

Cabin pressure

The dialectics of emotional labour in the airline industry

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You might pass the time engaging the hostess in some flirtatious banter. Without a doubt you get much more time and indulgence in business than tourist class. This is the one area in which the Far Eastern hostess does not excel but she makes up for that with great charm – and she doesn't pout and stare at the ceiling when she has had enough of you.¹

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This article explores the recent history of female airline cabin crew in the context of 'emotional labour', whereby women's 'virtues' are first essentialised into charm, pastoral care and sexuality and then turned into a commodity form.² Though historically some long-distance carriers employed only men – or mainly men – in the cabin, the job in question has been long regarded as 'women's work' – centred on performing a commercialised version of the caring and service activities carried out for centuries in the domestic sphere.³

The main period of study is the post-1978 deregulation era, a time of significant industry restructuring, aggregate growth and heightened competition between increasingly aggressive airlines.⁴ During this time labour – across all industries – has traditionally been seen as in retreat. However, though heightened competition brought with it an increase in demand for emotional labour among female cabin crew, it also created opportunities for women to become increasingly confident of engaging in struggles over control of their bodies and, by implication, their jobs. As Anna Pollert argues, 'if the aim is to *explain* men's oppression of and/or exploitation of women, then it is also to inform and find spaces for *challenge*'.⁵ The recent history of female cabin crew provides some of those spaces.

Following a discussion of theoretical aspects of emotional labour, I will explore cabin crew action and feminist concerns in the period immediately prior to deregulation, before discussing the impact of industry restructuring during the 1980s. The main body of the article involves an analysis of two specific events in the late 1990s – the Campaign against Airline Sexism organised by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the British Airways (BA) cabin crew strike of 1997. The conclusion will address the question of what was different about action in the 1990s and the extent to which it continued, or broke with, movements from previous decades. The central

argument is that, as competition became more acute, so, correspondingly, did the potential power of women cabin crew.

Emotional labour

The significance of emotional labour as a concept is its specific applicability to women. It should not be thought, for instance, that the struggle for gay rights among cabin crew, or indeed wider issues of job insecurity that affected both men and women, are viewed as less important.⁶ Emotional labour is constructed implicitly around the appropriation of sexual difference and is thus by definition not gender-neutral.⁷ Women are employed to make use of their 'natural' skills.⁸ As Tyler and Abbott argue, '[f]light attendants are required to deploy "skills" and abilities which they are deemed to possess simply by virtue of their sexual difference from men'.⁹ Often these 'skills' are deployed *outside* the formal contractual relations of exchange yet are indispensable *to* those relations.¹⁰

In her work on non-union Delta Air Lines cabin crews Hochschild defines emotional labour as the 'management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display'.¹¹ This display involves the kind of surface and deep acting observed in other service industries.¹² The *aim* of the act is to sustain an outward appearance that produces a desired state of mind – a contented customer, who is sometimes perceived as more important in determining wages than the employer.¹³ At worst, employees are forced into a double bind of having to be nice to the customer and having to show they are doing so to their line manager;¹⁴ at best, the customer becomes what Benson terms 'our friend the enemy', a generator of strong emotions – mainly anger, sometimes affection.¹⁵ Importantly, though, such emotions need to be controlled for the good of the product.

In the airline industry emotional labour is vital to the success of the product. Customer perceptions of a flight are overwhelmingly shaped by their dealings with airline staff and face-to-face contact.¹⁶ Even a low-cost carrier like easyJet sees its cabin crew as the front-line ambassadors of the service.¹⁷ Singapore International Airlines (SIA) has constructed its entire corporate image around its 'Singapore girls' – so famous that in 1993 a facsimile of the 'girl' became the first commercial icon to be placed in Madame Tussaud's waxworks museum in London.¹⁸

Emotional labour played a major part in the construction of total quality management (TQM) systems within human resource strategies during the 1980s. Perhaps most famous was Jim Carlzon's introduction of 'moments of truth' at Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS), where 'the first fifteen-second encounter between a passenger and the front-line people' became the fulcrum of the company's organisation.¹⁹ Yet this reliance on emotional labour, especially in a period of heightened competition when the working day becomes more intensive, makes companies more vulnerable to the threat of that labour being withdrawn. Skills of human interaction, as Benson notes, are 'a most unmanageable quality and one even harder to control than manual skill'.²⁰

Cabin crew have challenged company regulations affecting territories of the body both through co-ordinated action, through trade unions and civil litigation, and also on an individual basis, through the tactful withdrawal of the willingness to go the extra mile.²¹ As one Alaska Airlines worker put it, 'They're cutting back and we're out there every day taking it from passengers ... We say, "We're trying," but we're not trying. That one extra step we used to take we don't have the urge to take any more.'²²

Here one can see the unique potential industrial power of emotional labour. When 'women's virtues' are paraded as part of the package of flying with a particular airline, the withdrawal of those virtues – through the absence of the smile – can be perceived by the customer as a faulty commodity. He – and it is specifically a he – may well take his custom elsewhere. Poor service, especially for valued and high-revenue business travellers, could mean the transfer of patronage to another airline. Emotional labour is therefore a double-edged sword in terms of corporate resources, a commodity over which management may attempt to exert control but which increasingly displays a capacity to wriggle free.²³

This potential strength of female cabin crew is bolstered by their unusually close common identification across airlines. Williams argues that cabin crews represent an 'occupational community' whose members socialise more with persons in the same line of work than with a cross-section of occupational types.²⁴ Shared experiences helped deepen the common bond among female cabin crew and to develop an articulation of identifiably feminist issues. During the period under review there was often a non-ideological nature to cabin crew militancy, and solidarity was formed not from high theory but from directly shared on-the-job experiences with fellow workers. However, issues such as weight restrictions, equality in retirement age, exploitative imagery and bodily self-surveillance all concord with explicit feminist concerns of recent years. As one female worker commented, regarding the contentious 'weigh-ins' for cabin crew, 'the pilots aren't weighed ... It's just us ... Of course it's because we're women.'²⁵ A turning point in terms of galvanising public support for the American Airlines cabin crew strike of 1993 was a letter from a worker that compared the behaviour of the carrier to that of an abusive husband.²⁶

In other words an intriguing dialectic has been in operation. Placed at the heart of airline marketing and service delivery because of their supposed attributes as the weaker sex, female cabin crew have carved out a position of strength for themselves, and perhaps pointed the way forward for other women service workers both inside and outside the transport industry.²⁷ The exploitation of emotional labour, as Hochschild argues, resonant with Marx's famous dissection of the working day in chapter 10 of *Das Kapital*, produces a commonality of experience that reinforces resistance to that exploitation.²⁸ This resistance, however, has been prominent since the late 1960s and it is to this period that we now turn.

Challenging the 'Fly me' airlines

The first female cabin crew were trained nurses, employed by United Airlines in the early 1930s during a period when safety was still a primary concern for passengers. The sight of a nurse was reassuring to nervous flyers, especially in the unsteady confines of unpressurised cabins. It also provided a 'psychological punch' whereby travellers, especially male ones, would be loath to admit to a fear of flying when young women took to the air regularly as part of the crew.²⁹

By the 1960s the nurse/mother image of cabin crew had been largely transformed into one of outright sexual titillation.³⁰ The classic example was the 'Fly me' advertising campaign of National Airlines, but as Taylor argues, 'the airlines weren't just creating a stereotype by their advertisements; they were also hiring women who would reinforce this image'.³¹ This was achieved through weight restrictions on individual women cabin crew (veiled as a spurious concern for safety), age limits and strict hiring criteria that ensured only those recruits who fitted the company image were accepted. When crew complained about the inevitable sexual advances they were often told to take them in their stride. In the infamous memoir *Coffee, Tea or Me?* one of the co-authors reports the following response to her complaint of sexual molestation during an emergency landing: 'You know, Trudy, we can't have an unhappy, unsmiling stewardess serving our valued travelers, can we? ... We can recommend you a good psychiatrist who might help you become once again the happy smiling stewardess you were.'³²

Title VII of the US Civil Rights Act 1964 and the creation in the United States of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) gave an impetus to modern feminism that was bound to impact upon the role of cabin crew. In 1968 the EEOC found marital restrictions on female cabin crew in violation of Title VII, though the US courts dragged their feet in applying the ruling.³³ By the 1970s, partly as a result of such sluggish progress, cabin crews reflected the wider national radicalisation of feminism, paying less attention to liberal issues of entitlement and more to identity-based issues of a personal nature.³⁴ In 1972 Stewardesses for Women's Rights (SWFR) was founded, offering a free legal referral service to female cabin crew.³⁵ Aspects of the body, articulated at the time by feminist radicals such as Shulamith Firestone and Mary Daly, and perhaps reaching their apogee in the United States with the legalisation of abortion in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), were increasingly placed on the agenda of cabin crew action.³⁶ Reporting in the *Ladies Home Journal*, SWFR organiser Kathleen Heenan claimed, 'Flight attendants are more frequently suspended or fired for violations of weight restrictions than any other reason.'³⁷ In 1976 seven Ozark Airlines cabin crew filed a lawsuit under the EEOC against weight restrictions. The 'Fat Seven', as they called themselves, argued that the restrictions were sexist, as they were not applied to men.

The United States was not the only site of cabin crew organisation on these issues: in Canada two Pacific Western Airlines workers were suspended for refusing to wear a new uniform of short fringed skirt and red bloomers after

one had been grabbed by a male passenger. Their union, CUPE, took the ‘Red Panty Case’ to arbitration and won.³⁸ In 1975 the first serious cabin crew strike at Australian carrier Ansett escalated rapidly when the airline’s owner dismissed the workers as a ‘batch of old boilers’ (conflating ageism with sexism and causing much amusement in a patriarchal Australian press).³⁹

Alongside concern about image and stereotyping, female cabin crew also became more active in union issues. Historically, as Nielson argues, cabin crew were seen as a problem by male-dominated parent unions, particularly the Airline Pilots of America (ALPA). In 1974 the Association of Flight Attendants at United seceded from ALPA and achieved its first renegotiation of pay and conditions since 1946.⁴⁰ Other cabin crew unions, at TWA, Pan Am and Eastern, followed suit in decoupling from parent groups and forming individual ‘one airline’ unions. ‘We’re like gnats,’ quipped one spokeswoman. ‘The airlines never know where we bite next.’⁴¹

In the late 1960s and 1970s cabin crew made significant strides in autonomy and in challenging the more overtly sexually exploitative aspects of emotional labour. However, these gains were made mainly within a tightly controlled industry with limited competition. The advent of deregulation, introduced in 1978 in the United States, would mark the arrival of a cut-throat environment that placed cabin crew – and labour in general – under new pressure.

Deregulation and its effects

Deregulation both required and enabled attacks on US industry labour costs in the 1980s. Between 1981 and 1984 concessions were extracted from labour, yet cabin crew did not fare as badly as might have been expected. Of the total concessions, 42 per cent were made by pilots, 27 per cent by ground support staff and 19 per cent by cabin crew (with only mechanics lower, at 12 per cent).⁴² Cabin crew’s relative strength was a result partly of airlines not wanting to lose experienced staff. However, it was also due to the highly competitive nature of the new US cabin crew unions, who took a much tougher line in bargaining with carriers and agreed to fewer concessions than did pilots.⁴³

Between 1985 and 1989, however, a second round of cost cutting reduced US cabin crew average monthly earnings by 15 per cent, while the number of part-time workers increased.⁴⁴ The introduction of a two-tier pay scale at American Airlines, with new cabin crew commencing on a lower B scale, signalled a future development. The general shift in competitive focus from service to price, along with the introduction of new ‘no frills’ carriers entering the market at significantly reduced cost levels, resulted in several fare wars in the United States that acted as a smokescreen for ‘wages wars’.⁴⁵

The 1980s were a notably difficult period for labour in general, and cabin crew were no exception. However, despite the efforts of US airlines in the post-deregulation climate to improve cabin crew productivity (and hence reduce average costs) the fact remains that, *en bloc*, they singularly failed to

do so. From 1983 revenue passenger kilometres per cabin crew member rose from 8,500 to 9,000 by 1988, before falling to 8,700 by 1993, a figure matched that year by the supposedly ramshackle State-run, union-dominated Iberia of Spain.⁴⁶

As the industry entered the 1990s the Gulf War recession – alongside partial deregulation in Europe and Asia – presented carriers worldwide with a new incentive to economise. ‘Lean and mean’ became the industrial buzz words, with the combination of high fuel prices and low demand presenting carriers with ‘an undreamt-of opportunity to attack their high labour costs’.⁴⁷ However, though some concessions were extracted from cabin crew, they remained capable of defending and renegotiating their position. In 1993 the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA) struck at American Airlines just before Thanksgiving in a dispute over contracts which was settled only when President Bill Clinton pressed the company to agree to arbitration. Two years previous, APFA had reached a settlement through an EEOC lawsuit against American over weight discrimination.⁴⁸ Resistance to emotional labour through action over pay and contracts, and also over control over women’s bodies, was continued into the late 1990s.

Spaces of struggle

In 1997 the ITF launched its anti-sexism campaign with a poster depicting a blow-up doll in cabin crew uniform, alongside the caption ‘If an airline treats its employees like this what must it think of its passengers?’ (Figure 1). The impetus behind the campaign came not from traditional theoretical centres of feminism such as the United States but from the Pacific Rim carriers of Asia. Airlines such as Thai International, Korean Air, Cathay Pacific and SIA have yet to relinquish their emphasis on the image of ‘exotic orientalism’ of their female cabin crews. The most famous example was SIA, which launched its ‘Singapore girls’ in the early 1970s and gained a reputation for service other airlines tried to emulate during the highly competitive 1990s.⁴⁹ SIA promotes ‘girls from the heart, with Asian value, Asian charm, warmth and friendliness’.⁵⁰ Cathay Pacific hires workers to give ‘Service straight from the heart’ with uniforms reflecting their ‘modern Asian image’.⁵¹

Asian airlines were partly in competition with each other. In 1997 Thai brought down the maximum retirement age for female cabin crew to forty-five, in an attempt to combat Singapore’s youthful image – ‘too old, unsmiling and not pretty enough’, said Thai’s president.⁵² Similarly, in 1996 Cathay Pacific changed advertising agencies in an attempt to rebrand its image and focus on high-quality service.⁵³ But also Asian airlines found themselves – especially after the Gulf War – in competition with predatory Western carriers, seeking to compensate internationally for domestic downturns in traffic.⁵⁴ Exploitation of the emotional labour of the ‘oriental mystique’ was a logical tactic for Asian carriers.

At an ITF forum in Bangkok in 1997 a different picture from the ‘oriental mystique’ emerged. Cabin crew at Thai, for instance, were concerned at the

IF AN AIRLINE
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The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) believes that when airlines persist their employees as sexists, it compromises the dignity of women, insults passengers and undermines the vital safety role of cabin crew.

If as an employee or a passenger you experience sexist practices by airline companies or airports please inform the ITF Campaign Against Airline Sexism, 45 St Brevint Road, London W4 1AA, Fax: 44 (21) 940 9213, E-Mail: itf@itf.org.uk, <http://www.itf.org.uk>

CAMPAIGN AGAINST AIRLINE SEXISM

ITF

Figure 1 The blow-up doll poster, Campaign against Airline Sexism, 1997. Reproduced by kind permission of the International Transport Workers' Federation

withdrawal of wages if they failed to lose weight. There was also a catalogue of incidents involving sexual harassment by male passengers. One Thai cabin crew member complained of how two Chinese businessmen openly discussed how much they would pay to sleep with her, not realising that she spoke Chinese herself.⁵⁵ The level of anger genuinely shocked ITF officials based in London. As one said, 'We were surprised at how widespread it was but also how vocal people were. They knew about their rights.'⁵⁶

The campaign was very successful in Asia, putting pressure on companies to treat cabin crews as safety professionals central to the airlines' operations and also to take their employees' complaints seriously. It also reminded the industry in supposedly enlightened Europe that the old *Coffee, Tea or Me?* image of cabin crew in the 1960s still continued in places: easyJet was specifically targeted and effectively forced to discontinue its 'I'm easy' t-shirt uniforms, while Crossair, which employed only female cabin crews (being outside EU regulations, as a Swiss airline) was closely monitored. The campaign also strengthened employee confidence in other parts of the world, such as Mexico and Argentina, where the safety concerns of cabin crew unions had been consistently downplayed. Indeed, the fact that cabin crews' prime function on board an aircraft was safety and not serving drinks, or taking part in fashion parades, became the predominant message at the end of the 1990s, a fact that was underpinned by the campaign.

The anti-sexism campaign was explicitly aimed at changing perceptions and the image of cabin crews and grew out of an increasingly competitive climate – especially in the Pacific Rim, where airlines attempted to extract greater amounts of emotional labour from their staff. Through its concerns for bodily appearance, stereotype and exploitation it continued the work started by the anti-'Fly me' campaigns of the early 1970s.

By contrast, the BA strike fitted more into a pattern of industrial action. Yet it was also the most important industrial dispute in the airline industry of the last twenty years, more so than the 1993 walk-out at American Airlines, because of its global dimension. BA had established itself as the industry leader in Europe in the 1980s and probably the world by the 1990s.⁵⁷ It pioneered the privatisation of State airlines and became one of the leading proponents of TQM. It also was the first airline to envisage itself as definitively global, controversially replacing its union jack tail pattern with a variety of multi-ethnic designs. In the 1990s the industry motto became 'What BA do today, other airlines do tomorrow.'⁵⁸

The strike originated in CEO Bob Ayling's Business Efficiency Programme, designed to cut £1 billion in BA's costs. This affected cabin crew through new starter rates and redesigned work loads. In the 1990s two unions represented cabin crew at BA, the majority (10,000 members) Transport & General Workers' Union (TGWU) and minority (2,000 members) Cabin Crew '89. In 1997 BA signed an agreement with Cabin Crew '89 which it then claimed was binding on all staff. This left the TGWU with little option but to ballot its members on strike action. In fact only about a quarter of TGWU cabin crew actually went on strike; the rest went sick. BA claimed that the TGWU

organised the ‘sick-out’, although such a tactic would have been an admission of weakness for any union.⁵⁹ Even by British industrial dispute standards, the levels of intimidation by BA management were widely regarded as excessive, with even the normally conservative *Daily Mail*, *Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* newspapers condemning its heavyhandedness.⁶⁰

According to the TGWU, the *industrial* dispute was actually lost – in the sense that £1 billion worth of cuts were eventually made, and new conditions were introduced. But victory was visible in the publicity campaign. BA had been intent on destroying the TGWU’s presence in favour of the ‘pro-management’ Cabin Crew ’89, a union clearly modelled on the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers of the mid-1980s and formed at Ayling’s behest when he was Director of Human Resources. Senior management had even formed a clandestine grouping known as the Miners’ Group with express battle plans to break the TGWU in the same way that the National Union of Mineworkers had been effectively broken during the 1984–85 pit strike.⁶¹ Yet BA’s actions had the reverse effect, increasing cabin crew unionisation across the sector. In this sense, BA scored an own goal: it had built its reputation on the quality of its service – indeed, it had just launched its Customer First programme – and this had been temporarily destroyed. As one analyst put it, with few flights in operation, ‘BA just announced a new, friendlier-than-ever, better-than-ever service. In the wake of that, to not have staff who are providing this service is where the damaging point lies.’⁶² The dispute cost Ayling his job, the airline £125 million and probably played a major part in the collapse of BA’s share price from over 750p in 1996 to below 300p in early 2000.

Public sympathy, its international nature and its symbolic value are three particularly important aspects of the BA dispute. First, cabin crew elicited considerable public sympathy, especially in view of the heavyhandedness of management. But they also knew how to exploit this to good effect, and how to turn emotional labour on its head. Cabin crew were personally acquainted with American Express Platinum Card holders and would engage them in conversation during flights, or occasionally make in-flight announcements outlining their grievances. They attempted therefore to take direct action to win the support of those most valuable to BA – the premium business travellers (some of whom were acquaintances of Ayling) who comprised only 5 per cent of customers yet represented 25 per cent of revenue.⁶³ In competitive times, cabin crew knew exactly where the pressure points of the airline were.

A second aspect was the dispute’s international nature. BA cabin crew won the support of sister unions in the United States to prevent the wet-leasing (i.e. leasing of an aircraft with crew) of aircraft and to prevent Concorde flying. BA planes were surrounded by union members in Zimbabwe and Malta and prevented from taking off. Dutch cabin crews from KLM and Martinair told their management that they would not work if BA tried to wet-lease an aircraft from a Dutch carrier. Clearly, the BA dispute received a lot of moral support from other cabin crews, not least because of the airline’s stature as

industry leader. As previously noted, cabin crews represent an occupational community and workers from other airlines knew that the BA fight was implicitly their fight too, as measures taken by BA would often be replicated elsewhere.

The last point involves the dispute's symbolism. At the time, press coverage compared it to the UK miners' strike in 1984–85, in which a similar attempt to destroy a major union was successful, partly through the setting up of what was perceived as a bosses' union. But the cabin crew strike took place in an industry that was not in decline, as coal had been. Rather it was in one of the largest boom industries of the past twenty years. The fact that a dispute involving cabin crew could be seen in the same light as the most serious industrial battle of post-war British history, involving what was the most militant trade union, showed the extent to which their concerns had moved to the centre ground.⁶⁴ In the process they scored a high-profile victory which served to undermine stereotypical portraits of docile 'trolley-dolly girls' still prevalent in the media.⁶⁵

Conclusion

In 1998 the respected trade journal *Airline Business* suggested that 'labour is coming to the party with more aggressiveness and frontline support'. Like other service companies, 'airlines are finding it difficult to attract, retain and afford quality frontline people'.⁶⁶ Though the journal was speaking of the industry as a whole, there is little doubt that cabin crew enter into the equation. Hochschild's identification of a dialectical relationship between the competitive need for the greater exploitation of emotional labour and the capacity for the holders of that labour to impose their own autonomy on their work is generally borne out by a study of the past two decades in the industry. Both the anti-sexism campaign and the BA strike originated in management attempts to increase the extraction of surplus value through new contracts and hiring regulations.

In some ways, cabin crew in the 1990s fought the same battles as their predecessors. Campaigns over sexual imagery, the channelling of protest through trade unions, the use of the courts and Equal Opportunity structures and attempts to embed non-discriminatory practice continued to be the main aspects of action across the decades.

In other ways, though, differences can be found in more recent protest. The most immediate one is geographical: cabin crew from South East Asia were at the forefront of the anti-sexism campaign in a direct challenge to the 'oriental charm' stereotype peddled by SIA, Thai and the like. Undoubtedly the question of time lag comes into play here – US feminists led the way in the 1970s and other areas of the world have now caught up. However, this is not sufficient explanation. More likely the response of Asian cabin crew was a result of the deepening competitiveness in the industry in that part of the world and concomitant desire to contest the extraction of emotional labour on the part of carriers.

This competitiveness underpins a second difference. In a geographical sense, as the world became smaller, and as airlines became increasingly global in focus and organisation (through code sharing, networking agreements and alliances), the reliance on the human interface and emotional labour of cabin crew increased. Carriers like BA became highly complicated networks, utilising the most fashionable TQM skills and just-in-time inventory techniques, but their final delivery remained in the hands of the ‘smiling’ cabin crew. When that smile faded and disgruntlement turned to strike action, BA’s interconnected system collapsed. In other words, though they were always cogs in a business machine, cabin crew in the fiercely competitive, deregulated and globalised late 1990s were more central cogs than had previously been the case. This centrality gave them new power.

Of course, women occupied a more prominent position in society than in the 1960s. Then, as Heenan notes, ‘stewardesses ... were just beginning to be aware of their rights. They were still not accustomed to the idea they might continue working after marriage or raising a family.’⁶⁷ By the mid-1990s women, according to Cobble, were ‘the new proletariat’, with the contradictions they articulated and experienced driving workplace reform.⁶⁸ Cabin crew action thus fits into a wider picture of worldwide service-industry mobilisation, driven by the potential of finding crucial pressure points in a new globalised economic system. Again, the intensity of these pressure points, built around the withdrawal of emotional labour, distinguished the 1990s from previous decades.⁶⁹

This is not to suggest that cabin crew are about to storm the barricades. Nor is it to suggest that all the battles have been fought and won. Gains made by women need to be qualified at the very least, as writers like Susan Faludi and Naomi Wolf clearly asserted in the 1990s.⁷⁰ As if in confirmation, the ITF’s anti-sexism campaign was launched with the real-life anecdote:

The passenger pinched her bottom on a number of occasions when she was passing his seat, touched her breasts while she was serving his meal and later, stood up behind her, grasped her by the hips and simulated sexual intercourse. His fellow passengers cheered him on in his actions.⁷¹

Most recently, in 2001, BA’s new uniform designer announced his intention to put the ‘glamour back into travel ... The girls will look very sexy and the men will look like strong heroes.’⁷² Clearly, some attitudes die hard.

Nevertheless, one of the unifying threads through various strands of feminism is the need to describe, explain and prescribe.⁷³ The recent history of female cabin crew is illustrative of all three components. In their struggle to take control of their own lives, cabin crew provided inspiration for all workers – men and women – in their fight for equality and justice.

Notes

- 1 P. Jenner, ‘The aerial class struggle’, *Director* 37, 9 (1984), p. 71.
- 2 A. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (Berkeley CA, 1983), p. 7 n.

- 3 H. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 9. Before the Second World War Imperial Airways, for instance, employed no women as cabin staff. In 1985 Qantas employed 2,325 cabin crew, of whom only 500 (21 per cent) were women. G. Pirie, 'Gendered Aviation in the British Empire, 1919–39', paper presented at the 'Transporting Gender' conference, National Railway Museum, York, 6 October 2000; C. Williams, *Blue, White and Pink Collar Workers in Australia* (1988), p. 101.
- 4 For an account of this period see T. Petzinger, *Hard Landing* (New York, 1995).
- 5 A. Pollert, 'Gender and class revisited, or, The poverty of "patriarchy"', *Sociology* 30, 4 (1996), p. 655.
- 6 In 1997, for example, United Airlines was subjected to a boycott campaign organised through the Association of Flight Attendants and concerning the provision of spousal benefits for partners of gay employees.
- 7 S. Taylor and M. Tyler, 'Emotional labour and sexual difference in the airline industry', *Work, Employment and Society* 14, 1 (2000), p. 78.
- 8 N. James, 'Emotional labour: skill and work in the social regulation of feelings', *Sociological Review* 37, 1 (1989), p. 39.
- 9 M. Tyler and P. Abbott, 'Chocs away: weight watching in the contemporary airline industry', *Sociology* 32, 3 (1998), p. 434.
- 10 M. Tyler and S. Taylor, 'The exchange of aesthetics: women's work and "The Gift"', *Gender, Work and Organization* 5, 3 (1998), p. 166.
- 11 Hochschild, *Managed Heart*, p. 7.
- 12 For example, telephone sales agents form the basis of S. Taylor, 'Emotional labour and the new workplace', in P. Thompson and C. Warhurst (eds), *Workplaces of the Future* (1998), pp. 84–103. On other industries see M. P. Filby, "'The figures, the personality and the bums': service work and sexuality", *Work, Employment and Society* 6, 1 (1992), p. 39; E. Hall, 'Smiling, deferring and flirting: doing gender by giving "good service"', *Work and Occupations* 20, 4 (1993), pp. 452–71; K. Hughes and V. Tadie, "'Something to deal with": customer sexual harassment and women's retail service work in Canada', *Gender, Work and Organization* 5, 4 (1998), pp. 207–19. On an earlier period see S. Benson, *Counter Cultures* (Urbana IL, 1986).
- 13 D. Cobble, *Dishing it Out* (Urbana IL, 1991), pp. 44–8.
- 14 S. Folgerø and I. Fjeldstad, 'On duty – off guard: cultural norms and sexual harassment in service organizations', *Organization Studies* 16, 2 (1995), p. 303.
- 15 Benson, *Counter Cultures*, p. 259.
- 16 P. Festa, 'Wheeling out the service', *Airline Business*, January 1997, p. 43.
- 17 Interview, F. Shepheard, Cabin Services Manager, easyJet, 29 July 2000.
- 18 K. Lovegrove, *Airline* (2000), p. 36.
- 19 J. Carlzon, *Moments of Truth* (Cambridge, 1987), p. viii. See also K. Blois, 'Carlzon's *Moments of Truth* – a critical appraisal', *International Journal of Service Industry Management* 3, 3 (1992), pp. 5–17.
- 20 Benson, *Counter Cultures*, p. 126.
- 21 Hochschild, *Managed Heart*, p. 126 n.
- 22 Alaska Air cabin crew member Joyce Staff, quoted in M. Jennings, 'Surviving the cuts', *Airline Business*, December 1993, p. 28.
- 23 Filby, 'The figures', p. 39.
- 24 C. Williams, 'Domestic flight attendants in Australia: a quasi-occupational community?', *Journal of Industrial Relations* 28, 2 (1986), pp. 243–4.
- 25 Tyler and Abbott, 'Chocs away ...', p. 443.
- 26 J. Mann, 'Coffee, tea and solidarity', *Washington Post*, 26 November 1993.
- 27 Women have participated in union activity, for instance, in other transport sectors since the early 1900s. In Japan in the 1980s women bus guides successfully struck against a company age limit of thirty-five. *ITF Women* 2 (2000), p. 6. On the earlier experience of women workers on ocean liners see L. Coons, "'Floating Palace" or "Portable Jail"? The experience of female personnel on transatlantic steamers, 1919–39', paper presented at the 'Transporting Gender' conference, National Railway Museum, York, 6 October 2000.
- 28 Hochschild, *Managed Heart*, p. 14. See K. Marx, *Capital* I [1867], trans. B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 340–416.
- 29 The term came from Steve Stimpson, a district manager with United. C. Solberg, *Conquest of the Sky* (Boston MA, 1979), p. 211.
- 30 P. Lyth, 'Fly me, I'm Margie: the air stewardess and airline marketing, 1930–80', paper presented at the 'Transporting Gender' conference, National Railway Museum, York, 6

- October 2000. The Freudian overtones of much airline marketing are hinted at in Lyth's suggestion that, despite the 'Fly me' period, 'mother' never really went away.
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