VMC ANALYTIKS

The Relationship Between Aesthetic Labor and Body Esteem Among Saleswomen in Malls Located in Metro Manila: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

The quantitative study investigated the relationship between aesthetic labor demands and body esteem among saleswomen in Metro Manila malls. The primary objective was to understand how the pressure to conform to beauty standards in retail affects saleswomen's perceptions of their bodies and self-worth. 200 female saleswomen aged 20-35, working in fashion-related sections of a Metro Manila mall for eight years or less, were selected using purposive sampling. The respondents completed surveys measuring aesthetic labor performance and body esteem after they answered the informed consent through Google Forms. Findings revealed that participants exhibited high levels of aesthetic labor performance since the companies they work for want to instill a desired brand image and positive shopping experience to the customers. Additionally, the respondents exhibited medium body esteem, indicating that they do not self-criticize nor highly admire themselves excessively. A significant, moderate positive correlation (p < 0.05) emerged between aesthetic labor performance and body esteem, suggesting a positive link between meeting workplace aesthetic expectations and positive body image. Linear regression analysis further supported this relationship, demonstrating that aesthetic labor performance significantly predicts body esteem with a moderate degree of association. This highlights the substantial influence of workplace beauty standards on saleswomen's self-perception. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend exploring specific domains of aesthetic labor and body esteem, expanding participant demographics across Metro Manila, and considering participant predispositions. They also suggest strengthening collaborations with more malls to bolster future research efforts, enhancing the understanding of these dynamics within the retail environment.

Keywords: aesthetic labor; beauty standards; saleswomen; body esteem; Metro Manila malls, linear regression

INTRODUCTION

The retail industry, often perceived as a desirable career path, presents significant challenges that can negatively impact mental and overall well-being, particularly for saleswomen. A 2024 study conducted by BMS Performance revealed a significant disparity in mental health prevalence between salespeople and the general population. The study revealed a significantly higher prevalence of mental health issues among salespeople, with 43% reporting such concerns compared to 20% of the general population. This is likely due to the high demand for performance, regardless of market conditions. While the sales profession itself can be demanding, saleswomen in retail face an additional burden: the pressure to consistently conform to specific aesthetic standards set by their companies – known as aesthetic labor. In the Philippines, the retail trade workforce is heavily dominated by women, with 71% of store-based employees working in shopping malls being female (International Labor Organization, 2023). This means that a significant number of women are directly impacted by the demands of aesthetic labor.

Aesthetic labor refers to the performance of beauty, where employees are expected to present a specific aesthetic ideal that aligns with the company's brand image (Jeanes, 2019). This can involve adhering to dress codes, maintaining specific grooming standards, and even managing emotional expressions to create a positive and welcoming customer experience (Mann & Rawat, 2023).

While aesthetic labor can enhance professionalism and brand image, it also poses risks to employee well-being. The constant demand to meet beauty standards may lead to emotional dissonance, exhaustion, and inauthenticity (Mann & Rawat, 2023). Moreover, appearance-based expectations reinforce stereotypes and stigmas in workplaces (Guchait et al., 2020; Mann & Rawat, 2023). This underscores the importance of body esteem, which goes beyond body image and refers to holistic evaluations of one's physical self (Pop et al., 2022). High body esteem fosters confidence and self-acceptance (Choi et al., 2021), while low body esteem is linked to anxiety, depression, and self-consciousness (Pop et al., 2022).

Despite its relevance, the relationship between aesthetic labor and body esteem remains understudied. Researchers observed firsthand how strict dress codes, grooming rules, and even dietary restrictions negatively affected saleswomen's self-worth. Policies such as DOLE's Department Order 178-17 (Barcelo, 2017), which banned mandatory high heels, addressed physical strain but overlooked psychological burdens. Simon et al. (2021) further revealed that Filipino women scored lower in body esteem compared to men, highlighting gendered vulnerability to societal pressures. These findings emphasize the need to examine how aesthetic labor impacts body esteem, particularly in retail environments where attractiveness is tied to customer engagement and sales.

This study therefore aims to provide a deeper understanding of how aesthetic labor influences saleswomen's perceptions of their bodies, focusing to those in fashion, cosmetics, and clothing departments of Metro Manila malls. By exploring this relationship, the research seeks to identify risks to mental health, propose workplace strategies to mitigate negative effects, and promote inclusivity in beauty and professionalism standards. Ultimately, the study contributes to reducing stereotyping and stigma in retail by fostering healthier workplace and supporting positive body esteem among women employees.

Statement of the Problem. This study aimed to determine the relationship between aesthetic labor and the body-esteem levels of the saleswomen working in Metro Manila. More specifically, the study aimed to answer these questions:

1. What is the aesthetic labor performance score of saleswomen?

2. What is the body esteem level of saleswomen?

3. Is there a significant relationship between aesthetic labor performance score and body-esteem level among the saleswomen in Metro Manila?

4. Is aesthetic labor performance score a significant influence of body-esteem level among the saleswomen in Metro Manila?

Hypotheses. The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance:

H_{o1}. There is no significant relationship between aesthetic labor score and body esteem level among the saleswomen in Metro Manila.

H_{o2}. There is no significant influence of aesthetic labor score on body-esteem among saleswomen in malls in Metro Manila.

Scope and Limitation. This study examined the relationship between aesthetic labor and body esteem among female saleswomen in Metro Manila malls, focusing on those in fashion and beauty sections such as cosmetics, clothing, and accessories. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through online surveys (Google Forms) utilizing the Body Esteem Scale and an Aesthetic Labor Scale. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring they met the following criteria: (1) worked in a mall in Metro Manila, (2) were designated in fashion and beauty sections such as cosmetics, clothing, and accessories, (3) were female, and (4) fell within the early career profession age range of 20–35 years old, classified as the young professional age by the Philippine Statistics Authority (2020). Before participating,

all participants completed an informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. To ensure grammatical accuracy and clarity of ideas, Cici Ai and Grammarly were used to revise the paper.

While the study offered valuable insights into how aesthetic labor influences body esteem, several limitations were noted. Challenges included participant privacy concerns, limited time for data collection, and scheduling conflicts. These were addressed through flexible scheduling, proof of research legitimacy via consent forms, and coordination with mall HR departments. However, factors such as parenthood, marital status, and other industries beyond fashion and beauty were not considered. The quantitative design also limited exploration of personal experiences, and purposive sampling restricted generalizability. Despite these constraints, the study contributes meaningful understanding of how aesthetic labor affects body esteem among saleswomen in Metro Manila's retail sector.

Theoretical Framework. Self-Presentation Theory. Impression management, or self-presentation, refers to the deliberate effort to control how others perceive us. First introduced by Goffman (1959), it involves shaping impressions of one's abilities, attitudes, motives, and emotions to influence others' responses. Goffman emphasized that impression management is not merely for personal gain but a fundamental aspect of social interaction.

Using the theatre metaphor, Goffman described individuals as performers who take on different roles in various contexts, maintaining and defining social situations through both verbal and nonverbal communication (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Impression management includes strategies such as conforming to norms, regulating emotions, flattering others, and maintaining consistency between beliefs and actions.

According to Leary (2001), self-presentation significantly shapes emotional experiences, with individuals sometimes exaggerating

distress or engaging in certain behaviors to manage impressions (Leary et al., 1994). Motivation for impression management depends on factors such as goal importance, desired outcomes, and discrepancies between actual and ideal self-images (Schlenker, 1985). Individuals construct impressions based on their self-concept, roles, and social expectations.

The intersection between aesthetic labor and impression management highlights how workplace expectations shape self-presentation. Aesthetic labor requires employees to curate their appearance and behavior to meet employer-defined standards, mirroring impression management. While this can enhance brand image and customer satisfaction, it can also cause emotional strain, inauthenticity, and body image concerns.

Within this framework, the present study examined how aesthetic labor influences body esteem among saleswomen in Metro Manila malls. It explored how the pressure to conform to aesthetic expectations, driven by the need to manage impressions affects saleswomen's perceptions and feelings about their bodies.

Conceptual Framework. The researchers hypothesized that aesthetic labor would greatly affect the body-esteem level of the saleswomen working in malls in Metro Manila.

Figure 1
Conceptual framework for the relationship between aesthetic labor and body esteem of saleswomen working in Metro Manila

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized relationship between aesthetic labor and body esteem among saleswomen in Metro Manila malls. This framework draws on Goffman's (1959) concept of "presentation of self", which highlights the conscious and unconscious efforts individuals make to manage their appearance and behavior

to influence how others perceive them. Aesthetic labor, as defined by Tsaur and Hsieh (2020), refers to the effort employees exert to maintain a specific appearance and demeanor aligned with workplace expectations.

In the context of retail, this often involves adhering to a certain aesthetic ideal, which can include physical attractiveness, helpfulness, and displaying positive emotions. Body esteem, how one subjectively evaluates one's physical appearance and attributes, is influenced by the pressures of aesthetic labor. Saleswomen in Metro Manila malls, often working in industries that emphasize aesthetics, experience pressure to abide by these ideals. This pressure can lead to negative self-perceived evaluation based on their attributes, potentially impacting their self-worth (Warhurst et al., 2020).

The conceptual framework proposed that aesthetic labor had a significant relationship with body esteem. Saleswomen, in their efforts to manage their presentation of self and meet aesthetic expectations, might experience a disconnection between their perceived ideal self and their actual self, leading to negative effects on their body esteem. This framework suggested that the stronger the influence of aesthetic labor, the more likely it was to negatively affect body esteem. This framework highlighted the potential negative consequences of aesthetic labor on the body esteem of saleswomen, particularly in industries where appearance was heavily emphasized. It underscored the need to understand the complexities of aesthetic labor and its relationship to the well-being of workers in these environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The retail industry is a major global economic force, employing millions and generating billions in revenue. In the Philippines, it contributes about 13% of the GDP, with leading companies such as Robinsons Retail Holdings, Ayala Malls Group, Rustan's Group, and SM Prime Holdings. This sector has created numerous job opportunities for women—about 1.72 million in 2017—with retail consistently ranking among the most sought-after occupations (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018).

Despite its appeal, retail work presents challenges that can affect employees' well-being. A 2024 BMS Performance study found that 43% of salespeople reported mental health issues compared to 20% of the general population, due to constant performance pressures. For saleswomen, these pressures are compounded by aesthetic expectations imposed by employers, a phenomenon known as aesthetic labor.

Aesthetic labor involves managing appearance and demeanor to meet organizational or customer expectations (Warhurst et al., 2000), often overlapping with emotional labor (Mann & Rawat, 2023). In retail, workers embody brand ideals through dress, posture, and behavior (Hall & van den Broek, 2012). While it can foster creativity, confidence, and job satisfaction (Gruys, 2012; Acevedo, 2018; Warhurst et al., 2000; Mann & Rawat, 2023), constant pressure may lead to stress, burnout, and body dissatisfaction (Dean, 2005; Mann & Rawat, 2023). Appearance-based hiring practices perpetuate discrimination, privileging traits such as lighter skin or slimmer figures (Hamermesh, 2013). In Metro Manila, strict beauty requirements for salesladies include age, height, complexion, and mandatory makeup, with violations penalized (Del Rosario-Rondilla, 2020). Over time, these rules become part of the saleslady's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), shaping identity and self-perception.

Excessive emphasis on appearance can cause emotional dissonance and fear of replacement (Savina, 2024; Vonk, 2021). Comments from coworkers or superiors reinforce these pressures (Vonk, 2021, as cited in Savina, 2024). Respicio and Co. (2025) emphasize that appearance policies must be reasonable, nondiscriminatory, and follow due process. Aesthetic labor also entails physical strain, such as prolonged standing or uncomfortable attire (Fixsen, 2023). DOLE's Department Order 178-17 (2017) banned mandatory high heels, addressing physical discomfort but not

psychological burdens (Barcelo, 2017). To date, no national policy directly tackles the emotional or mental health effects of aesthetic labor in the Philippine workplace.

Body Esteem. Body esteem (BE) refers to the subjective assessment of one's body and self-perceived physical evaluation (Mendelson et al., 2001, as cited in Beltrán-Garrayo, 2022). It is a key component of overall self-worth, often shaped by societal norms that impose stricter standards on women than men, leading to gender differences in self-perception (Mendelson & White, 1997). The evaluation of weight may differ from feelings about general appearance, as stigma surrounding body size can evoke distinct emotional responses (Allon, 1979). Research has shown that body esteem is multidimensional, with separate domains for appearance and weight, which may not always align (Franzoi & Shields, 1984). Studies indicate that women hold stricter body standards than men, and failure to meet these ideals negatively affects body esteem. Simon et al. (2021) found that Filipino females scored lower in body esteem and higher in physical perfectionism than males, supporting findings by Quittkat et al. (2019) that women exhibit lower appearance evaluation and body satisfaction compared to men.

While self-esteem represents overall self-worth, body esteem specifically concerns one's evaluation of physical appearance (Harter, 1993; Mendelson et al., 1996). Distinguishing these constructs underscores the unique role of body esteem in shaping self-perception and well-being, especially among women facing societal appearance pressures (Franzoi & Shields, 1984).

Research consistently shows a positive correlation between body image and self-esteem—individuals with positive body image generally have higher self-esteem (Furnham et al., 2002; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Abdulnabi, 2014; Khalaf & AlKhalaf, 2006; Ashram, 2008, as cited in Anamika, 2020). Fostering a positive body image thus supports healthy self-esteem and overall well-being (Anamika, 2020). However, Mariano et al. (2020) found that

Filipino female bank tellers, despite having high body image, reported lower self-esteem. This suggests that a positive body image does not always equate to strong self-worth. Body esteem goes beyond appearance satisfaction—it involves deeper self-acceptance and contentment with one's body, highlighting the importance of promoting both positive body image and genuine body esteem to enhance overall self-worth (Mariano et al., 2020).

Aesthetic Labor and Body Esteem. The relationship between aesthetic labor and body esteem among saleswomen working in malls in Metro Manila is a critical area of study, demanding a deeper understanding of the unique challenges these women face. Aesthetic labor, as defined by Warhurst et al. (2000), involves managing one's physical appearance to meet workplace expectations, often leading to feelings of objectification and emotional exhaustion. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in retail settings, where employees are expected to embody the brand image and create a positive shopping experience (Hall & van den Broek, 2012). In Metro Manila malls, this pressure to conform to specific beauty standards is amplified, as the environment is heavily influenced by consumerism and image-consciousness.

Research suggests that women in this sector often struggle to reconcile their body esteem—their self-evaluation of physical appearance—with the unrealistic beauty standards imposed by employers and society (Simon et al., 2021; Mariano et al., 2020). The constant pressure to maintain an attractive image linked to customer engagement and sales can diminish self-esteem, even among those with positive body image. Yet, aesthetic skills are often valued in recruitment and viewed as essential job assets rather than burdens (Hancock & Tyler, 2007; Martin & Grove, 2002; Nickson et al., 2003; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Warhurst et al., 2000, in Katircioglu & Tekin, 2021). Social media further reinforces these ideals, encouraging women to pursue fitness, grooming, and beauty routines for validation and belonging (Katircioglu & Tekin, 2021). This highlights the need to understand how aesthetic labor shapes

body esteem in Metro Manila malls, where beauty and consumerism intersect. Low body esteem and negative body image perceptions are also linked to depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (Pop et al., 2022), emphasizing the importance of examining this relationship for safeguarding saleswomen's mental well-being.

METHODS

Design. This study employed a quantitative approach using a linear regression design to examine the relationship between aesthetic labor and body esteem among saleswomen in Metro Manila. Quantitative research enables systematic measurement and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and relationships (APA, 2020). Linear regression was used to determine how the independent variable, aesthetic labor, predicts the dependent variable, body esteem (Taylor, 2024). Numerical data were collected from saleswomen in various Metro Manila malls to assess the extent to which aesthetic labor influences body esteem.

Population and Sampling. A sample size of 200 was used to represent the population in this study. According to Memon (2020), a reasonable number of respondents for linear regression must be a minimum of 50. This is supported by Green (1991), as cited in Morgan and Vanvoorhis (2007), who stated that the sample size (n) should be greater than 104 + m (where m is the number of independent variables) for optimal results in linear regression.

The target population consisted of all women working as saleswomen in malls within Metro Manila. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) working in a mall in Metro Manila, (2) being female, (3) working in cosmetics, clothing, or other sections related to fashion, (4) aged 20–35 years old, and (5) having eight years of experience or less. These criteria focused on a population likely to experience mental health challenges related to aesthetic labor. The criteria centered on Early Career Professionals (ECPs), defined as those with less than eight years of experience, as this

group is particularly vulnerable to mental health issues. Research shows that 72% of ECPs have experienced poor mental health in the past year, with many reporting suicidal thoughts or attempts (Darbyshire, 2021). This vulnerability is heightened among those aged 20–35, who often face career pressures and performance anxiety (Gibbons, 2023; Philippine Statistics Authority (2020). This age group also represents a large share of the workforce, comprising 27.3% of employed individuals (PSA, 2020). By focusing on this demographic, the study aimed to understand the unique mental health challenges of saleswomen in the early stages of their careers, particularly within the context of aesthetic labor in retail.

Among the gathered data, the largest group was aged 27 (14.0%, 28 respondents), followed by ages 24 and 28 (13.5% each, 27 respondents). Ages 22 and 25 accounted for 7.5% each (15 respondents), while the least represented age was 33 (2.0%, 4 respondents). The majority of respondents were between 24 and 30 years old, indicating a mid- to late-twenties demographic. In terms of experience, most had 1–2 years (35.0%, 70 respondents), followed by 3–4 years (25.0%, 50 respondents) and 5–6 years (18.5%, 37 respondents). Fewer had less than 1 year (11.0%, 22 respondents) or 7–8 years (10.5%, 21 respondents), indicating that most were in the early to mid-career stage.

Geographically, respondents were concentrated in major urban areas of Metro Manila, with Makati having the largest representation (39.5%, 79 respondents), followed by Manila (25.0%, 50 respondents) and Quezon City (19.0%, 38 respondents). Mandaluyong and Pasay each contributed 7.5% (15 respondents), while Parañaque (1.0%, 2 respondents) and Taguig (0.5%, 1 respondent) had minimal representation.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. This method involves deliberately choosing participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Unlike random sampling, where every individual has an equal chance of selection, purposive sampling allows

researchers to select participants who possess the desired characteristics and experiences (Stewart, 2024; National Center for State Courts, 2022).

The researchers anticipated possible challenges during recruitment, such as scheduling conflicts, refusal to participate, transportation costs, and difficulties obtaining managerial approval. To address these, researchers focused on malls with a high concentration of relevant retail stores in each city and conducted visits during both morning and afternoon hours to reach more participants. They also coordinated with store managers and HR heads to explain the study's purpose and secure consent. If permission or participation was denied, researchers sought other willing participants within the same or nearby malls. Although equal city representation was ideal, it was not required. Thus, any saleswoman working in a relevant retail store within Metro Manila was eligible to participate. This approach ensured diverse and representative participation while minimizing potential obstacles.

Instrumentation. The research instruments utilized in the study were the following:

Aesthetic Labor Performance Scale (ALPS). The Aesthetic Labor Performance Scale (ALPS), developed by Hsieh and Tsaur (2020), is a 29-item tool measuring eight areas of aesthetic labor: organizational service requirements, customer service stress, burdens in time-off hours, vigor, dedication, absorption, physical attractiveness, displayed positive emotion, and helpfulness. Reliability is strong, with Cronbach's α ranging from 0.77 to 0.97, and validity confirmed through convergent and discriminant values between 0.66–0.88 and composite reliability estimates of 0.67–0.97. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), ALPS categorizes performance as low (29–65), medium (66–109), or high (110–145). These levels reflect the degree of company enforcement of aesthetic labor, with higher scores indicating greater impact on saleswomen's performance.

Its rigorous validation ensures ALPS is a reliable measure of aesthetic labor.

Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA). The Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA), created by Mendelson et al. (1997), is a 23-item questionnaire assessing body esteem across three subscales: BE-Appearance, BE-Weight, and BE-Attribution. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0=Never to 4=Always), with several reverse-scored items in BE-Appearance (7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 21) and BE-Weight (18, 19). Internal consistency is high (α=0.92, 0.94, 0.81), with strong test-retest reliability. Validity is supported by Cragun et al. (2013), who found correlations with global self-esteem and BMI, and Beltrán-Garrayo et al. (2022), who reported negative associations between BMI z-scores and BESAA subscales. Scoring yields low (0–43), moderate (44–77), or high (78–92) body esteem, reflecting inferiority, balanced confidence, or vanity/superiority (Pop et al., 2022; Cherry, 2024). BESAA remains a robust tool for evaluating body esteem.

RESULTS

The aesthetic labor performance score of saleswomen. Table 1 presents the overall Aesthetic Labor Performance Score of the Saleswomen. The overall mean score for aesthetic labor performance was 116.26, which falls in the range of 110-145, indicating a High Aesthetic Labor Performance Score.

Table 1
The Aesthetic Labor Performance Score of Saleswomen in Metro Manila (N= 200)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Interpretation
Aesthetic Labor Performance Score	116.26	13.52	High Aesthetic Labor Performance

Legend: *29-65 = Low Aesthetic Labor Performance; 66-109 = Medium Aesthetic Labor Performance; 110-145 = High Aesthetic Labor Performance*

This suggests that aesthetic labor highly impacts the performance of saleswomen working in malls in Metro Manila. However, it must be noted that the standard deviation was

13.52, which entails that there is a minimal dispersion of data from the average, but the high aesthetic labor performance remained predominant for 200 respondents.

The result is supported by Hall & van den Broek (2012) that aesthetic labor is highly valued in the protocols of retail industries, especially on saleswomen since it enables the company to portray the desired brand image and develop a positive shopping experience among customers. This is further emphasized by Del Rosario-Rondilla's (2020) qualitative study, where she reported that throughout employment, saleswomen in Metro Manila are expected to comply with the rigorous standards, particularly on their physical appearance and demographic profile. For instance, they should be taller than 5 feet, not older than 35 years old, and have no visible tattoos. Aside from the hiring process, the high expectations continue throughout their working days. These include having a clean and professional hairstyle, flawless skin, and acne-free face. Additionally, they are required to wear concealers during work hours to cover their skin imperfections. Lastly, this also aligns with the study of Warhust et. al., (2000) that saleswomen must always observe a certain positive demeanor, and specific behaviors like being approachable and cheerful in accommodating customers. If this is not observed in saleswomen, violations may be implemented with due process. No contrasting studies were found with regards to employing aesthetic labor standards in retail industries.

The body esteem level of saleswomen. Table 2 presents the overall Body-esteem Level of Saleswomen working in malls in Metro Manila. The overall mean score for Body Esteem Level was 47.53. This indicates Medium/Regular Body Esteem as it is within the levels of 44-77, implying a balanced self-perception of their bodies without extreme dissatisfaction or overvaluation. However, the standard deviation is equal to 15.22. This means that the data are moderately spread from the overall mean, signifying that a minority of the respondents may have high or low body esteem. To elaborate, the majority of respondents that fall within Moderate body esteem level exhibit confidence and value with regards to their body appearance.

Table 2
The Body-esteem Level of Saleswomen working in malls in Metro Manila (N= 200)

Variable	M	SD	Interpretation
Body-Esteem Level	47.53	15.22	Medium/Regular Body-Esteem

Legend: 0-43 = Low Body-Esteem; 44-77 = Medium/Regular Body Esteem; 78-92 = High Body Esteem.

Moreover, they possess a balanced, and realistic perception of how they see themselves, physically. This shows that they do not criticize themselves excessively, nor do they admire themselves highly (Pop et al., 2022). The interpreted data is in contrast to the study by Simon et al. (2021). The study revealed that women experience significant societal pressures, such as meeting the strict body standards which led them to lower body-esteem, resulting to lower self-esteem and a high tendency of acquiring eating disorders, such as Bulemia nervosa and Anorexia nervosa. Regardless of the ideal portrayal that has been set by the society, especially in the retail sector, the interpreted data demonstrate that saleswomen respondents retain a moderately positive perception and self-acceptance of their physical appearance and bodies, which elevates their self-worth (Mariano et al., 2020). In addition, the interpreted data indicates that the saleswomen have lower risk of acquiring eating disorders since they do not tend to engage themselves in crash dieting or negative comparison of themselves with their co-workers (Franzoi & Shields, 1984).

Relationship between aesthetic labor performance score and body-esteem level among the saleswomen. Table 3 shows the correlation between the over-all Aesthetic Labor Performance Score Body-Esteem and Body Esteem Level of Saleswomen in Metro Manila. The correlation was determined using the Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results revealed a moderate, positive correlation of r = 0.56, which was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that higher aesthetic labor performance is associated with higher body-esteem scores. Specifically, as

saleswomen reported better performance in fulfilling aesthetic labor expectations, their body-esteem scores tended to be higher. This suggests that the demands of aesthetic labor, such as adhering to appearance regulations and engaging in professional image management, may positively influence individuals' body-esteem.

Table 3
Pearson r Test Analysis Between the Overall Aesthetic Labor Performance Score and Body-Esteem Level of Saleswomen in Metro Manila (N= 200)

Variable	N	df	Pearson's r	p-value	Interpretation	Correlation
Aesthetic Labor Performance Score and Body Esteem Level	200	198	.56**	< .001	Significant	Moderate Positive Correlation

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Legend: 0.90–1.00 or (–0.90 to –1.00) very high positive (negative) correlation, 0.70–0.90 or (–0.70 to –0.90) high positive (negative) correlation, 0.50–0.70 or (–0.50 to –0.70) moderate positive (negative) correlation, 0.30–0.50 or (–0.30 to –0.50) low positive (negative) correlation; and 0.00–0.30 or (–0.00 to –0.30) negligible correlation.

The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), highlighting the strength and reliability of this relationship. Thus, null hypothesis 1 (Ho$_1$), which indicates that there is no significant relationship between aesthetic labor performance scores and body-esteem level among saleswomen in Metro Manila, is rejected. The moderately positive correlation between the variables aligns with the study of Gruys (2012) wherein the stricter implementation of aesthetic labor provides positive effects on employees. Women who are qualified with the stringent criteria feel empowered as these protocols set by the companies are catered to their body appearance. In this case, the respondents possess a moderately positive level of confidence and sense of empowerment since they accommodate the beauty standards that has been established in the protocols of their agencies. Additionally, this is further supported by Warhust et al. (2000) stating that moderate performance on aesthetic labor contributes to improved job satisfaction, better self-perception, and sense of belonging in the workplace. During the recruitment process, the saleswomen consider that aesthetic skills are one of the aspects they possess. Therefore, they do not see aesthetic labor as a burden, but

rather a positive step in improving their body image and sense of self-worth, which contributed to the result of data gathered. To further elaborate, implementing moderate demand of aesthetic labor in their protocols enable them to take care of themselves, such as going to the gym, grooming, and eating a balanced diet, as it can make them feel good about themselves through their efforts (Katircioglu & Tekin, 2021).

Significant influence of aesthetic labor performance score on the body-esteem level of the saleswomen. Table 4 shows the simple regression analysis of Aesthetic Labor Performance Score on the Body-esteem Level of Saleswomen in Metro Manila. To predict the body-esteem level based on its relationship to the aesthetic labor performance score, a simple linear regression was used. It predicts Aesthetic Labor Performance Score on the Body-esteem Level by 0.55 at the significance level of 0.05, indicating a moderate degree of association. This explains that if the body esteem level increases every 1 unit, the beta coefficient of .55 is seen in aesthetic labor score, respectively. The null hypothesis (Ho$_2$), indicating that there is no significant influence of aesthetic labor score on body esteem level among saleswomen in Metro Manila, is rejected since its p-value of < 0.001 is less than 0.05 level of significance. In fact, there is a significant influence of aesthetic labor performance score on body-esteem level.

The model's R² value of 0.31 indicates that aesthetic labor performance scores explain only approximately 31% of the variance in body-esteem levels. The remaining 69% of the variance is attributable to unmeasured factors, which likely include individual personality traits (e.g., resilience, pre-existing self-esteem), social support systems, prior experiences with body image issues, other life stressors (financial, relational, health), broader societal beauty standards and their influence, coping mechanisms, genetic predispositions, and access to resources (e.g., mental health services). These factors, not accounted for in the model, significantly influence body esteem independently of workplace pressures related

to aesthetic labor. The standard error of the estimate of 11.14 quantifies the average discrepancy between the model's predictions and the actual observed body esteem levels.

Table 4
Simple Linear Regression of Aesthetic Labor Performance Score on the Body-esteem Level of Saleswomen in Metro Manila (N= 200)

Variable	β	R2	Std. Error	F	p-value	Interpretation	Association
Aesthetic Labor Performance Score on the Body-esteem Level	0.55	0.31	11.14	89.44 (1,198)	<.001	Significant	Moderate Positive Association

Legend: +.70 or higher– Very strong positive association; +.40 to +.69: Strong positive association; +.30 to +.39: Moderate positive association +.20 to +.29; Weak positive association +.01 to +.19; No or negligible association 0: No association; -.01 to -.19; No or negligible association;-.20 to -.29; Weak negative association; -.30 to -.39: Moderate negative association; -.40 to -.69: Strong negative association -.70 or higher: Very strong negative association.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) further supported that the regression model statistically predicted body-esteem scores significantly, $F(1, 198) = 89.44$, $p < .001$. This suggests that the model offers a significantly improved fit to the data compared to a model without predictors. In other words, aesthetic labor performance scores significantly explain a portion of the variance in body-esteem scores. Thus, the independent variable (aesthetic labor performance) contributes meaningfully to predicting the dependent variable (body-esteem). The results align with the study of Mann and Rawat (2023) where aesthetic labor performance can significantly influence body-esteem as it is a step of cultivating the self-expression and personal growth that boosts the self-perception and overall well-being of employees. Meanwhile, this is in contrast with the study of Nickson (2022), stating that aesthetic labor performance significantly influences body esteem as it enables the employee to feel a sense of inauthenticity. Thus, the demands of aesthetic labor can lead to emotional dissonance and body image issues. The moderate association of aesthetic labor performance on body-esteem is further emphasized with Respicio & Co. (2025), explaining that the standards of aesthetic labor does not solely affect their body-esteem since the employees retain a degree of freedom toward the implementation, as long as it does

not violate the protocols set by the company that are important to the nature of the business. Moreover, during the recruitment process, they are fully aware of the rules and regulations of aesthetic labor, thus, they professionally comply with it, without them being affected in terms of their self-perception and confidence on their body appearance (Katircioglu & Tekin, 2021).

DISCUSSION

The study reveals a high average aesthetic labor performance score (116.26) among saleswomen in Metro Manila (Table 1), consistent across respondents with a low standard deviation of 13.52. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of aesthetic labor in retail for enhancing brand image and customer experience (Hall & van den Broek, 2012; Del Rosario-Rondilla, 2020; Warhust et al., 2000). The rigorous standards encompassing physical attributes and professional demeanor are widely accepted within the industry, with no contradictory literature found. However, despite these high-performance scores, the body esteem scores (Table 2) show a moderate average (47.53) with a standard deviation of 15.22, suggesting a balanced self-perception among the saleswomen but with individual differences. This contrasts with studies linking societal pressures to lower body esteem (Simon et al., 2021) yet aligns with research emphasizing the role of self-acceptance in fostering a positive self-image (Mariano et al., 2020; Pop et al., 2022; Franzoi & Shields, 1984).

Further analysis reveals a significant moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.05$) between aesthetic labor performance and body esteem. This finding suggests a meaningful relationship between the two variables, where higher scores in aesthetic labor performance are associated with higher scores in body esteem. The moderate strength of this correlation indicates a noticeable link but not a perfect or extremely strong one, leaving room for other factors to influence body esteem. This moderate positive correlation could imply that success in meeting aesthetic labor expectations contributes to a sense of accomplishment and

empowerment, leading to a more positive self-perception and body image.

This finding is further supported by the significant predictive effect of aesthetic labor performance on body esteem, confirmed by linear regression analysis ($p < .05$). The model explaining approximately 31 % of the variance in body esteem scores ($R^2 = .31$) indicates a moderate association of the predictor variable (aesthetic labor performance) on the dependent variable (body esteem). This suggests that while aesthetic labor performance is not the sole determinant of body esteem, it plays a significant role in shaping individuals' self-perception.

This positive association is consistent with research suggesting empowerment through meeting standards (Gruys, 2012; Warhust et al., 2000; Katircioglu & Tekin, 2021; Mann & Rawat, 2023). However, it is crucial to consider research highlighting potential negative impacts, such as inauthenticity and emotional dissonance (Nickson, 2022). The findings suggest that pre-existing awareness of aesthetic labor expectations during recruitment (Respicio & Co., 2025) may mitigate potential negative effects, fostering a more positive self-perception despite the inherent job demands. The study ultimately highlights a complex relationship where the positive influence of meeting aesthetic standards on body esteem is moderated by individual agency and pre-existing awareness of expectations.

Based on the findings, the researchers therefore rejects both null hypotheses. The first null hypothesis, proposing no significant relationship between aesthetic labor performance and body esteem, was refuted by a demonstrated significant moderate positive correlation. On the other hand, the second null hypothesis, suggesting no significant influence of aesthetic labor performance on body esteem, was similarly rejected. These indicate that successfully meeting the demands of aesthetic labor shows a moderate positive association with higher levels of body esteem, likely due to feelings of accomplishment and empowerment. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this

relationship is not deterministic; other significant, unmeasured factors contribute substantially to an individual's body esteem. The moderate strength of the observed correlation, along with the explained regression in the model, highlights the limitations of solely focusing on aesthetic labor performance in understanding body esteem. Additionally, the research also reveals considerable variability in both body esteem levels and the extent of engagement in aesthetic labor among the participants. The dispersion in aesthetic labor scores and body esteem levels highlights that factors beyond the immediate demands of the job, such as personal experiences, individual predispositions, and broader societal influences on body image, likely play a substantial role in shaping each woman's self-perception and body esteem.

Therefore, while the study confirms a positive correlation, it also highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding that accounts for the complex interplay of individual factors and the specific demands of aesthetic labor in the context of the sales profession. Future research should incorporate a wider range of variables, including individual personality traits, social support networks, and broader societal influences on body image. The cross-sectional nature of this study also limits the ability to establish causality. Further longitudinal studies are needed to fully explore the dynamic interplay between aesthetic labor, its associated pressures, and the development of body esteem over time.

Recommendations. Based from the findings, the researchers recommend the following:

To Mental Healthcare Workers. Mental health professionals are encouraged to incorporate an understanding of aesthetic labor's impact on self-esteem and body image into their practice. This includes providing self-acceptance workshops and strategies to maintain authenticity as short-term interventions and conducting continued research on the nuanced effects of aesthetic labor for long-term development of specialized interventions to improve body esteem levels.

To Retail and Hospitality Employers. The researchers suggest short-term practical steps that employers can take to improve the work environment. These include training programs that balance professional appearance with authenticity, transparent communication during recruitment to set realistic expectations, and regular well-being assessments to identify and address emerging concerns. For the long term, sustained efforts through ongoing training, policy adjustments based on employee feedback, and continued investment in mental health resources are recommended to promote a genuine culture of well-being and employee support.

To Retail and Hospitality Employees. Retail and hospitality employees are encouraged to engage in short-term strategies to reduce the immediate impact of aesthetic labor demands on their well-being. These include personal development activities that promote self-acceptance and confidence-building, as well as participation in peer support networks that foster sharing and coping within a supportive community. Diversifying skills beyond appearance-related competencies such as improving customer service or product knowledge can also enhance job satisfaction and overall self-worth. For the long term, continuous personal growth through resilience training, mentorship, or professional coaching is essential to help employees effectively navigate the ongoing challenges of aesthetic labor in their work environments.

To Women. Women in these roles are encouraged to adopt short-term empowerment strategies by challenging societal beauty standards and embracing their individuality to strengthen self-acceptance and authenticity. Participation in empowerment and resilience-building programs, along with forming mentorship and professional networks, can provide valuable personal and professional support. In the long term, advocacy for inclusive workplace cultures and initiatives promoting body positivity is essential to foster systemic change and create more equitable, supportive environments for women in these industries.

To Policymakers. Policymakers are encouraged to foster healthier and more equitable workplaces, especially in sectors reliant on aesthetic labor, by establishing clear and fair guidelines that prioritize employee well-being. These standards should ensure that appearance-related expectations are applied consistently and without discrimination based on race, gender, or body type, helping address unfair pressure or judgment related to appearance. Implementing effective reporting and accountability mechanisms is also essential to protect employees from such bias. For the long term, policymakers should invest in research examining the relationship between aesthetic labor, body esteem, and mental health across different sectors and cultural contexts. The results can guide the creation of policies and interventions that promote body positivity, resilience, and respect for individual differences, supported by public awareness campaigns that challenge unrealistic beauty norms.

To Future Researchers. To strengthen future research on aesthetic labor and body esteem, larger and more diverse samples are needed, ideally with equal representation from Metro Manila cities. Studies should also consider factors such as health, personality, and social support to achieve more accurate results. Partnerships with more malls can enhance data access and recruitment. In the long term, longitudinal studies are recommended to establish causality and explore the effects of aesthetic labor across different sectors and cultural contexts. Ongoing collaboration with organizations will ensure findings remain both practical and impactful.

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