

Aesthetic Labor, Latinx Beauty Ideals, & Racial Inequalities:

An Initial Examination of the Literature

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Background

Retail workers in lifestyle sectors, like clothing and cosmetics, do more than unlock fitting rooms and recite sales pitches. They actively use their bodies to model the brand and make sales. The concept of *aesthetic labor* explains how employers expect workers to embody the brand (Warhurst et al., 2000).

Sociologists have theorized aesthetic labor as gendered and classed, but have not deeply considered race and ethnicity (Williams & Connell, 2010). Latinx people are rarely discussed in studies about retail work or embodying the brand.



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Central Questions

- What do social scientists know about Latinx people's experiences of beauty ideals and/or retail work?
- How might the dominant theories used to understand aesthetic labor apply to Latinx retail workers?

Analyzing the Literature

We began examining the scholarly literature about Latinx workers, Latinx beauty ideals, aesthetic labor, and retail work.

- Located 98 articles using academic databases & article bibliographies
- Coded 43 articles with MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis program
- Applied 9 themes: aesthetic labor, beauty/body, class, gender, methods, race, retail work, theory, and "juicy" (to flag noteworthy data)

Emerging Themes

Latina Beauty Standards

Latinas, like other gender-racial groups, face racialized beauty ideals:

The bleaching syndrome where Hispanic women are meant to internalize their skin complexion and feel the need to assimilate to the western beauty ideals (Hall, 1994, p. 313).

This theme highlights the centrality of colorism in Latina experiences of beauty ideals.

Love the Brand, Love the Job?

Workers are hired for both their looks and their brand appreciation, which allows them to represent the company robustly during customer encounter. But love for the brand does not always last as long as the job:

Aesthetic labour can have two opposing effects. It could increase the workers' identification with the brand... or it could decrease brand identification, leading to feelings of dissonance" (Cutcher & Ahtel, 2017, p. 686).

Sampling Expensive Stores

Scholars mostly study aesthetic labor in upper-class or more expensive stores. Perhaps this trend helps explain why scholars tend to focus on only white workers. Yet it fails to account for their decision not to analyze whiteness or deeply consider racial dynamics.

References

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HELP
WANTED
Must Represent
the Brand