particularly increases when they incur poor sales performance. Aside from meeting sales quotas, other performance metrics—attendance, punctuality, behavior, attitude toward others, reliability, and committed violations—are part of contract renewal evaluation.

Directly hired seasonal salesladies of a top department store only get employed for a one-time, five-month engagement. During this stint, the salesladies learn to navigate the retail setting enough to look for leads or build networks that will lead them to a referral or their next work placement. Their need for continuous employment pushed them to be familiar with the information matrix for finding work opportunities.

DEVELOPING SELF AND IDENTITY

When I first worked as a saleslady on April 16, 2009, I was not used to wearing makeup. Oh my God, I kept getting lipstick in my mouth! (Jane, Personal Interview, 2014)

Beauty and makeup play a significant role in the transformation of the informants. Jane used the word “evolved” to describe the transformations that came with facework and being a saleslady. She claims to be a simple person. The beauty and makeup practices enhanced her looks and boosted her confidence. She even managed to excel in her work performance. From a temporary salesclerk, she became a regular employee and eventually snatched a sales assistant position in her division—a position only one notch below the position of the officers (i.e., supervisors and managers). As a sales assistant, her role expanded beyond providing customer service: these included

administrative and back-office assignments. No longer confined to the selling area, she could move around the shop floor to monitor and report on the attendance, behavior, and visibility of other salesclerks. Her position provided her with semi-administrative authority.

Aside from excelling in work performance, Jane excelled in non-work-related activities. When she represented their branch at the HR (human resources) sponsored beauty pageant for salesladies, she won as Ms. Sucat.

Nag-iba ako since nag Ms. Sucat. Nag-iba daw ang aura ko. . . . Hindi na boyish . . . (laughs) kasi may boyfriend na . . . Mas naging confident na ako kasi kaya ko na pala gawin ung ginagawa ng iba. Kaya ko na gawin pag naka-makeup. Mas nag-evolve na ako after ko sumali ng Ms. Sucat (I have changed a lot since I became Ms. Sucat. They say my aura has changed . . . I am no longer boyish (laughs) because I already have a boyfriend . . . I became confident and realized that I could also do what others are doing. I can do it because I have makeup on. I have evolved after I joined Ms. Sucat).

Jane credits makeup for developing her self-confidence. Her active participation in most HR development activities plus her already advanced ranking as sales personnel increased her cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu 1977). The combined net impact increases her marketability should she decide to navigate a different work setting in the future. With all this capital now available to her, she is in a better position to move freely and explore other options for economic gains.

For instance, Jane mentioned that she has become well-known within her branch and in other branches in the region. Previously looking up to others to guide her actions as a saleslady, she has now become a model for her fellow workers. Beauty and makeup pushed her boundaries for self-development and increased her life chances for a better future more than her high school education could. Jessa, whose statement appears at the beginning of this section, used her learning from various department stores as steppingstones for progressing in higher-level retail sales work.

CHANGE IN SOCIOECONOMIC STANDING AND PRESTIGE

Informants who were single took pride in sharing how their work as a saleslady not only contributed in providing food for their family of origin.⁶ Eunice, who was still single when she worked as a saleslady (2011–2013), shared how she budgeted her salary. Back then, she earned approximately Php 446 per day. The amount of every salary cut-off at the middle and end of the month was Php 5,800. Eunice regularly allocates Php 1,000 per cut-off for her family of origin. After deducting her work allowance and transportation budget, she is left with Php 800. From this net income, there is enough money to buy her clothes, pants, bags, makeup, cellphone, and other desired items. She can even “save” some change from the Php 800. When accumulated, these “savings” provided a budget for the allowance of her younger siblings and for home projects like buying appliances (like a stove and a second-hand refrigerator or TV) and addressing plumbing repairs. Juliet, also single and 23 years old, took charge of electrical connections and roofing repairs for their three-member household.

Abi, then in her early 30s and married with three children, has been working in retail sales work for more than a decade. She has a lot to say about the changes that came with an elevated socioeconomic standing from working in retail. During the interview, she smilingly said: *“parang ang pera pera ko na”* (it is as if I am well-off now). She feels *mapera* (well-off) because of two things: *“mukhang ang pera pera ko na dahil may trabaho ako at dahil sa company na ito ako nagtatrabaho”* (I appear well-off now because I am employed and also because I work at my current company). Working in retail makes her *sikat talaga* (really popular) among her friends because they know how difficult it is to pass the saleslady screening in her company. Abi hinted how being a saleslady improved their family’s status. Working in the department store, these salesladies are more exposed to and have more access to fashion items and clothes. In the past, she would buy her children’s clothes from the wet market or Divisoria and acquire goods in a less fancy department store.

Working as a saleslady induced a feeling that one became more beautiful because of work appearance rules. The air-conditioned work setting made their skin tone fairer, further enhancing the beauty from learning how to fix the self. Additionally, those who were working

in the Philippines' top retail destinations have the most pride. They feel that the formal recruitment process, work environment, uniform, work training, and regular team-building activities of the company made retail a desirable workplace.

One informant used the word “sophisticated” to talk about the combined impact of being a saleslady and working in this company. Indeed, this is a big difference when the only option available is to work in a factory, wet market, or hardware store. Another informant made a comparison: “*nang nasa pabrika ako tamang suklay at polbo lang talaga*” (When I was working at the factory, I just combed my hair and put on powder, and I am done). She is pleased with the impact of facework to her life, she even said with a laugh, “*may laban na tayo*” (I now have what it takes). She takes pride in the confidence acquired from the appearance rules and the sense of professionalism encountered in retail sales work. Though most of the informants were contractual, they have acquired pride from their work as well as the anxiety of contract renewal. Salesladies regularly deal with this reality.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Indeed, the complex role and meaning of the beauty and makeup practices lie beyond the skin. In examining these practices, the article challenges the dominant views on the “commercialization of bodies and emotions” to draw attention to the worker’s perspectives, their lived experiences, and the realities of their work-life. In delivering the analysis, key ideas and concepts of the acting subject, subjectivity, agency, habitus, and capital proved useful in constructing the arguments. The following discusses the convergence of these ideas, as presented in the findings.

The retail industry demands a specific workforce. The service and sales-oriented “logic” of the business—the way it generates wealth—depends on the qualities of its sales personnel. Other conditions notwithstanding, looks, beauty, and makeup practices are necessary for a competitive workforce. The industry puts a high value on beauty as a component of its human resources strategy to pursue its business objectives. This value materializes in the hiring standards, appearance rules, and surveillance mechanisms. Companies associate looks and appearance to the performance of the sales force in driving wealth creation in a service industry such as retail. Beauty and productivity intertwine in forming the unique work demands placed on salesladies.

Furthermore, the retail business is unpredictable, seasonal, and not to mention capital and operating expense intensive. Workers share the burden of maintaining financial sustainability through flexible work arrangements, particularly contractualization. There is no promise of continuous employment for many workers except for high demand product categories or during peak seasons. The precarious nature of retail work induces constant fear, worry, and insecurities among the contractual hires (Kalleberg and Vallas 2018). Not having a stable source of income compounds the work anxieties of salesladies.

Subjects know and reflect on their conditions and experiences (Giddens 1979). Their contemplations on the beauty policies, performance, and precarity generate the “particular structure of feelings” that constitute “subjectivity” (Ortner 2006, 107). These elements arouse subjectivities to give it a particular form and appearance. Admittedly, the belabored juxtaposition with these external forces complicates the focused discussion of the beauty and makeup practices. However, it is necessary to account for the dynamic encounter between the inner states and the “large scale cultural formations” (Ortner 2006) acting subjects experience in their everyday life. Because agency is context-specific, exploring the encounter reveals the distinct enactments and outcomes of agency (ibid., 56).

Upon entering retail sales, the “beautiful” applicant gets further enhancements with makeup. Everyone needs to learn the standard makeup practices of the company. I discussed the prescriptions on acceptable makeup—the use of corporate colors, full or simple, accentuated or enhanced—and how they learn these through formal training, direct instruction, observation, and socialization. Fellow salesladies and other co-workers (e.g., security personnel, supervisors, managers) check one another to ensure compliance or to offer advice. Some even work on each other’s faces to demonstrate how to achieve the “perfect face” for the selling area.

Interestingly, the face becomes a discursive space for talking about the pressures of working in the department store. When informants talk about the beauty and makeup practices at work, it always gets blended with the desired effects on customers. The notion of what I called the saleslady’s “charming eyes” surfaced from the intense labor of the eye zone during the initial stages of customer interaction. The effort devoted to eye makeup—as indicated in the

techniques, tools, and products used in beautifying the zone—goes beyond looking presentable or attracting the attention of customers. The goal is to charm customers. The “charming eyes” ease the selling process that will help fulfill the performance quota. The interviews and observations showed shifts in the overall and specific impacts of beauty and makeup in facilitating customer interaction. The deliberate and intentional deployment of the “charming eyes” indicates how the salesladies exercise agency in dealing with the practical concerns of making a sale. The literature would say that the appearance rules promote “docility.” The “charming eyes” say otherwise.

To what end? Beauty and makeup practices in retail work blend with the goals, desires, and aspirations of the salesladies. Beauty and makeup serve as capital for achieving their mobility projects. The extent to which these projects are pursued and consequently attained might appear ordinary, small-time, or modest. It might not seem much from the standards of more educated or high ranked individuals. However, the variable gains are invaluable in providing the basic needs in life for those perpetually troubled and distressed by low wages and uncertain work placement. For the undereducated, training and on the job learning build knowledge and skills. Their version of being professional and sophisticated becomes associated with the company’s policies and appearance rules. The informants repeatedly mention achieving self-confidence, pride, and efficacy-based self-esteem when talking about the higher gains of retail work. It makes life transformation possible.

However, the positive outcomes narrated should not be mistaken as a signal that the work arrangements are acceptable and always lead toward the well-being of workers. Arguably, their ability to realize the transformation and change comes from learning how the systems operate and how they enact work in the service of their projects.

This article necessitated going back and forth and traversing various scales of analysis in demonstrating how beauty and makeup practices are profound. In using the ethnographic approach, the complex convergence of subjectivity, practice, gender, body, and work emerged through the notion of the “charming eyes.” Through this, the article provides a voice to the often silent and unheard lived experiences of salesladies in Philippine department stores in Metropolitan Manila. It will be similarly exciting to examine and reveal the distinct versions of agency of other categories or rank of workers in other industries or contexts.

NOTES

- 1 See: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014, "Philippines Consumer Goods: Philippine Retail Sector," January 3, <http://country.eiu.com/ArticleIndustry.aspx?articleid=1731387557&Country=Philippines&topic=Industry&subtopic=Consumer%20goods>.
- 2 Skills Registry System, accessed March 18, 2020, <http://www.ble.dole.gov.ph/index.php/porgams-projects/nsrp>. The NSRS Project establishes a web-based National Skills Registry System in the Philippines.
- 3 For more information on job rankings see: Bureau of Local Employment-Department of Labor and Employment, 2019, "Labor Market Profile Issue No. 1 Series of 2019," <http://ble.dole.gov.ph/downloads/Publications/LMI-LMP-2018%20PH%20Labor%20Market-March%202019%20Issue.pdf>.
- 4 Take note, the information presented in Table 3 was compiled from various sources.
- 5 Salesladies, like most women, will have a *kikay* kit (vanity kit)—a small, portable bag, pouch, or purse used to hold the essential items for putting on makeup. At a minimum, this would contain face powder, foundation, blush on, a lipstick or two, eyeshadow, eyebrow pencil, and eye gel. The *kikay* kit holds the materials for preparing the face for work.
- 6 The "family of origin" is an anthropological way of referring to one's natal family. It is also known as "family of orientation."

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