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# Not just a pretty face: The evolution of the flight attendant

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Not Just a Pretty Face: The Evolution  
of the Flight Attendant

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A Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Arts and Letters  
James Madison University

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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by Angelica Rose Gertel

May 2014

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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## **Dedication**

For my mother, father and sister who have always encouraged me to reach for the stars, for my grandfather, who sparked my interest in airplanes, and for Mrs. Murphy, who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself.

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## **Acknowledgments**

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## Early Women In Flight and the Birth of the Flight Attendant

It is easy to get caught up in the daily hustle and bustle of a large airport. Wandering through the crowded terminal waiting for a flight, it is hard not to be overwhelmed with the sights and sounds of fellow travelers: an overtired businessman muttering into his cellphone, the shrieks of a bored child, or the constant chatter of excited young adults setting out on a new adventure. It is quite easy to forget how flying from one destination to another is still a relatively new concept. Commercial flights have become a mundane occurrence, as is the sight of women in flight attendant uniforms, brusquely traveling towards departure gates to help with the necessary pre-flight preparations. While women have been a part of aviation history since its beginnings, most female involvement in this industry has been overlooked.. Yet thousands of women played an extremely important role in the foundation and promotion of the commercial airline industry. This paper will shed light on the women at the departure gate and on the airplane and the various struggles they have weathered in the face of changing gender stereotypes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The main primary sources that have been essential to the construction of this paper include *Rita Gloyd (American Airlines Inc. Stewardess) Collection*, 1941, Sources that served as key in providing background on women in aviation include Roger E. Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) and Sherrie A. Inness, "On the Road and In the Air: Gender and Technology in Girls' Automobile Serials, 1909-1932," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 47-60. Sources that have been key to helping constructing the timeline and proving key facts about the history of flight attendants include Kathleen Barry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2007); Victoria Vantoch, *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Kathleen Heenan, "Fighting the 'Fly-Me' Airlines," *The Civil Liberties Review* (December 1976/January 1977); and Georgia Panter Nielsen, *From Sky Girl To Flight Attendant: Women and the Making of a Union* (Ithaca, Cornell University, 1982). Scholarship key to understanding general women's history and second wave feminism include Louis W. Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History: Second Edition* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1984); Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the*

The early era of aviation saw women predominately as spectators. When the Wright Brothers built the first successful plane, their sister Katherine was at their side as a nurturing supporter of their endeavor.<sup>2</sup> The first American woman to fly, Mrs. Hart O. Berg, flew with Wilbur Wright during a demonstration in France in 1908.<sup>3</sup> However, most men and women interacted with airplanes at exhibitions and air shows. In the early air age, from around 1910 to the late 1920s, events attracted thousands of curious spectators who came to watch. Daring show pilots or “birdmen” performed dangerous stunts in different types of planes. Tricks would range from loop-de-loops to treacherous dives, which could be fatal. In fact, many early pilots died while performing these stunts in front of crowds. Roger Bilstein mentions in his history of flight that out of the four men who signed two-year contracts for the Wright Exhibition Company as stunt pilots, only one lived to fulfill his contract. Factors that often led to the deaths of these stunt pilots included sheer carelessness, ill-conceived stunts and maneuvers, and pressure from gathered crowds who demanded the pilots fly even if conditions were marginal.<sup>4</sup> Due to the high mortality rate from this form of entertainment, the airplane seemed to the public eye to be nothing more than an extremely dangerous toy.

The plane itself was a simple biplane constructed of metal and wood. A photo of female pilot Katherine Stinson and her plane from 1910 shows the simple structure of her two-person

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*Twentieth Century* (New York, Hill and Wang) 1992; While Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, Dell Publishing, 1963) gives direct insight to the women’s movement in; The scholarship used to understand Emotional labor please refer to Arlie Russel Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Adams and Margaret Kimball and Jenette Eaton, *Heroines Of The Sky* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company Inc., 1942), xiv.

<sup>3</sup> Adams and Kimball and Eaton, ix.

<sup>4</sup> Roger E. Bilstien, *Flight in America 1900-1983: From the Wrights to the Astronauts*, (Balitmore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 24-25.

plane. The plane itself looks like a large-scale model of a small child's toy, with beat up rubber wheels that look like they have come from an oversized wagon rather than something that would ensure safe landings. The series of wires that hold the wings to the plane appear almost as a complex metal spider web. The plane itself is also not in top condition, rather the metal is covered in what appears to be soot and paint splatters around the engine and wings.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore no wonder that the public was both entranced and scared of these aircraft.

Yet the airplane, like the automobiles before them, opened a new realm of freedom and exploration to upper class and middle class women. The plane offered this group of women the chance to explore a previously forbidden territory: the sky. While only those who had the funds to maintain an airplane or obtained a sponsorship or endorsement could access this new realm, spectating women could still enjoy the sense of wonder. This wood and metal biplane may have seemed rickety and scary, but it offered excitement and adventure. For women like Katherine Stinson, the airplane created the opportunity for freedom from social spheres that they had otherwise been confined within.

The public's deeply implanted fear of flying brought women to the forefront of the commercial aviation industry, in other roles, in the 1920s. The commercial aviation industry considered women and their fragile, domestic, nurturing stereotypes to be the antithesis of the dangerous birdmen.<sup>6</sup> The commercial aviation industry recruited women to showcase planes as safe and stable machines. Most commonly, women demonstrated and sold planes for the private market. In fact, almost all of the well-known female pilots worked in airplane sales at one point

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<sup>5</sup> *Miss Katherine Sinnson and Her Aeroplane* via [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a6/Miss\\_Katherine\\_Stinson\\_and\\_her\\_Curtiss\\_aeroplane\\_3c06324u.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a6/Miss_Katherine_Stinson_and_her_Curtiss_aeroplane_3c06324u.jpg)

<sup>6</sup> Joseph J. Corn, Making Flying "Thinkable": Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation, 1927-40," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Autumn, 1979): 560.



in time. Corporations hired women to make promotional flights, race both other women and men, embark on long-distance tours in different model planes, and set records.<sup>7</sup> Harriet Quimby, an American woman, gained international recognition by being the first woman to fly across the English Channel. Other women such as Ruth Law and Katherine Stinson became known for setting records, performing stunts, as well as flying competitively against men.<sup>8</sup> A very small number piloted commercial flights, with one woman finding a temporary place within the realm of scheduled airliners.

However, women were well aware that in taking these positions to advertise the aviation industry they were in fact supporting demeaning stereotypes against their gender. Corporations tried to push the general belief that “if a woman can do it, it must be easy and safe.”<sup>9</sup> This marketing strategy aimed at men who may have feared flying. If a woman could handle flying a plane, then it must be extremely easy for a man. Those women who sold planes faced the everyday consequences of this belief during their test flights. Some of the male customers would force the plane into harrowing situations to try to prove themselves and reaffirm their masculinity to the sales woman, who ultimately had to regain control of the plane.<sup>10</sup>

Women also faced discrimination when trying to obtain their pilot’s licenses, in both training and the actual test. Amelia Earhart pointed out in her book that women found themselves at a huge disadvantage for receiving adequate training because the best flight schools were parts

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<sup>7</sup> Corn, “Making Flying ‘Thinkable,’” 560-561.

<sup>8</sup> Bilstein, 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Corn, “Making Flying ‘Thinkable,’” 560-563.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America’s Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 77.

of the Army and Navy, neither of which allowed women.<sup>11</sup> The pilot test itself was sometimes purposely made harder for women, with the added risk that the instructor could fail them purely because of gender bias.<sup>12</sup> Commercial flight schools often appeared unwelcoming to women, and gender divisions provided men with an unfair advantage.

Men held the upper hand in commercial flight school due to gender roles and the desire by men to preserve their ideals of masculinity. Males were encouraged from a young age to tinker and build. By having the benefit of interacting with mechanics from an early age, men could attain higher scores in some aspects of the pilots test and within flight schools.<sup>13</sup> Tinkering was seen as a manly activity, and men viewed women who tried to enter flight school as a threat to their own realm of masculinity. In much the same way that men tried to reserve the activities of driving and tinkering with their cars as “manly activities,” women entering this realm disrupted the constructed gender roles, thus bringing the hobby into jeopardy.<sup>14</sup>

While most female pilots resented furthering the gender stereotype, many believed that embracing a role as a socialite could help promote women in aviation.<sup>15</sup> Often, the media justified women taking part in the masculine activity of flying by using gender to draw a line, such as referring to female pilots as “angels” or “sweethearts of the air”. By referring to these

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<sup>11</sup> Amelia Earhart, *The Fun of It: Random Records of My Own Flying and of Women in Aviation* (New York: Harcourt Brace And Company, 1932), 143

<sup>12</sup> Corn, “Making Flying “Thinkable,”” 562.

<sup>13</sup> Earhart, 145.

<sup>14</sup> Clay McShane, *Down The Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 153

<sup>15</sup> The term socialite is used to define women that came from wealthy middle or upper class family who became well known names in society and often appeared at a variety of social situations. These women conformed to the gender roles prescribed to white upper class society, especially in exhibiting what as considered to be accepted feminine traits. These women had been the first to take advantage of aviation due to their access to the funds to buy and maintain an aircraft. Most often, these women would hire a male pilot to fly the plane while she rode along as passenger.

women as “flying flappers” or terms other than the term “pilot,” they softened their appearance and made their behavior more socially acceptable. In order to further their careers, women had to assure the public that the activity of flying did not threaten a woman’s femininity. This is most often seen in derbies or other racing events, whereupon landing, female pilots had to spend their evenings socializing at banquets and parties while male pilots did not. This could be extremely wearing on the female pilots, who had to sacrifice time that could have been spent on airplane maintenance or preparing for the next part of the race. Yet these women put on a brave face when it came to endless social engagements, because as Amelia Earhart explained, to reject an invitation to one of these events would make them seem ungrateful and in turn, would perhaps cause further alienation within the aviation industry— a risk these pilots were not willing to take.<sup>16</sup> This was a challenge that male pilots did not face.

Gender stereotyping in the aviation industry even affected the lives of fictional female pilots, who faced similar scrutiny in their industry when compared to their living counterparts. Those women who were unable to experience flight for themselves could do so vicariously through book serials. Serial novels, which were published monthly, acted as a repetitive advertisement for the aviation industry.<sup>17</sup> Authors of this young adult literature attracted young readers interested in exciting new technology, yet wove tales that ultimately reinforced gender roles of the era. In series such as Edith Van Dyne’s *The Flying Girl* and Margaret Burnham’s *Girl Aviators*, both published in 1911, the main characters emulated some of the famous female pilots and their greatest stunts and showed a positive attitude towards flying. Some even encouraged women to view the airplane as an easily accessible technology by having the main

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<sup>16</sup> Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 84

<sup>17</sup> Sherrie A. Inness, “On the Road and In the Air: Gender and Technology in Girls’ Automobile Serials, 1909-1932,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 48.

character fly in a skillful manner and repair her plane. However, the protagonist always ensured that her activities did not go too far against gender stereotypes.

This conformity was reflected in the extreme hesitation of many of the protagonists to fly or pilot an airplane. In *The Flying Girl* the protagonist Orissa only flies the plane she and her brother built after her brother conveniently breaks his leg. However, before making the decision to fly she justifies to herself and the audience that she is doing it in order to save her family's farm by demonstrating it to those who helped invest in the aircraft. Much like the famous female pilots at this time, the protagonists put emphasis on maintaining femininity, be it through how they dressed or their careful avoidance of criticism in showing her piloting skill.<sup>18</sup> Before flying, Orissa exclaims, "I'm not at all freakish— indeed I'm not!—and only stern necessity induces me to face this ordeal."<sup>19</sup> The heroine's relationship with the airplane and the technology behind it is limited in comparison to the protagonists of novels for boys. While boys in novels such as Wilbur Lawson's *Boy Aviators* series were encouraged to tinker, build and design, girls showed a limited amount of knowledge in mechanics. Girls also had their inventing skills limited to helping a male figure with their creation, leaving most of the building and testing to the men.<sup>20</sup> Overall, while serial novels used the popular technology to create their own gains in which women could take part in aviation, gender roles remained firmly in place. While allowing their female protagonists some degree of freedom, the books ultimately contributed to a conception of aviation in which women played secondary roles.

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<sup>18</sup> Inness, 54-55.

<sup>19</sup> Edith Van Dyne, *The Flying Girl*, (Chicago: Reilly & Britton, 1911), 160.

<sup>20</sup> Inness, 56.

However, the women of the aviation industry did not completely give in to the gender stereotypes that so often worked against them. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, who flew alongside her famous husband Charles, learned how to fix their plane to help her fight off the “flying housewife” image that the media pinned on her.<sup>21</sup> In 1929, well-known female pilots such as Amelia Earhart and Ruth Nichols gathered to form the Ninety-Nines, an organized club for female pilots.<sup>22</sup> This group protested sex discrimination within the Air Commerce Department and in government legislation affecting the aviation industry. They also made efforts to reach out to young women interested in aviation. Young girls who competed in model plane competitions, such as Betty Hind, were recognized and awarded the Earhart trophy by Earhart and the Ninety-Nines.<sup>23</sup> They sought to stimulate the average housewife’s interest as well through a magazine, *99’er*, which published articles supporting female aviators alongside columns that catered to etiquette, gossip, and tips on how to be a good hostess.<sup>24</sup> This magazine, like youth fiction, tried to fit the airplane into the gender constructs of the era. The *99’er* celebrated aspects of domesticity and mixed in aviation, reflecting the Ninety-Nines attitude of supporting gender roles to allow female flight to continue. The establishment of the Ninety-Nines and their successes led to the creation of more women’s aviation groups for both women in the profession and for those generally interested in aviation.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the public became used to the airplane. The rickety, flying death traps of the early age of aviation gave way to new technology. The commercial industry turned away from the wooden and metal bi-planes and towards sturdier metal planes

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<sup>21</sup> Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 87.

<sup>22</sup> Corn, “Making Flying “Thinkable””, 565.

<sup>23</sup> A young girl in a summer dress proudly displaying two model paper planes to the camera, smiling proudly on a rooftop, Joseph J Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America’s Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), photograph.

<sup>24</sup> Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 88.

like the Douglas DC-3. The DC-3 planes used by airlines in the early days of commercial flight, while a step up from their predecessors, did not have pressurized cabins, or noise cancelation from the engines. The aviation industry's successes in transforming the image of the airplane led to the creation of a new niche for women in aviation. With the airplane no longer seen as an intimidating, foreign piece of technology, there was no more need to fund women to advertise their product. Many of the strong female leaders and those who served as the pioneers of the industry had retired, faded from the spotlight, or died in airplane accidents. Amelia Earhart, who had served at the forefront of the strong feminist movement within the industry, had perished in her famous 1937 flight over the Atlantic.<sup>25</sup> Commercial airlines refused to hire women to pilot their aircraft, placing the women who had flown for companies to break records and demonstrate safety slowly out of business.

While air travel became more commonplace in the world of transportation as early as the 1930s, there were still potential consumers who remained wary of passenger flight. As an attempt to soothe nervous customers, Boeing Air Transport (the predecessor to United Airlines) first tried using male stewards on their planes, without much success.<sup>26</sup> Passengers found male stewards to be over-zealous and annoying, while some stewards got so air sick that they had to be cared for by passengers. One observer of these early stewards concluded that "white men were simply not cut out for passenger service."<sup>27</sup> This would soon change when former pilot Ellen Church created a new niche for women in aviation. Church proposed the use of trained nurses on flights to a manager of Boeing Air Transport. The manager, Steven Stimpson, saw the

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<sup>25</sup> "Navy Ends Search for Miss Earhart; Flier and Her Navigator Are Dead, Officials Believe-Warships Are Recalled," *New York Times*, 19, July 1937.

<sup>26</sup> Kathleen Barry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>27</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 18.

potential of having young, white women on the flight. Church and Stimpson deployed gender not to sell planes but to quell fear in passengers. Trained nurses would be able to care for those with airsickness, as well as calmly handle emergencies. In contrast to the socialites of early aviation, who paid to fly as passengers and carried the stereotype of becoming hysterical in emergencies, nurses carried the stereotype of being tough. Nurses had long been viewed as smart, headstrong women who could deal with male antics and perform clerical tasks alongside their duties to soothe.<sup>28</sup> The idea of staffing planes with women initially met some resistance from the male supervisors, who feared that women would interfere with the male dominated commercial industry. However, Boeing hired Church and gave her the task of hiring seven other nurses to serve at her side. On May 15, 1930, these women, dressed in stylish uniforms, each served their own ten-passenger flight. They became an instant success.<sup>29</sup> As letters of praise from passengers flooded into Boeing and attracted an unexpected amount of media attention for their company, Boeing considered their “sky girls” a huge success.<sup>30</sup>

Recognizing the popularity of the hostess on Boeing flights, many commercial air carriers immediately followed suit. In the beginning a background in nursing became a standard requirement for a hostess, as well as being “uniformly white, young, single, and slender.”<sup>31</sup> These women worked hard to tend to passengers by preparing and serving meals, caring for those who felt ill, enforcing safety and being sociable all while being charming, attractive and

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<sup>28</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 18-20.

<sup>29</sup> Eight young, very glamorous looking women in uniform pose in front of the entrance to an airplane, Bettmann Archive, 1930.

<sup>30</sup> There will be times in this paper that I will refer to the flight attendant by the names that she was called at a certain period in time. This includes terms such as “sky girl,” “hostess,” and “stewardess.” While these terms are no longer appropriate titles for the position, it is sometimes important to use their original titles to explain behavior or reactions at a point in different period in time.

<sup>31</sup> Kathleen M. Barry, “‘Too Glamorous to Be Considered Workers’: Flight Attendants and Pink-Collar Activism in Mid-Twentieth-Century America” *Labor* 3, no.3 (2006): 119.

graceful. Tasks such as meal preparation had to be done in a seamlessly hidden manner, so as to not detract from the passenger's experience.<sup>32</sup> The behind-the-scenes work of quickly preparing multiple meals in the cramped galley of the aircraft was unknown to passengers, who only saw the flight attendant in her chic outfit gracefully presenting them their meals with a bright smile.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the position of flight became extremely glamorous by the public eye. Airlines encouraged this view in order to help fill seats on their flights. Much like the female pilots in the decades before them, flight attendants were portrayed as not as workers of the aviation industry, but as stereotypes that enforced ideals of femininity at that time. While the women in the era of racings and shows had to simultaneously reflect the socialite image, hostesses had to portray the image of a flying housewife. Both images served as a projection of the ideal woman on those who had stepped outside of prescribed gender roles.

The nursing requirement served to be one of the most important qualities for flight attendants in the early days of commercial aviation because it projected nurturing qualities of femininity while also serving a real and necessary purpose on the planes used for early passenger flights. Their presence was used to soothe passengers' nerves and care for them if they became airsick. The DC-3's unpressurized cabin, and its inability to fly above the clouds, forcing them to fly through weather, made airsickness a common ailment. Cramped spaces, extremes in temperatures, turbulence, as well as noise from engines and propellers made the flight attendant's job extremely important on flights.<sup>34</sup> Much like the barnstorming women of the early days of flight, airlines used flight attendants to prove the safety and assurance they had in their service, however in significantly different ways. While women in the early era of flight had sold

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<sup>32</sup> Barry, "Too Glamorous," 122.

<sup>33</sup> A stewardesses in a flattering uniform, prepares multiple meals in the galley of a passenger aircraft, Bettmann Archive, 1948.

<sup>34</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 14-15



planes for purchase, flight attendants sold passenger service, and thus more numerous, intimate, and prolonged interactions with customers.

With this strategy, female flight attendants received responsibility for emotional labor in the commercial airline industry. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild defines emotional labor as “the requirement of one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.”<sup>35</sup> To flight attendants this meant going through great lengths and training to ensure that the passengers on her plane always felt welcome, happy and safe. With flight attendants displaying appropriate and comforting emotional responses, customers purchased a friend for the flight along with their tickets. Airlines viewed their hostesses as ambassadors, ensuring that customers had the best experience possible, despite the conditions of early commercial airline travel. The flight attendant represented friendly and personalized service, as she would gladly help airsick passengers and soothe the nerves of first time flyers.<sup>36</sup> Flight attendants in the early days of flight also loaded and unloaded baggage, served beverages to passengers, provided medical care if needed, and even helped service the plane during flights that required multiple stops.<sup>37</sup> Their use of emotional labor kept passengers in line, whether keeping them calm or preventing them from throwing trash out the window of the plane. Flight attendants used the knowledge of their nursing skillset to care for those around them, as well as control the situation at large. While not yet widely used in the commercial airline industry, emotional labor would become a skill heavily relied upon as the industry grew in

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<sup>35</sup>Arlie Russel Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2012. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Hochschild, 93.

size and popularity. By managing their own feelings to influence those around them, flight attendants created an atmosphere that eased the minds of passengers and made flying feel safe.<sup>38</sup>

The role of women in the commercial airline industry underwent a drastic change from the 1910s-1930s. In the beginning, companies hired women to market the safety of the aircraft by taking part in the barnstorming phenomenon. While not always accepted on an equal plane as men in the world of aviation, women helped prove to the public that airplanes could be used by anyone. Female pilots of the early era of aviation assumed other roles in setting records and teaching others to fly. When flight became a more commonly accepted phenomenon, women found themselves pushed out of an industry role that had brought a great amount of freedom to their otherwise restricted social roles. However, women found a new niche in aviation through that of the flight attendant. The commercial airline industry used feminine gender roles to soothe passenger's worries about air travel. By hiring those with training in nursing, companies could assure passengers that they would be properly cared for medically in the event of airsickness. Flight attendants could harness the same strategies used to calm patients to soothe the nerves of passengers, creating a skill that would be taught to every flight attendant who would follow in their footsteps. While the airplane offered women the opportunity for freedom from the social spheres they had otherwise been confined within, the popularity of flight attendants would soon create the illusion of upholding gender roles while offering women the opportunity of a lifetime. As commercial aviation stepped into the popular spotlight, flight attendants would find themselves facing a glamorous makeover.

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<sup>37</sup> "High Flying, But Not Flighty: Original Stewardesses" *Senior Scholastic*, May 12, 1967, Vol. 90, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Hochschild, 21.

### **A Friend for the Flight**

On a Sunday afternoon in the later years of the 1930s, Rita Gloyd's love for flying was born when, as a teenager, she went flying in her boyfriend's plane for the very first time. As they pulled into the small airport, a plane flew over the Ford convertible in which Gloyd had been seated. While full of fear and anxiety at the thought of flying, she put on a brave face to impress her man. She somehow managed to force herself into the small plane, despite her fears, and before she knew it the plane was racing across the meadow and into the air. Suddenly, all of Gloyd's fears melted away as she and her boyfriend soared over family homes and familiar places. Despite one small moment of fear when she realized that sticking her arm out of one of the open sides of the cockpit was not the best idea, as her arm was quickly blown backward, Gloyd's undying love for flight was born.<sup>39</sup>

Commercial flight and the passenger airplane of the 1940s and 1950s offered young women the opportunity to travel the country. Unlike the women in the era of the Ninety-Nines, women like Rita Gloyd found their freedom not within the airplane itself, but through the experiences and opportunities it offered. Women hoped to attain the glamorous image that would emerge in the early postwar era, as the flight attendant became popular in the job market and in the media. To many, the position took them away from the monotonous small town life. While flight attendants of this era played up the ideal housewife image, it was a position open to women outside of the realm of prescribed "woman's work." While Pan Am still used male stewards on their flights, most airlines by the 1940s hired exclusively female hostesses. Flight

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<sup>39</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection. This is one of the short autobiographical pieces that was included alongside her tests and various forms from flight attendant school. Other short autobiographical pieces found in the collection are called "Clearing Manhattan" and "The Germans are Coming."

attendants played gendered roles like their predecessors, but in doing so they obtained new amounts of freedom outside of their prescribed place in society.

Before continuing onward, it is important that Rita Gloyd and her collection be introduced. Rita Gloyd was a woman from Gaithersburg, Maryland, who donated her materials from the American Airlines flight attendant school to the Archives of the National Air and Space Museum. Her records include everything from written tests, tickets, and passenger manifests. Her collection was absolutely essential to constructing this chapter, as it provided extremely useful primary source materials. Included are even memoirs that chronicled her life and some of her more exciting experiences as a flight attendant. She flew for American Airlines from 1940 until her father's death in 1942. Her memoirs and the materials that she provided from her time in flight attendant school have proven to be key in understanding the flight attendant and her experiences in the 1940s.

Like many flight attendants, Gloyd began her career in nursing. Before joining the ranks of flight attendants at American Airlines, Gloyd attended nursing school at Georgetown University for three years, and in 1939 was among the first nursing class to graduate alongside the men on campus. After graduation she worked for a well-loved obstetrician in Washington D.C. until she heard from a roommate about the opportunity to work on airplanes.<sup>40</sup> Gloyd's nursing background made her an asset to the commercial airline industry in the late 1930s to early 1940s, when all flight attendants were required to have a degree in nursing.<sup>41</sup> The application process Gloyd and her friend and fellow nurse, Carol, went through was no easy task. Before they were hired, they had to navigate their way through a series of interviews. If a woman

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<sup>40</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>41</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 23.

made it past the first interview, she would be given a free trip to the second and final round of interviews that were going to be held in New York.<sup>42</sup>

Gloyd quickly learned that the second round of interviews were much more daunting than the initial round. She faced a more intimidating interviewer, who judged her on her cosmetic appearance. It is here that she remarks that her interviewer, the Supervisor of Passenger Service brought in the Supervisor of Stewardesses and gestured to Rita's upper lip, which apparently had noticeable hair, and asked "What can you do with that?" to which The Supervisor of Stewardesses simply replied, "That can be fixed." Gloyd had to turn around several times for her interviewer, along with having her measurements taken, she was told that even though she was very near-sighted she would not be allowed to wear glasses if she managed to get the job. While she was able to pass the eye test by squinting, she also had to face the scrutiny of the Supervisor of Passenger Service as well as the Supervisor of Stewardesses, where it was agreed that certain "unsightly" and rather minor facial details could be easily altered.<sup>43</sup> In addition to physical tests and the interview, Gloyd was tested on current events and general intelligence. While Gloyd would ultimately pass the test, Carol had been told that she was too tall to work in the DC-3 cabins. So in 1940, Gloyd packed her bags and set off to flight attendant training school at the American Airlines Headquarters in La Guardia Airport.<sup>44</sup>

Flight attendant school was so much more than learning how to wear one's hair and what shades of nail polish were permitted. It was an immersive environment that demanded only the best from its students. Schools created by airlines and commercial businesses alike put those women who passed the series of interviews through rigorous training in a multitude of subjects.

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<sup>42</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>43</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>44</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

While these schools became well known for churning out beautiful, doll-like, young women, fashion and beauty tips were only one small facet of knowledge that flight attendants in training had to memorize. These young women became well versed in the technical side of flying. This included lessons on meteorology and how different meteorological events could affect a flight. Flight attendants in training memorized these events to help plan for different emergencies. This basic knowledge could be used to inform curious or nervous passengers. In addition to meteorology, flight attendants in training had to memorize the routes the airline used, and the order of stops along each route. Technical knowledge in plane care appeared on tests as well, with examiners quizzing trainees on substances that could be used on a plane propeller to keep the part from freezing in cold temperatures. Flight attendants learned the inner workings the cockpit and each individual part of the planes that they worked on so that they could perform basic maintenance on the aircraft in needed.<sup>45</sup>

Women in flight attendant school also went through regular hands-on testing with other flight attendants in simulated flights, with their fellow trainees posing as passengers. In these simulations trainees went through proper passenger care in different scenarios, from normal flights to emergencies. At the same time, trainees who served as passengers worked on how to properly fill out appropriate forms and process tickets provided by their classmates.<sup>46</sup> These simulated flights helped the trainees practice the intricate dance that provided top-notch care to passengers, from pre-flight checks to helping passengers disembark after they landed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> “Tests from Flight Attendant School,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>46</sup> Gloyd has several different passenger manifest forms, most of which are filled out with female names, indicating that these could be some of the forms used in practice. Some even contained notes in the indicated areas for flight attendants to make notes about passengers and supplies.

<sup>47</sup> “Gloyd’s Notecards,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

Jane Forbes, another flight attendant in training in 1949 recalled her experience in United's flight attendant school in Cheyenne, Wyoming.<sup>48</sup> Like Gloyd, she too recalled, "the training consisted of meteorology, communications, principles of aeronautics, infant care, graceful walking, flight connections, and general geography."<sup>49</sup> Forbes also underwent training on a full-scale model of a DC-6 aircraft as well as simulators that were used to practice emergency procedures.<sup>50</sup> These exercises taught flight attendants in training how to properly respond to various airline emergencies as well as how to properly administer first aid for a multitude of scenarios.<sup>51</sup> This comparison of Forbes's and Gloyd's experiences in rival flight schools shows that even in the early era of the flight attendant position, airlines were careful to standardize their training, so their flight attendants could function efficiently at their jobs while maintaining proficient knowledge of the aircraft they worked within.

An important lesson to take away from the collection that Gloyd compiled while in school is that early flight attendants did a tremendous amount of work both on and off the plane that often went unnoticed or unrecognized by consumers. Gloyd's extensive knowledge of safety regulations and routes could be used to help answer the questions of any nervous passengers. However, only her supervisors could appreciate Gloyd's knowledge of how to properly add butter chips to flight meal trays.<sup>52</sup> Flight attendants were also provided with extensive checklists for both pre and post flight. Flight attendants had to be aware of the exact inventories of all

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<sup>48</sup>Michael Kassel. "The United Airlines Stewardess School in Cheyenne, Wyoming." *Annals of Wyoming: The Wyoming History Journal* Autumn 2003 (2003): 15.

<sup>49</sup> Kassel, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Kassel, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Kassel, 16.

<sup>52</sup> "Stainless Steel Butter Chips Memo." March 17, 1941, Rita Gloyd Collection.

passenger meals and amenities onboard the plane.<sup>53</sup> Passenger lists included information on each passenger with notes for special occurrences, such as allergies and reasons behind their trip, and it was the flight attendant's job to memorize and create personalized service for each of her passengers.<sup>54</sup>

The outbreak of World War II brought a shift in attitude for all on the home front, creating an important turning point for the flight attendant profession. Up until the outbreak of war, it was known that one of the absolute requirements to become a flight attendant was an education in nursing.<sup>55</sup> The requirement was done away with in 1942 to ensure that all women that had undergone training in nursing could instead be used to tend to the injured on the front lines.<sup>56</sup> However, not all flight attendants who held proficient knowledge in nursing rushed off to war. Some like Gloyd continued to work for the airlines, and used the skills that she honed both in nursing school as well as her flight attendant training to comfort passengers in times of crisis. In one account given by Gloyd, during a flight from New York to Boston she was summoned to the cockpit and told that the captain had been given orders to land immediately due to a radio report that Germans had been spotted off the Atlantic Coast. As she individually informed each passenger as calmly as possible, the plane landed in Providence, Rhode Island in a small air terminal. Gloyd was able to safely collect her twenty- one passengers to a corner of the airport with their bags, and tended to those who were the most nervous.<sup>57</sup> While the planes were being hidden for safe keeping, Gloyd worked to keep the spirits of her passengers light, and enlisted the help of several salesmen on board to calm the other passengers with stories of their own

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<sup>53</sup> "Cabin Equipment and Cleaner's Check Sheet," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>54</sup> "Passenger Manifest," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>55</sup> Barry, *Friend for the Flight*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Kassel, 15.

<sup>57</sup> "Clearing Manhattan," Rita Gloyd Collection.



travels, as well as one liquor salesman who gave out whiskey samples to the other passengers to keep them calm. Hours later the terminal received the announcement from the head of the Civil Air Patrol that the entire event had been a test to demonstrate the readiness of airlines in case of a German attack. Gloyd took great measures to ensure that everyone stayed calm, and when the ordeal ended she helped provide alternate means of transportation for passengers to reach their destination.<sup>58</sup>

Gloyd's readiness and nurturing reactions demonstrated what was expected of flight attendants during the time of war. During the emergency landing Gloyd calmly repeated the message multiple times to each passenger on the flight, a display of the intense emotional labor flight attendants had to perform. While she could have loudly announced the message to all passengers, much like the overhead speakers in modern planes, Gloyd made sure to calmly talk to each passenger. The dedication to their passengers in times of emergency displayed how flight attendants managed to reflect the war effort that occurred on the rest of the home front. Some flight attendants left their jobs to become nurses in the war, or even pilots.<sup>59</sup> During this time Pan Am had been one of the last airlines using exclusively male flight attendants. With many men shipping off to war, Pan Am started hiring females to the position in an effort to keep up service.<sup>60</sup> In some ways female flight attendants reflected their nursing counterparts who were active out in the warfront. Their uniforms of muted, dark colors and rather starched and militaristic appearance gave off the same sort of secure vibe that a man in uniform would project. When flight attendants appeared in advertisements throughout the 1940s, their nurturing smiles

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<sup>58</sup> "Clearing Manhattan," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>59</sup> Victoria Vantoch, *The Jet Set: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 26.

<sup>60</sup> Vantoch, 26.

and promise of efficient service was most often accompanied with a patriotic message.<sup>61</sup> Other advertisements portrayed flight attendants in their pristine uniforms and pillbox hats serving military members returning home safe with top-notch service and comfort.<sup>62</sup> In 1940 Trans World Airlines even commissioned an advertisement using a pin-up girl in their hostess uniform to show support for the troops.<sup>63</sup> However this was an exception for this time period, as airlines tried to keep their flight attendants' appearance as professional and nurturing in appearance as possible.

The end of the war brought about a change in the portrayal of commercial flight by the airlines from being how tired businessmen traveled to an image that focused on glamour and style. This was in part thanks to a regulatory act that was put in place even before World War II officially began. In 1938 Congress signed the Civil Aeronautics Act into place.<sup>64</sup> The act created The Civil Aeronautics Board, or CAB, which placed regulations on which routes each carrier was allowed to provide service, and what price the airlines could charge customers.<sup>65</sup> With these new regulations in place, airlines had to find new ways to attract customers to their flights. However, airlines turned away from reinventing passenger service and instead focused on how they could assist in the war effort with the outbreak of World War II.<sup>66</sup> The end of the war meant that airlines once again had to research what would bring consumers to commercial flight now that they could no longer tempt customers via price or route incentives. They found the answer through the marketing of glamour and luxury.

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<sup>61</sup> "Courtesy Is Not Unpatriotic" *Fortune*, 1944, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T1754/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T1754/)

<sup>62</sup> "Tomorrow, Joe, we'll have this speed and cushions too!" *Saturday Evening Post*, 1945, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T1871/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T1871/)

<sup>63</sup> TWA's Pin-up stewardess, 1940. Blue Lantern Studios/CORBIS.

<sup>64</sup> Civil Aeronautics Board, *Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938*, 75<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 1938.

<sup>65</sup> Civil Aeronautics Board, *Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938*, 75<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 1938.

<sup>66</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 40.

Advertisements in the early postwar era marketed airlines as posh, glamorous, flying lounges with top-notch service for passengers to enjoy. Airlines such as American Airlines ran advertisements with rich illustrations of passengers dressed to the nines and enjoying themselves in what looks more like a restaurant or lounge than an interior of an airplane.<sup>67</sup> A few passengers in this advertisement, both male and female, can be seen enjoying a cigarette or a drink that is being provided to them by a stylishly dressed flight attendant.<sup>68</sup> Similarly Northwest ran advertisements proclaiming that their aircraft were in fact the equivalent of castles in the air. The airplane was portrayed as a comfortable, yet stylish lounge, that also provided spacious, comfortable looking personal beds for overnight flights.<sup>69</sup>

Flight attendants became the center of airline advertising for the first time with the airlines' postwar switch to marketing a glamorous image. They began to grace advertisements as trendy, yet nurturing young women eager to serve customers on their flights. Flight attendants traded in their military style uniforms in exchange for stylish and elegant pantsuits, gloves, and hats, all often of designer origin.<sup>70</sup> This shift in uniform accompanied the change in marketing persona that flight attendants faced now that they had become the stars of advertising for the commercial airline industry. Airlines portrayed the flight attendant as the "girl next door", a loving and nurturing figure who would be both friendly and extremely efficient on flights.<sup>71</sup> Airline advertisements that did not show scenes of grandeur had full-page artwork of friendly looking flight attendants playing their roles as nurturing and friendly women. Capital Airlines in

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<sup>67</sup> John Falter, "America's Finest Coast-to-Coast Transportation" *New Yorker*, 1950. via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T0363/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T0363/).

<sup>68</sup> John Falter, "America's Finest Coast-to-Coast Transportation" *New Yorker*, 1950. via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T0363/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T0363/).

<sup>69</sup> "Castle in the Air" *Saturday Evening Post*, 1950, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T2283/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T2283/).

<sup>70</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> Vantoch, 27.

one 1950 advertisement shows artwork of a stylish, and smiling flight attendant who is depicted by the advertisement's title to be young and popular due to her working for the airline.<sup>72</sup> It is only when the consumer looks closely at the advertisement they will notice that the proclamation of "23 years old...and such popularity!" is not describing the artwork of the flight attendant but rather the age and supposed popularity of the airline itself.<sup>73</sup> Other airlines, such as American Airlines, played up the nurturing description used for flight attendants to appeal to customers. In a 1950 advertisement a young, attractive flight attendant is shown holding an excited young girl in her arms, accompanied by the quote "We deliver more children than the stork!"<sup>74</sup> By playing up the youth and energy of these young flight attendants and implicating elements of the traditional roles of women, airlines used their flight attendants to lure in consumers and ensure their safety.

Due to the wary attitude many consumers held towards commercial flight in the early postwar era, airlines still felt it was necessary to focus on the safety of air travel. Many still associated the airplane with the barnstormers of decades past, as well as the violent imagery that accompanied planes during the war; therefore, a majority of the general public remained wary about setting foot on an airplane for recreational travel. Up until the postwar era many still held an understandable fear of flying, and for some flying remained out of their reach in terms of affordability.<sup>75</sup> However, the 1940s brought the introduction of newer planes that could hold up to fifty or sixty passengers, with new pressurized cabins, a luxury that had not been available to

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<sup>72</sup> "23 Years Old...and what popularity!" *Time*, 1950, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T1078/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T1078/).

<sup>73</sup> "23 Years Old...and what popularity!" *Time*, 1950, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T1078/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T1078/).

<sup>74</sup> Miller, "We Deliver More Children Than The Stork!" *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1950, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T1792/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T1792/).

<sup>75</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 41.

early passenger service.<sup>76</sup> Due to the ongoing fear of flight that accompanied many potential consumers, the flight attendant played a crucial role in luring in customers. To play up the safety of planes to consumers, airlines placed women to work on the flights. By showing that these women could easily fly without any sort of panic lured in consumers through assurance blatantly based on the stereotypes of the time. This strategy directly paralleled female pilots of the past who had implied the safety of early airplanes. If a woman could work and fly within in a plane with no trouble, then what was stopping men?

This type of consumer assurance was accompanied by the emotional labor provided by the flight attendants throughout the flight. This can be seen in the records of Gloyd's training, where the individual who handled flight reservations provided flight attendants with forms listing the traits of her passengers in advance. Within Gloyd's notecards it can be seen where emotional labor is put into play throughout the flight in terms of when it should be stressed to provide the best service.<sup>77</sup> Flight attendants at Delta had been instructed to treat their passengers not as passengers on a plane, but as guests coming to visit in the flight attendant's home.<sup>78</sup> This plays at the stereotypes of the time by asking flight attendants to refer to the behavior of a housewife. If emotional labor worked properly then she kept all passengers placated and happy. Even when passengers got rowdy or irritable, flight attendants invoked emotional labor by treating them like "a child in need of nurturing and empathy."<sup>79</sup> By using the practice of emotional labor, flight attendants were able to navigate flights while spending the appropriate amount of time with each

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<sup>76</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 41.

<sup>77</sup> "Gloyd's Notecards," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>78</sup> Drew Whitelegg, "From Smiles to Miles: Delta Air Lines Flight Attendants and Southern Hospitality," *Southern Culture* 11, no 4, Winter 2005,13.

<sup>79</sup> Whitelegg, 14.

passenger, therefore crushing any fears or nerves that the consumer may have held prior to the flight.

Emotional labor also helped flight attendants keep passengers calm in emergencies. In her memoir, Gloyd recounts a challenging flight from La Guardia to Washington D.C. The captain summoned her to the cockpit as they flew over Manhattan. Upon talking to the captain, she learned that she had to individually deliver the message to each of her passengers that their left engine had gone out and that they had to turn around. After being placed into a different plane, once again setting out from La Guardia, the captain summoned Gloyd to the cockpit again. This time they had to return because their right engine had gone out. However, due to Gloyd instilling confidence into each of her passengers, she recalls that even after switching planes for the second time, that her passengers remained smiling and upbeat. Many even joked about the incident as they switched into their third and final plane.

Joan Waltermire also shows emotional labor at work. That typical day was the subject of an April 28, 1941 article In *Life*. For example, the author, Joseph Kastner, described how Waltermire effectively handled a difficult passenger when he refused to fasten his seatbelt.<sup>80</sup> However, most of the emotional labor that Waltermire exhibits heart warming, in which she handles passengers who are in high spirits and soothes the nerves of an elderly woman on the flight. Before the flight the passenger agent gives her confidential information on each passenger to help get to know the individuals flying on her plane so she can plan out how to make each passenger's trip pleasant no matter how many times he or she may have flown or where he or she resides on the scale of social status.<sup>81</sup> Tasks such as providing a cigar to a passenger before he

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<sup>80</sup> Kastner, 102.

<sup>81</sup> Kastner, 106.

can even ask for one make all the difference.<sup>82</sup> This also makes it easier for Waltermire to relate when she spends individual time with each passenger on her flight, ensuring their happiness and taking the time to talk to them as well as listen to their stories.<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that this article about Waltermire was printed in 1941, meaning that while she was providing individualized service, Waltermire was working with a smaller crowd than postwar flight attendants. With larger flights, the burden of emotional labor became stronger. In the flight described, Waltermire was only responsible for sixteen passengers. Most flight attendants of the postwar era, had to care for upwards of sixty passengers on a flight with the same amount of individual care. Flight attendants of the postwar era had their hands full in properly distributing the proper amount of emotional labor.

In the process of being the perfect flight attendant through the application of emotional labor, women projected the so-called “girl next door” image that the airlines wished, and practiced skills associated with the postwar suburban housewife. The suburban housewife had become the expected gender role for women at this time, and was a stereotype widely accepted by society. The use of this stereotype in advertising was no doubt part of the airline’s strategy to make consumers feel safe and secure on their aircraft. However, it also helps demonstrate a larger parallel. Both housewives and flight attendants were expected to play a certain role that demonstrated ownership and responsibility of their domain, without holding any actual ownership over their so-called domain. The housewife meticulously cleaned, cooked and cared for others within the household even though she often held no actual ownership of the house itself. The same goes for the flight attendant. The use of traditional gender roles by airlines made it easier for flight attendants to treat the aircraft as their home and their passengers were their

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<sup>82</sup> Kastner, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Kastner, 106.

guests within the household. However the use of traditionally female gender roles ensured that flight attendants also remained in a low position in the airline industry's hierarchy. While neither held any actual claim to this domain, a housewife was expected to take good care of "her home" and flight attendants "her plane".

The idea that becoming a flight attendant was a good way to find a husband was sold to women through film and fictional stories found in magazines. Due to their similarly constructed roles, flight attendants were often perceived as housewives of the air. Flight attendants had been advertised as perfect wife material. They were attractive as well as capable of performing tasks skillfully and efficiently. Movies used the glamour and adventure that the job could hold to make a profit of their own, while still maintaining gender roles. The 1951 MGM movie *Three Guys Named Mike* tells the tale of an airline stewardess named Marcy who meets three male passengers: a pilot, an advertising executive, and a college professor, all named Mike. Each takes her on adventures in route to three different destinations, all trying to gain her affection. While Marcy loves her adventurous, fast-paced lifestyle, ultimately she gladly gives it up so she can trade her glamour for the settled world of domesticity with Mike the college professor.<sup>84</sup> The message of the movie demonstrates that even these highly adventurous cosmopolitan women of the sky could still hold the postwar ideas of femininity and cherish the domestic lifestyle of tending for a home and raising children above all else.

This transformation from cosmopolitan woman to postwar housewife can also be seen in Robert Dexter Neff's story "The Pilot Hated Stewardesses" that appeared in the May 1954 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. This tale follows a stubborn pilot named Theron who thinks of

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<sup>84</sup>*Three Guys Named Mike*, directed by Charles Walters film (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952), via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U--wNMMGyuE>.



flight attendants as vapid husband hunters until Lari, a flight attendant in training, tricks him into giving her a ride home when she did not need one.<sup>85</sup> After running into her several times while on the job, Theron realizes that he has become infatuated with Lari and is overcome with jealousy once he hears rumors that she is dating a pilot friend who is notorious for dating flight attendants.<sup>86</sup> Theron confronts his friend in a dance hall, thinking Lari is with him on a date, but ultimately finds her back at the hotel. Theron proclaims his love to Lari, who reveals that she became a flight attendant just to find him and marry him.<sup>87</sup> She and her grandmother had been passengers on one of his flights. It had been her grandmother's first time in the air, and her eightieth birthday. Theron had made time to come and talk to Lari's grandmother, and Lari had known from that moment that she wanted to marry him. The story perpetuates the stereotype that flight attendants make good wives and expected social behavior between gender roles. Theron is extremely possessive of Lari; however, Lari holds her own, showing her cunning intellect in her interactions with Theron and other men as she managed to snag him as her husband.

While the image of the flight attendant to the adult general public focused on the "girl next door" or "perfect future wife" stereotype, fiction written for young women focused on the adventure that came with the opportunity to travel. The most famous serial involving flight attendants was the Viki Barr Flight Stewardess series written by Helen Wells and Julie Campbell Tatham between 1947 and 1964.<sup>88</sup> This series emerged as a competitor to the popular Nancy Drew books, which launched a decade earlier. Viki, the star of the series, achieves her dream of

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<sup>85</sup> Robert Dexter Neff, "The Pilot Hated Stewardesses." *Saturday Evening Post*, Vol. 226, Issue 46 (May 15, 1954), 97.

<sup>86</sup> Neff, 98.

<sup>87</sup> Neff, 103.

<sup>88</sup> Helen Wells, *Silver Wings for Vicki*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1947).

becoming a flight attendant despite not fitting all of the initial requirements.<sup>89</sup> While on the job she solves mysteries with the help of her fellow stewardess friends. Viki is brought to each new adventure through interacting with passengers or the airline reassigning her to different routes.<sup>90</sup> The mysteries Vicki solved usually included elements of danger, though fairly mild. While providing excitement to the reader it also demonstrates the evolution of the flight attendants role from the early era. While flight attendants of the era represented safety, Vicki's adventures offered an element of danger and excitement. Viki's adventures play up the glamour and adventure that the media often connected to becoming a flight attendant, keeping younger generations interested by promoting this exciting and active life that was available to young women.

This taste for adventure even surpassed children's fiction to reach Henry LaCossitt's nonfiction article "Adventures of the Air-Line Stewardess" in a 1954 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. This series of true stories provides more emphasis on the peril that flight attendants could face while on the job. The article is full of examples of flight attendants delivering babies mid flight or discovering passengers who passed on in their sleep.<sup>91</sup> In one story, a TWA flight attendant named Jeri Starr aided the FBI in capturing a felon when she realized he was one of her passengers on the flight, disguised by an alias.<sup>92</sup> Some stories tell of flight attendants' dedication to keeping their passengers happy even in a gloomy atmosphere, as

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<sup>89</sup> Wells, 22.

<sup>90</sup> Helen Wells, *Hidden Valley Mystery: The Vicki Barr Flight Stewardess Series*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1948).

<sup>91</sup> Henry LaCossitt, "Adventures of the Air-Line Stewardesses," *Saturday Evening Post* 226, June 26, 1954, Issue 52, 25.

<sup>92</sup> LaCosset, 95.

demonstrated by the story of a flight attendant who made her Christmas eve flight into a memorable experience by decorating the plane and leading the passengers in caroling.<sup>93</sup> While most of the stories described within this article are all very extreme cases, especially in the case of there being real emergencies on board, these are the sorts of adventurous stories that drew women to the profession.

In some cases, this image of glamour and adventure did prevail in the reality of some flight attendants, who used the perks of their job to seize opportunities that would have otherwise remained unavailable to them. In her memoir, Gloyd lists a number of famous individuals she met during her time flying DC-3s. This list of individuals includes high ranking political figures from Rose Kennedy and her sons, Jack and Robert, who frequently flew, to Mayor La Guardia, who always needed extra seating for his entourage and even, on one special occasion Eleanor Roosevelt. Gloyd also had the chance to fly with several well-known celebrities, such as singers, actors, and athletes. While in training and on the job Gloyd was also sent to major events such as the dedication and reception for the National Airport in Washington D.C. She represented civilian airlines by “setting the watch” in a ceremony to mark the transfer of the New York airport at Floyd Bennett Field to the Navy, a lavish and fancy event.<sup>94</sup>

Flight attendants of the time often appeared in advertisements for airlines and other popular products. Gloyd was chosen to advertise the DC-3 flights to Niagara Falls. Photographs of her holding a model of a DC-3 appeared in several travel agencies.<sup>95</sup> Flight attendants also appeared in advertisements outside of commercial aviation to promote popular products. Two identical twins who were flight attendants for United Airlines can be seen in an

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<sup>93</sup>LaCosset, 92.

<sup>94</sup> “My Story,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>95</sup> “My Story,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

advertisement for Pepsodent Tooth Powder.<sup>96</sup> While the main goal of the advertisement was to sell the powder, which one twin claims gives her a brighter smile, the two women are depicted in the advertisement in uniform and on the job, giving the illusion that only the most glamorous of women are wise enough to use this product.<sup>97</sup> This is evidence that the glamorous image of flight attendants was so widely recognized that advertisers deployed it to sell their own products. The flight attendant in the postwar era became a position of status to women, one that promised glamour and opportunity that was not held by many postwar era jobs that were available to women. Even newspaper advertisements aimed at recruiting flight attendants showed pictures of attractive women and flaunted the opportunities for women to “visit romantic cities and famous vacationlands” as well as the allure of meeting new and interesting people.<sup>98</sup> However, upon joining, many of these women found that the glamour and adventure they had been promised came with limits.

Films and books did not portray the hectic lifestyle, long hours, and sexist limitations enforced by the airlines. Many of these limitations kept women from making a lengthy career out of being a flight attendant. Many airlines in the 1950s began to include and enforce a maximum age limit of thirty-two for their flight attendants.<sup>99</sup> Once they reached this age, women were forced into retirement. However, many flight attendants found themselves forced out long before they ever reached the age of thirty- two. Airlines did not allow married women to serve as flight

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<sup>96</sup> “Can twins be divorced?” *Life*, 1942, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_BH2218/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH2218/).

<sup>97</sup> “Can twins be divorced?” *Life*, 1942, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_BH2218/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH2218/).

<sup>98</sup> “Apply Now for a Career in the Sky as a United Air Lines Stewardess!” *Chicago Tribune*, 1951, via [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T2211/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T2211/).

<sup>99</sup> Vantoch, 197.

attendants. If a flight attendant got married, she was forced out of her position.<sup>100</sup> Policies like these kept the turnover rate for flight attendants extremely high, perpetuating the stereotype that flight attendants joined the position to find a husband.<sup>101</sup>

The living of flight attendants could rarely be described as “spacious”. Many sources describe a similar situation: a small apartment in a big city shared by a handful flight attendants. Gloyd, for example, lived with four other flight attendants in a small apartment during her time working for American Airlines.<sup>102</sup> Due to each flight attendant working a different flight schedule, not all the women occupied the apartment at once. However, in the off chance that they all did wind up at home at the same time, apartment living became extremely cramped.<sup>103</sup> Waltermire, like Gloyd, also had flight attendant roommates, though she shared her New York apartment with only two other women.<sup>104</sup> Flight attendants did not get a break from cramped living spaces when dealing with layovers on the job. While male staff received their own hotel rooms on layovers, airlines often paired up flight attendants to share rooms. This provided little privacy and depending on whom one was paired with, little opportunity for rest.<sup>105</sup>

While death did not often occur, the flight attendant job could be fatal. After 1938, when the Civil Aeronautics Board started recording statistics, some sixty-four flight attendants died in plane crashes, not including nonscheduled lines.<sup>106</sup> Some flight attendants received honors for their service and their heroics. In 1951 National Airlines flight attendant Mary Frances Housely

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<sup>100</sup> Vantoch, 197.

<sup>101</sup> “High Flying, But Not Flighty: Original Stewardesses,” 5.

<sup>102</sup> “My Story,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>103</sup> “My Story,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>104</sup> Kastner, 103.

<sup>105</sup> Georgia Panter Nielsen, *From Sky Girl To Flight Attendant: Women and the Making of a Union* (Ithaca, Cornell University, 1982), 117.

<sup>106</sup> LaCossitt, 96.

ran in and out of a burning plane after it crash landed at a Philadelphia airport. She managed to save all but four passengers, giving her life in the process of trying to rescue the four passengers who had not escaped.<sup>107</sup> One of Gloyd's roommates, Mary Blackley, was killed while working on a flight to Chicago when the plane crashed.<sup>108</sup> Gloyd and her remaining three roommates suffered shock and grief at the loss of one of their close friends. While coming to terms with their loss, they had to deal with reporters who swarmed their apartment asking for details on their departed friend.<sup>109</sup> Gloyd mentions the media's intrusion of her grief in passing, but this can be used to speculate the role of flight attendants as celebrity figures media figures. Gloyd and her roommates could have evoked emotional labor even in times of private grief. While airline accidents did not occur often, it seems the media looked to flight attendants as public figures that could provide answers or reactions. As celebrities it could have been their job to display a strong image to the general public when faced with public dialogues on the safety of air travel.

While tragic, the death of Gloyd's friend demonstrates the close network and bond that formed between flight attendants. Gloyd and her remaining friends felt a great amount of grief at the loss of their friend. They helped pack Blackley's belongings, and even tracked down her boyfriend in England to deliver the bad news.<sup>110</sup> Gloyd and her remaining roommates traveled to Blackley's funeral, where they shared their grief with Blackley's mother. Gloyd even recalls that the experience, while horrible, brought her and her roommates together. Gloyd and her four remaining roommates "became close friends and shared many happy times together."<sup>111</sup> Due to their cramped living styles and often working together as planes began to hold larger capacities,

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<sup>107</sup> LaCossitt, 96.

<sup>108</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>109</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>110</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>111</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

flight attendants held a tight, sister-like bond with many of their fellow flight attendant. Losing someone in a crash, like Mary, could be as painful to as losing a family member.

During the early postwar era, the airplane provided women freedom from gendered work that was gradually disappearing as the soldiers returned home from war. Even in the war's earliest stages, the nation called on women in ways that granted freedoms within the social sphere. For the first time factories hired women to positions previously reserved for men. To help with the production of war goods, factories paid these women on a more equal pay scale to the men that they now worked beside.<sup>112</sup> Fields outside of what was traditionally referred to as "woman's work" now brought in both single and married women. This changed what was considered "women work" and how it should be viewed within the social realm.<sup>113</sup> With the war ending and the soldiers returning, these women who had been highly valued in the wartime, found themselves suddenly pushed out of the spotlight. Rosie the Riveter disappeared and the 1950s housewife emerged to replace her. This woman married early, had children, and spent her time caring for them in a suburban neighborhood. Employers and the general public ostracized women who refused to leave their factory or non-traditional "woman's work." Companies actively placed limitations to prevent the advancement of women in the workplace, presuming that women had taken jobs that could have instead been given to veterans.<sup>114</sup>

The airplane offered an escape from the jobs normally permitted to women in the wartime and postwar era. While the position of flight attendant emerged from nursing, or traditional women's work, it offered an unprecedented opportunity for freedom through

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<sup>112</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York, Hill and Wang) 1992, 128-9.

<sup>113</sup> Rosenberg, 130-1.

<sup>114</sup> Deborah G. Douglas, *United States Women in Aviation: 1940-1985*, (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990) 58.

scheduling. While enforcing social standards of femininity and domesticity, flight attendants broke the conventional image of ideal womanhood. A flight attendant who worked for Delta explained that while they played the part of housewives, flight attendants received a great amount of freedom and independence with their schedules as a reward.<sup>115</sup> While the job held many regulations in terms of standards of beauty, some of the flight attendants genuinely enjoyed the sense of glamour and fashion that came with the role. In her memoir, Gloyd recalled that upon going through the required beauty training at flight attendant school, a major cosmetic company rewarded her with a set of high quality make-up as a gift. She recalls being excited over the cosmetics, but is most fond of the small watch she received as a gift from the Boliva Watch Company.<sup>116</sup>

The flight attendant job permitted women a great amount of independence in terms of scheduling as well as the ability to explore the world by air. Flying offered the opportunity for travel to many women from small towns, offering an escape from rural life.<sup>117</sup> In one of her interviews to become a flight attendant, Gloyd revealed that she had never had the chance to travel before, but would happily travel wherever the airline chose as her station.<sup>118</sup> Joan Waltermire revealed in her article that if she had not become a flight attendant she would have become a nurse or a housewife in her small hometown in Indiana.<sup>119</sup> Many women who became flight attendants for Delta echo Waltermire's story of growing up in a small rural area. They wished to escape small town living and see what the world had to offer through their new

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<sup>115</sup> Whitelegg, 17.

<sup>116</sup> Rita does not provide the name of the companies that provided her with the make-up.

<sup>117</sup> Whitelegg, 17.

<sup>118</sup> "My Story," Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>119</sup> Kastner, 103.



occupation.<sup>120</sup> To these women, becoming a flight attendant liberated them from some pre-determined life of monotony.

Being a flight attendant provided the chance to mix and socialize with all sorts of individuals. With the amount of emotional labor that went into each flight, flight attendants had the chance to form bonds with fellow flight attendants and passengers on each flight. From assuring an elderly passenger remained comfortable throughout the flight, to listening to an excited passenger describe wedding plans, Waltermire listened attentively to her passengers.<sup>121</sup> While flight attendants sometimes received advances from businessmen or other men who became dazzled by their presence, sexual behavior was taken in stride. While on flights, flight attendants like Waltermire learned how to handle any amorous passengers without being rude.<sup>122</sup> However, the use of emotional labor in flights allowed flight attendants to create friendships in an unlikely place. As a token of friendship, Waltermire often received gifts from passengers after flights that ranged from her favorite perfumes to books, clothes, jewelry and other trinkets.<sup>123</sup> From mixing with the everyday businessman to famous celebrities or well-known political figures, the job was the social opportunity of a lifetime.<sup>124</sup>

Even with the perks that came from being a flight attendant, many women simply loved the exhilaration that flying had to offer, and they remained willing to apply again and again if it meant finally having their place in the sky.<sup>125</sup> Waltermire told her interviewer that she had not lost her love of the sensation that comes with flying. The sight of the sun reflecting on the clouds

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<sup>120</sup> Whitelegg, 17

<sup>121</sup> Kastner, 106

<sup>122</sup> Kastner, 112.

<sup>123</sup> Kastner, 108.

<sup>124</sup> "What It's Like To Be An Airline Stewardess," *Changing Times*, February 1958, Vol. 12, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Vantoch, 19.

below them continued to take her breath away.<sup>126</sup> This lifelong love of flying, as well as the bonds created with fellow flight attendants would become helpful when their times as flight attendants ended. This longing for the sky created new outlets for women to gather and share their experiences.

Even when the journey ended, most former flight attendants held an extreme fondness towards their former occupation. While many had been forced out due to the no-marriage rule or the age restriction, their love flying refused to die.<sup>127</sup> Even after their retirement, these women kept their love of flying alive by keeping in contact with one and other by forming groups and newsletters. Connie Bosza, a former flight attendant to United Airlines, continued her connection with the aviation industry by becoming an editor for a newsletter for former flight attendants for United. She also wrote an unpublished memoir of her experiences.<sup>128</sup> She, like many other flight attendants who had been forced out due to marriage or age, missed the excitement and social opportunities that accompanied being a flight attendant, which contrasted with the isolation of being a homemaker. This feeling of isolation was what ultimately drove Connie to found the San Francisco Chapter of Clipped Wings in 1950, a community for former flight attendants of United Airlines.<sup>129</sup> Connie was not alone in her idea, for throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s clubs of flight attendants much like the Clipped Wings emerged in major cities. While these groups started as a way for former flight attendants to stay in touch with the community and the profession that they had loved so much, they were also a place where these women were also

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<sup>126</sup> Kastner, 112.

<sup>127</sup> Vantoch, 42.

<sup>128</sup> Vantoch, 194.

<sup>129</sup> Vantoch, 195.

free to express their opinions. Many of these women disliked that they had forced out before they had been ready to leave, and discussed other practices that they found unfair or demeaning.<sup>130</sup>

These ideas and grievances discussed within these groups would give life to the unions that would later become an influential part in the struggle for flight attendants' rights. Unions for flight attendants began forming as early as 1945, when a few hundred flight attendants joined together to form the Air Line Stewardess Association (ALSA). Within a year of its formation, the ALSA quickly went to work negotiating a pay raise for flight attendants.<sup>131</sup> This was quickly followed by the formation of the Air Line Steward and Stewardess Association (ALSSA) in 1946, a group that held a charter tying it to the Air Line Pilot Association, an influential pilots union who agreed to take on the small organization.<sup>132</sup> The smaller ALSA then merged with the ALSSA to strengthen its numbers and gain access to the benefits of being tied to an already strong organization.<sup>133</sup> The ALSSA held its first full convention in 1951. Members elected a president and set goals for the regulations and benefits they wanted the industry to create for flight attendants.<sup>134</sup> To ensure their longevity as a union they decided to maintain their conditional charter with the ALPA, as well as create ties with the associations that it was affiliated with as a form of self-preservation.<sup>135</sup> While the ALSSA decided to keep close ties with the ALPA in order to keep themselves afloat, this would make working to pass measures to improve their own standard more difficult. The ALPA would soon show how hard they would be willing to work to preserve the gender role hierarchy in the aviation industry.

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<sup>130</sup> Vantoch, 195.

<sup>131</sup> Vantoch, 196.

<sup>132</sup> "ALSSA Holds First Convention," *Aviation Week*, June 25, 1951, Vol. 54, 60.

<sup>133</sup> Vantoch, 197.

<sup>134</sup> "ALSSA Holds First Convention," 60.

<sup>135</sup> "ALSSA Holds First Convention," 60.

Unions like the ALSSA provided a voice for women of the industry. Most of the early efforts of unions went unfulfilled in ways flight attendants would have preferred, or ignored altogether. However, unions represented the voice of females in a male dominated workplace. These early efforts would help to prepare flight attendants for the union struggles that would begin to emerge in the late 1950s and carry well into the 1970s. While unions may have started as a place to share relatable experiences and grievances, they would soon be used to make sure that the female voice in the commercial airline industry was heard loud and clear.

The airplane held a world of opportunity and freedom that had previously been unavailable to women before the wartime era. Women had the chance to take advantage of their love of flying while staying within prescribed social norms. Even with perceived social structure created by society, flight attendants received a great amount of freedom compared to the limited number of positions a woman could take on outside the home. Flight attendants functioned as ambassadors of the airlines, friends to all passengers who could cater to their needs and carry out a friendly and reassuring conversation. While the job was not all glitz and glamour that stories and films portrayed, flight attendants loved what they did with a passion. So much so that even when they found themselves forced out due to unfair regulations, they continued to meet in groups to discuss their love of the job they had cherished. Just because these women had their wings clipped, did not mean that their love for flying had been extinguished.

Many years after she left American Airlines, Gloyd still cherished every second she had spent as a flight attendant. Even after her retirement in 1984 from her position as a social worker, she still reveled in opportunities to travel by air, though this time as a passenger.<sup>136</sup> In her memoir she considers herself “blessed to have the opportunity to travel new places and meet so

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<sup>136</sup> “My Story,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

many new people.”<sup>137</sup> She views her experience as a stepping-stone to help her realize the beauty and goodness that exists within the world. Becoming a flight attendant, while a short stepping stone in her journey through life, helped Gloyd rediscover the love she held for flying on that Sunday afternoon at Congressional Airport.

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<sup>137</sup> “My Story,” Rita Gloyd Collection.

## Jet-Age Feminism

The era of the 1960s and 1970s bore witness to the conflict between the stewardess and the flight attendant ideals. Each representation brought important connotations and contested meanings to light that had only been recognized in this era. The stewardess can be viewed as the airline's image of the women they hired, heavily promoted through advertising to the public. The flight attendant became the professional, progressive image that women in the industry fought to promote. This feat can be seen in the introduction of the term "flight attendant," a gender-neutral term used to include the men. Until Title VII, or specifically *Diaz vs. Pan American Airways* in 1972, men had remained a very small minority on a select number of airlines.<sup>138</sup> "Flight attendant" holds an air of professionalism that women now demanded in their field. While stewardesses had been advertised as professionals during the wartime era and throughout most of the 1950s, the 1960s-1970s stewardess wore provocative fashions and openly invited consumers to "fly her". Even the late 1960s American Airlines advertisement that asked consumers to "think of her as your mother" is accompanied by an image of a young woman in a short, white uniform with a sultry look that is anything but motherly.<sup>139</sup> The "stewardess" image that emerged from the airlines interpretation of the sexual liberation for their own marketing purposes is the same degrading image that could be found in male fantasies created by the interpretations of these advertisements by male consumers. "Stewardesses" could be found in the

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<sup>138</sup> *Diaz v. Pan American World Airways, Inc.*, 346 F. Supp. 1301 (1972), United States District Court, S.D. Florida, accessed via [http://www.leagle.com/decision/19721647346FSupp1301\\_11429.xml/DIAZ%20v.%20PAN%20AMERICAN%20WORLD%20AIRWAYS,%20INC](http://www.leagle.com/decision/19721647346FSupp1301_11429.xml/DIAZ%20v.%20PAN%20AMERICAN%20WORLD%20AIRWAYS,%20INC).

<sup>139</sup> "Think of Her as Your Mother" American Airlines Advertisement, *Journal of Transport History*, Jun 2009, Vol. 30 Issue 1, photograph, found on pg 15.

film and novel portrayal of these women, while “flight attendants” stood for the professionals consumers had to interact with in reality.

The airplane in the eyes of flight attendants was a tool that could be used to help gain the equality in the workplace that they deserved. It was a location in which women could no longer handle the day-to-day drudge of dealing with drunks and handsy businessmen. Tired of the image of the glorified waitress many believed they had become, the plane, especially these new jets, such as the Boeing 707, created the opportunity for change.<sup>140</sup> Through the utilization of the women’s liberation movements, union reform and Title VII, the airplane could make a difference for flight attendants. The plane and terminal gate was their “factory floor” where a large group of women could fight for their rights. Here women would use their new sexual image to battle restrictive guidelines put in place by airlines.

The last few years of the 1950s into the 1960s brought about the most important change in aviation history: the birth of the jet plane. The first successful commercial jet flight occurred in late 1958.<sup>141</sup> The jet opened up opportunities for faster travel and the opportunity for global travel. The jet, with its larger carrying capacity, made flying more affordable than ever before. Up until this point, and even in the early 1960s, businessmen made up the majority of the consumers who dominated the air travel market. Most Americans had never flown due to the cost or certain personal fears.<sup>142</sup> Airlines had long advertised flying as the way the highest class of people travel, with advertisements flaunting cosmopolitan atmosphere and posh lounges.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> “Boeing 707 Family” via <http://www.boeing.com/boeing/commercial/707family/index.page>

<sup>141</sup> Vantoch, 91.

<sup>142</sup> Vantoch, 96.

<sup>143</sup> 1952 Northwest airlines “Finest thing on wings!” advertisement, as seen on [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_T1545/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T1545/)

However, the jet-age brought the opportunity for those other than the cosmopolitan elites and businessmen to take advantage of commercial aviation.

For flight attendants, the jet brought a myriad of new and exhausting complications. Faster flights meant that flight attendants worked more hours and more flights without any sort of raise in pay. The shorter flight times had flight attendants working twice as many flights as usual, with twice as many passengers, due to the larger carrying capacity of the new planes.<sup>144</sup> Many complained of being overworked and of health problems that stemmed from spending so many hours on their feet with not much sleep.<sup>145</sup> The change in consumer base also brought new challenges, mainly in the form of the passengers themselves. As one veteran flight attendant described to the *Chicago Tribune* in 1978, “The cheap fares and the charter flights allow all kinds of people to fly who never used to fly before...The barroom brawlers, the drunks, the types to get violent, the kind with no class at all.”<sup>146</sup> While this could not be said for all new airline passengers, dealing with disgruntled or rowdy passengers became a more common experience.

Airlines introduced the effort to Taylorize jet service in order to run through necessary flight procedures for a larger crowd of passengers.<sup>147</sup> Flight attendants had to be efficient in their interactions with passengers in order to ensure that everyone got service and that the flight routine ran smoothly. Guidebooks for women who wished to become flight attendants dedicated entire chapters to flight service. A 1966 guidebook by Jodi Smith, a former flight attendant and

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<sup>144</sup> “Weary Stewardesses” *Newsweek*, October 26, 1959, Vol. 54, 84.

<sup>145</sup> “Weary Stewardesses,” 84.

<sup>146</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 107.

<sup>147</sup> Taylorism was a process that found its peak in the early 1900s, made popular by studies done by Frederick Taylor to create a more efficient workspace. The studies filmed different workers on the job in an effort to see what steps could be eliminated to make the work go faster. These studies would be integrated into American factories with the implementation of the assembly line and simplified work.



director of the Johni Smith Airline Stewardess School, described to aspiring women what had to be done from the second a flight attendant arrived at the airport to when they disembark the plane at the end of a flight.<sup>148</sup> The personalized service demonstrated by Rita Gloyd in the 1940s proved to be impossible on larger planes due to the sheer number of passengers a jet could carry.<sup>149</sup> Yet while flight attendants faced pressure to go through flight plans quickly and efficiently as possible, airlines still advertised the same individualized emotional labor that had been provided on smaller, propeller planes.<sup>150</sup> As one flight attendant from Pan Am described the clashing ideals, “The ads promise [passengers] that they’ll be coddled every minute of the flight. I just can’t coddle 130 people at once time. But they all expect it and they get downright rude when they don’t get it.”<sup>151</sup> Overworked and underpaid flight attendants turned to their unions at the beginning of the jet-age for some kind of relief.

The stress brought on by the jet resulted in the first large scale movements for better conditions for flight attendants. Tired of being overworked and ignored by their airline, flight attendants of TransWorld Airlines, or TWA, worked with the Air Line Stewards and Stewardess Association, or ALSSA, for a strike to take place starting on November 8, 1959.<sup>152</sup> The strikers demanded a seventy-hour monthly flight limitation and a raise in pay.<sup>153</sup> The airlines refused to work with the union on the basis that most of the complaints had been filed during a transitional period of the jet-age, making the complaints invalid.<sup>154</sup> The Federal Aviation Administration supported the airlines’ transitional period theory, leaving the flight attendants with no choice but

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<sup>148</sup> Johni Smith, *How to be a Flight Stewardess: A Handbook and Training Manual for Airline Hostesses* (North Hollywood, Pan American Navigation Service Inc., 1966) 276.

<sup>149</sup> Rita Gloyd Collection.

<sup>150</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 105.

<sup>151</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 106.

<sup>152</sup> “Hostess Union Sets TWA Strike Date” *Aviation Week*, October 19, 1959, 48.

<sup>153</sup> “Hostess Union Sets TWA Strike Date,” 48.

<sup>154</sup> “Hostess Union Sets TWA Strike Date” *Aviation Week*, October 19, 1959, 48.

to strike in an effort to have their issues properly addressed. The conflict between the flight attendants and the airline lasted eight months, with the air carrier rushing to bring in replacements for the women that took part in the walkout. The issue went to an arbitration board that tried to settle the matter by finding a pay raise percentage and workweek cap to which both parties could agree.

However, this first surge of protest holds much deeper significance to the transformation of the flight attendant position.<sup>155</sup> During the eight-month period, the rift between flight attendants and their union appears in some of the later articles that covered the walkout.<sup>156</sup> It would be several years before flight attendants made an effort to reform and reshape their unions. However, the discontent for how the union handled the walkout can clearly be seen in sources that catered to the aviation industry. The issues that women fought for would become the basis for the fight against gender discrimination in the airline industry. While the jet-age promised cosmopolitan glamour to the everyday consumer, flight attendants saw the jet as the basis for revolution.

The general public was introduced to some of the jet-age's complications in the 1962 play and 1965 film *Boeing-Boeing*. The slapstick comedy of an architect named Bernard juggling engagements to three different flight attendants highlights some of the biggest themes that can be found in this era.<sup>157</sup> The play capitalizes on the advancement of airline technology as the catalyst for all the mayhem that ensues within the play. At the beginning of the play, Bernard proclaims to his friend Robert that a small book of airline timetables made it possible for him to juggle

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<sup>155</sup> "TWA Speeds Substitute Training To Relieve Stewardess Walkout," *Aviation Week*, July 11, 1960, 47.

<sup>156</sup> "TWA Speeds Substitute Training To Relieve Stewardess Walkout," *Aviation Week*, July 11, 1960, 47.

<sup>157</sup> Marc Camoletti, *Boeing-Boeing*, 1960.

three different engagements to different flight attendants from three different international airlines.<sup>158</sup> With the introduction of the jet the old timetables become useless. Bernard and Robert must juggle all three women visiting at the same time, while keeping them all blissfully unaware. While the play hints at some of the problems flight attendants faced, such as working back-to-back flights, the three women in the play endure their schedules with smiles. The “ideal wife” stereotype that had been established in the early postwar era is openly mocked throughout the production, with Bernard claiming what makes them so ideal is that they are barely ever home. The play hints at the emergence of the promiscuous stewardess trope, particularly with the American flight attendant. She is dressed in the most provocative outfit, and she spends the play juggling several romances at once.<sup>159</sup> Bernard and Robert reference the airline’s marketing process in picking only the most attractive women by saying that women are “hand-picked” by the airlines. Bernard assures Robert that, if he decides to join in the multi-relationship game, then he is guaranteed to have his selection of beautiful women. This stereotype furthered the advertising strategy created by the airlines and shows the intended target audience that is most affected: young, white males traveling for business.<sup>160</sup>

One issue that must clearly be understood in order to maintain a firmer grasp upon the time period is the tension over the conflicting images of the appearance of the flight attendant and the expectations of the women’s liberation movement. Most of the major conflicts over the sexualization of female flight attendants through dress and advertising took place within the context of the sexual revolution. However, the marketing strategies put in place by airlines seem

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<sup>158</sup> Camoletti, 1960.

<sup>159</sup> Camoletti, 1960.

<sup>160</sup> Camoletti, 1960.

to only further oppress these women rather than join in the movement's goal to liberate disenfranchised women.

Airlines utilized the ideas of the sexual revolution to gain the attention of a new generation of male customers. This transition to new forms of advertising began in the 1960s through the introduction of new wardrobes. Braniff International Airways became the first to break away from the modest, militaristic uniform to attire that would be considered stylish by younger consumers. Braniff hired popular Italian designer Emilio Pucci to design colorful, modern uniforms for its flight attendants as part of the "End the Plain Plane" campaign.<sup>161</sup> The "Air Strip" advertisement that appeared on television and in magazines unveiled these new provocative outfits in 1965. The advertisements display the new outfit's transformation from a day look to a night look on longer flights. However, it is blatantly noticeable that as the young woman mimics a strip tease, each wardrobe change displays more and more skin to passengers.<sup>162</sup> The television advertisement even plays what is clearly music the consumer associates with a strip tease, complete with upbeat whistling, horns and cymbals. When consumers read the fine print on the advertisement, the airline assures consumers that "each change is made in a flash, which allows her to give you constant attention, from the time you take off to the time you land."<sup>163</sup> So while Braniff intentionally began to turn the market towards how the flight attendants looked, the main goal remained providing consumers as much personalized attention as possible.

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<sup>161</sup> Vantoch, 167-8.

<sup>162</sup> Braniff International Airways, "Air Strip," 1965, via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKiVCkE0dDw> and <http://cutcutpaste.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/braniff-airstrip.jpg>

<sup>163</sup> "Air Strip," 1965.

Braniff's move towards provocative dress for their flight attendants convinced larger airlines to shed their militaristic, drab uniforms, too. In a 1967 article from *Newsweek*, Mary Hoan Glynn, the woman who headed the advertising firm used by American Airlines, states that the airline's problem was that their "stewardess looks like World War II WAC corporals."<sup>164</sup> Her solution? American Airlines spent nearly \$2 million on new outfits and advertising to promote their new looks. This change to a glamorous and high fashion look, inspired by Braniff's new uniforms, met great reception by the airline's directors.

The general audience displayed different reactions to the airline's changes in wardrobe from the industry audience, with one focusing on fashion trends while the other looked at the wardrobe's repercussions. A November 1967 issue of *Seventeen* magazine ran an article titled "Fashion Flies Highest for the Stewardess Corps." The wardrobe change is portrayed to teenage girls as a sign of liberation, "recognizing that stewardesses are real live individuals and not just grooves in the galley."<sup>165</sup> The article celebrates American's new uniforms and describes details of each new design in comparison with those of other airlines like Trans World and Braniff.<sup>166</sup> The appearance of the flight attendants is the only part of the job discussed in this short article. This brought attention to the airlines themselves and kept the position of flight attendant interesting to the young, fashionable women who read these articles. By luring young women with a fashionable wardrobe and the promise of glamour, airlines could potentially tap into an endless fountain of youth in the form of young, impressionable women.

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<sup>164</sup> "Up from Betty Grable" *Newsweek*, September 4<sup>th</sup> 1967.

<sup>165</sup> "Teen Travel Talk: Fashion Flies Highest For The Stewardess Corps." *Seventeen*, November 1967, Vol 26, 74.

<sup>166</sup> "Teen Travel Talk: Fashion Flies Highest For The Stewardess Corps." 74.

Articles geared towards the industry held a more in depth look at how these uniforms affected the women who wore them. In the August 28, 1967 issue of *Aviation Week and Space Technology* the uniform change is viewed in a larger context. The uniforms began the shift from the airline's emphasis on glamour and women to a new focus on wages and working conditions of flight attendants.<sup>167</sup> In opposition to the short and lighthearted article found in *Seventeen* magazine, this article focused on pressures airlines faced from flight attendants due to their new wardrobes and existing union action. This included flight attendants' request for lower heels, or the request for stockings instead of fishnets.<sup>168</sup> While the article in *Seventeen* served as a light fluffy piece to attract girls, industry geared magazines concentrated on real issues that flight attendants had been facing. This included the main reasons why the job held such as low retention rate.<sup>169</sup> While the general public saw the glamorous side of the position, industry geared media brought attention to how the introduction of the newer and faster planes led to worsening work conditions and the demand for pay raises and union action.<sup>170</sup> Even though fashion magazines heralded these early uniform upgrades as liberating and as a glamorous and rather provocative draw for new consumers, it was in no way a reflection of the actual movement that would emerge within the late 1960s and reign through a majority of the 1970s.

The new wardrobe placed more pressure on flight attendants to watch their weight. While this focus on appearance was not new, the reason for the weight requirements had changed. In the early days of flight attendants, the weight requirement was necessary due to payload concerns. With the creation of better planes, the weight standard remained due to the airlines

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<sup>167</sup> "Stewardesses Seek Change in Airline Role," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, August 28, 1967, 34.

<sup>168</sup> "Stewardesses Seek Change in Airline Role," 35.

<sup>169</sup> "Stewardesses Seek Change in Airline Role," 35.

<sup>170</sup> "Stewardesses Seek Change in Airline Role," 35-36.

using flight attendants to market their brand.<sup>171</sup> One executive even bluntly told a reporter to the *New York Times*, “You run a \$1.5- billion business, and it boils down to whether some chicks look good in their uniform. If you have fat stewardesses, people aren’t going to want to fly with you.”<sup>172</sup>

Enforced as early as training school, this notion of strict weight control followed flight attendants after graduation. Surprise weighings could result in a flight attendant’s grounding until she lost the weight. Groundings meant loss of pay.<sup>173</sup> Flight attendants who made an effort to lose the weight but did not reach their target could be granted a time extension. However, if the flight attendant did not lose the required amount of weight in time, her size could result in her termination.<sup>174</sup> Company magazines such as *Delta Digest* showed women who were fiercely enthusiastic to lose the weight if it meant achieving their dream job. In an interview, Hildy Hoffman described that it took a total of six years for her to become a stewardess because of the weight she had to shed to reach the airline’s requirement.<sup>175</sup> Regardless if flight attendants did not mind these weight restrictions, the airlines believed the restrictions needed to stay in place to keep the company image strong.

Weight even affected those who entered the application process. In 1973 at the young age of 19, Carole Cambria decided to apply to become a flight attendant as a fun way to travel. Her father was a pilot for United, and from a young age she recalled how she thought the flight

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<sup>171</sup> Kathleen M. Barry, “Lifting The Weight: Flight Attendants’ Challenges to Enforced Thinness,” *Iris*, winter/spring 1999. 51.

<sup>172</sup> “Air Stewardess Flight Weight Rule” *New York Times*, March 4, 1972, 29, 54, via Barry, “Lifting The Weight,” 53.

<sup>173</sup> Barry, “Lifting The Weight,” 50.

<sup>174</sup> Barry, “Lifting The Weight,” 53.

<sup>175</sup> Barry, “Lifting The Weight,” 50.

attendants who worked with her dad had been “very pretty and doll-like.”<sup>176</sup> After deciding that becoming a flight attendant would be a fun way to travel and see the world, she decided to apply. She made it through to the third round of interviews, one that she attended even though she was sick with pneumonia. She recalled going through the physical that was a part of the interview process. At the time, Cambria remembers weighing between 130-135 pounds. “I remember they circled that in red on my application.”<sup>177</sup> However, she does not blame her weight for being the reason she did not get the job. “They asked me what hub I would want to be stationed at, my home base. I could have told them Los Angeles, or Chicago or Honolulu, but I told them Cleveland. The man and woman who interviewed me cracked up and then asked me why I chose Cleveland, and I told them that it was not that far from home. That might have been the nail in my coffin.”<sup>178</sup> Cambria also recalls not being too upset over getting rejected; the oil crisis happened only six months later, “So I probably would have been laid off anyway.”<sup>179</sup> Cambria said her father, Frank, later admitted to her that he had been quite relieved that she had not gotten the job, and that he had not even allowed his elder two daughters to apply for the position. He told her she was capable of accomplishing “much greater things in life.” He was alluding to what pilots, saw in the treatment of flight attendants by the rest of the industry, or maybe in other pilots’ treatment and opinion of flight attendants.<sup>180</sup>

Hollywood showed no hint of the problems flight attendants faced; rather, they stressed the glamour and romance that awaited young women who chose to enter this profession. Films such as *Come Fly With Me*, released in 1963, celebrated the glamour, adventure and romance

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<sup>176</sup> Carole Cambria Gertel Oral Interview

<sup>177</sup> Carole Cambria Gertel Oral Interview

<sup>178</sup> Carole Cambria Gertel Oral Interview

<sup>179</sup> Carole Cambria Gertel Oral Interview

<sup>180</sup> Carole Cambria Gertel Oral Interview. A cousin also recalls that Frank often referred to flight attendants as “air waitresses.”



that drew so many young women to the occupation.<sup>181</sup> This movie follows the main characters as they go on racy adventures with males that they met on flights.<sup>182</sup> This sexualized image directly contrasts with the “girl next door” image of the early postwar years. When comparing the protagonists of *Come Fly With Me* to Marcy of *Three Guys Named Mike*, which was released in 1951, the change in the flight attendant’s attitude is astounding.<sup>183</sup> In *Three Guys Named Mike* Macy has the power and freedom to choose amongst her suitors. This contrasts with *Come Fly With Me* and *Boeing-Boeing* where the men clearly manipulate the women. *Come Fly With Me* follows the storyline of three different stewardesses working for a fictional airline called Polar Atlantic Airways. The first stewardess, Donna Stuart, meets an impoverished Austrian baron who smuggling diamonds. The second stewardess, Carol Brewster, spends the movie dealing with her crush on the plane’s First Officer. This becomes problematic since the first officer is having an affair with a married woman. Finally the third stewardess, Hilda Bergstrom or “Bergie”, falls in love with a multi-millionaire.<sup>184</sup> The flight attendants of *Come Fly With Me* are much more sexually aggressive and promiscuous, and in some cases place themselves in much more dangerous situations than the level-headed protagonist of *Three Guys Named Mike*. However, this redesign of the “stewardess” image was only the beginning.

The emergence of this new sexually charged stewardess brought about new fictional portrayals of the women who made flying into an erotic experience. *Coffee, Tea or Me* (1967) by Donald Bain remains a popular example of this sexual depiction. In his 2002 memoir, Bain

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<sup>181</sup> *Come Fly with Me*, directed by Henry Levin (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952) via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROc9n-61-M8>.

<sup>182</sup> *Come Fly with Me*, directed by Henry Levin (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952) via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROc9n-61-M8>.

<sup>183</sup> *Three Guys Named Mike*, directed by Charles Walters film (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952), via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U--wNMMGyuE>.

<sup>184</sup> <sup>184</sup> *Come Fly with Me*, directed by Henry Levin (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952) via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROc9n-61-M8>.

reveals that he published the book while working in public relations for American Airlines and that most of the story he made up. However, the book was originally marketed as non-fiction, with Trudy Baker and Rachel Jones appearing as co-authors of a “memoir.”<sup>185</sup> This massive best seller “chronicles” the rather racy adventures of these two young women as they travel for Eastern Airlines.<sup>186</sup> It “reveals” racy intimate details to the reader, relationships they encounter, what stewardess school was like, and different passenger stereotypes that every “stew” encounters in her years of flying.<sup>187</sup> Racy cartoons accompanied each new chapter: big bosomed stewardesses being ogled by men, or a stewardess reaching for something in the overhead bin while a male passenger has his face pressed into her chest. The chapter that describes the women’s experience of sharing a penthouse is accompanied by a sketch of a topless woman holding a towel.<sup>188</sup> The book became so popular that it was followed by three sequels.<sup>189</sup> In 1973 a made for TV movie borrowed the name of the popular series; however, the movie contained a completely different story rather than bringing Trudy and Rachel’s stories to the screen.<sup>190</sup>

Due to the sexualization of flight attendants in airline advertising and popular media, the sexy “stewardess” began to emerge as a stock figure in areas of adult entertainment like

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<sup>185</sup> Donald Bain, *Every Midget Has an Uncle Sam Costume: Writing for a Living*, (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2002).

<sup>186</sup> Trudy Baker, Rachel Jones, and Donald Bain. *Coffee, Tea or Me? The Uninhibited Memoirs of Two Airlines Stewardesses*. (New York: Bartholomew House, 1967).

<sup>187</sup> Trudy Baker, Rachel Jones, and Donald Bain, 66.

<sup>188</sup> Trudy Baker, Rachel Jones, and Donald Bain, 67.

<sup>189</sup> The three sequels to *Coffee, Tea, or Me?* are as follows: *The Coffee Tea or Me Girls' Round-the-World Diary*: published in 1969, *The Coffee Tea or Me Girls Lay It on the Line*: published in 1972, and *The Coffee Tea or Me Girls Get Away from It All*: published in 1974.

<sup>190</sup> *Coffee, Tea, or Me?* directed by Norman Panama (Columbia Broadcasting System, 1973)

pornography. This pattern can be seen starting with advertisement campaigns by airlines in the late 1960s. For example, Trans World Airlines' 1968 "Foreign Accent" campaign showed off their newer, sexier stewardesses posed like a photo-shoot for a spread in *Playboy*, complete with provocative stares and alluring outfits.<sup>191</sup> This sexualized mentality was taken one step further with the release of *The Stewardesses*, a 1969 3D soft-core pornographic movie released to the general public.<sup>192</sup> The poster for the movie mimics airline advertisements at the time. Several other pornographic films centered on flight attendants emerged around the same time as *The Stewardesses*, creating a new niche in media where the stewardess fantasy could be accessed.<sup>193</sup> The "stewardess" stereotype became intertwined with that of the actual "flight attendant." However, most flight attendants were not loose women looking to have a good time with men both on and off the job. This sexualized image became intertwined with the popular men's magazine *Playboy*. In the 1960s *Playboy* featured women who aspired to become flight attendants or had at one point worked for one of the airlines.<sup>194</sup> Continental Airlines even tried to integrate *Playboy* into their own flights as an advertising strategy by using actual *Playboy* bunnies as stewardesses on their planes for a week.<sup>195</sup> As a result of this constant image association, many men projected these fantasies onto the flight attendants that they encountered on planes. This made the job of the flight attendant more difficult to carry out when they faced constant sexual harassment by male passengers.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> TWA, "Foreign Accent" ad, 1968, via Vantoch, 181.

<sup>192</sup> *The Stewardesses* directed by Al Silliman Jr. (Hollywood Films 1969) via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N25u6YZhHgE>

<sup>193</sup> Vantoch, 183-4.

<sup>194</sup> Vantoch, 184.

<sup>195</sup> Nielsen, 117.

<sup>196</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 174

Flight attendants utilized their new sexualized image in early protests against the sexist policies of the airlines. On April 17, 1963 a small group of women went to the press to bring national attention to the strict age limit that airlines enforced to maintain their new “sexually liberating” image.<sup>197</sup> These eight flight attendants, who ranged in age from twenty–three to thirty-six, dared the media that had gathered at a New York press conference to identify exactly what the public found unattractive about their appearance.<sup>198</sup> Most notably, Barbra “Dusty” Roads, a thirty-five- year-old union lobbyist for the ALSSA, addressed the unfair age limits enforced by airlines by asking the on looking media outright “Do I look like an old bag?”<sup>199</sup> This phrase became the war cry to those flight attendants who fought airlines before the ratification of Title VII. Calling attention to the discriminatory practices of airlines, protesting flight attendants purposely invited the public to objectify them to prove their point and draw in media attention.<sup>200</sup> Most focused their protests on the age limit and marriage rules enforced by airlines, relying on the media’s responses to help affirm that women could still look good when past their so-called “prime.” Flight attendants harnessed media attention to bring the topic of airline discrimination into the public spotlight, even if the attention brought no change in airline practices prior to the ratification of Title VII.

One opportunity for flight attendants to fight the age limit in the early days of protest came with a 1965 congressional hearing on the problems of aging workers.<sup>201</sup> Here, members of the Subcommittee of Labor looked over Colleen Boland, president of the ALSSA, and sixteen

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<sup>197</sup> “Labor: A Kiwi at 32,” *Time*, April 26, 1963, 84.

<sup>198</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 122.

<sup>199</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight* 122.

<sup>200</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 131.

<sup>201</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 132.

women who had been forced into an early retirement by airlines.<sup>202</sup> Boland, who was thirty-six, testified that in keeping this unfair age limit, the airlines had violated an executive order from 1946 banning age discrimination by federal contractors. She suggested that the term “age” be added to Title VII to protect workers from having age used against them in a discriminatory practice.<sup>203</sup> However, more focus was placed on the attractiveness of the women themselves in the proceedings, even as the Representatives agreed flight attendants worked tirelessly for their customers. Representative William D. Hathaway pointed out that the core problem was, “the notion that airlines are flying bunny clubs.”<sup>204</sup> It was agreed women much older than the airlines cutoff lines could do work done by flight attendants. While the banter from this hearing is what garnered most attention by the press, the issues that faced flight attendants became more widely publicized and even foreshadowed future battles that would be fought between the airlines and their flight attendants.

These early 1960s protests brought publicity to the extremely restrictive standards of beauty that the airlines enforced. While flight attendants publicly challenged the airlines using their own strategies of glamour against them, the airlines would prove to be a difficult enemy. Airlines remained ready to block cases and ignore union claims every step of the way, even after the ratification of Title VII.<sup>205</sup> In fact, one could argue that these standards had been kept in place by airlines to keep the unions weak. With such a high turnover rate, the age line, marriage restrictions and beauty rules kept many women from staying a part of a union for a long period of time.<sup>206</sup> These left groups like ALSSA weak and gave them no opportunity to grow or gain

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<sup>202</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 133.

<sup>203</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 133.

<sup>204</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 133.

<sup>205</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 126

<sup>206</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 126.

power, as women constantly cycled through and left no basis for seniority or any sense of organization.

The airlines effort to stamp out the voice of their workers is a pattern used by many industries that employed women. Parallels can be made here to the strategy the textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, enforced in the 1830s and 1840s in order to keep activism suppressed. Lowell Mills was a group of textile mills established in Lowell, Massachusetts that hired women. The idea of a non-permanent work force that many of the airlines tried to establish reflects the same idea that the women at the mill faced. Both groups served a minimum number of years before they reached marrying age. In suppressing efforts to unionize, airlines made it difficult for the women to meet and organize grievances. This parallels the elimination of dormitory life at Lowell Mills to keep the women separate and silent. While both suffering parties campaigned for workers rights, the protests of flight attendants in the 1960s show signs of influence from the protests arising from second wave feminism. The women of Lowell Mills would in turn inspire women's activists groups in the later 1800s.<sup>207</sup> The idea of a non-permanent workforce reflected poorly in the eyes of women in both eras. They strived to establish better working conditions for those who would follow them if they could not secure it for themselves. However, those at Lowell Mills only succeeded in certain, small victories. Flight attendants and their unions would soon band together and achieve great strides, with help from Title VII and second wave feminism.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> This new wave of feminism is often referred to as "second wave feminism" by historians, with "first wave feminism" occurring in the 1800s through the suffrage movement. Henceforth, the movement mentioned in this paper will also be referred to as second wave feminism.

<sup>208</sup> Emily Westkaemper, "Lecture, Feb. 12" Class Lecture, Women In United States History, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, February 12, 2014

The rise of second wave feminism beginning in the 1960s helped to further the cause of flight attendants in their struggle for a more equal and professional position. Betty Friedan became one of the first voices of this new movement with her book *The Feminine Mystique*. Within the pages of the book Friedan attempts to uncover what she calls the “the problem that has no name”.<sup>209</sup> This problem, she argues, is the depression and restlessness that women face in their new occupation of housewife resulting from the highly gendered society of the postwar era.<sup>210</sup> She shared the accounts of many young housewives who felt empty inside, despite having a husband, kids and home that many women spent their youths dreaming of attaining.<sup>211</sup> Friedan looks at the impact of women’s magazines. The messages within these magazines changed from the idea of the independent and strong woman, to that of the docile and obedient housewife.<sup>212</sup> Friedan herself became one of the first well-known spokeswomen of second wave feminism. Her book set the tone for the 1960s feminist movement, as women who had become sick of the daily discrimination that they faced rose up to claim their rights in the world outside their home.<sup>213</sup>

This is not to say that the women within second wave feminism supported flight attendants and their efforts. Flight attendants who turned to second wave feminism sometimes discovered the hostile and patronizing attitude of prominent feminists. This hostility emerged from the gender norms that flight attendants upheld, which some radical feminists considered degrading. Rather than help flight attendants fight the gender norms they were forced to uphold, radical feminists mocked flight attendants for not fitting the image of “true feminism”.<sup>214</sup> One of

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<sup>209</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, Dell Publishing, 1963), 15.

<sup>210</sup> Friedan, 32.

<sup>211</sup> Friedan, 21.

<sup>212</sup> Friedan, 38.

<sup>213</sup> Lois W. Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History: Second Edition* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1984), 253.

<sup>214</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 192-3.

the most potent examples of this degradation of women by feminists can be seen in the September 7, 1968 protest of the Miss America Pageant.<sup>215</sup> Protesters vehemently objected to the image that contestants upheld for the male population. As one pamphlet states, this group of women felt that the contest had been “enslaved by ludicrous ‘beauty’ standards we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously.” In the eyes of the protesters, the women in the contest were “degrading, mindless, Boobie-girl symbols.”<sup>216</sup> Throughout the day a group of women demonstrated through picketing, chanting and various public displays. This included throwing various “instruments of torture” into a container marked “Freedom Trash Can.”<sup>217</sup> Flight attendants used these same products to uphold the airline’s standards of beauty. Finally the protesters declared a dressed up sheep the winner of the pageant before being taken away by police.<sup>218</sup> While this protest was not geared towards flight attendants, some feminists used the ideas regarding beauty stereotypes against flight attendants in the same manner. Flight attendants continued to uphold these standards of beauty in order to retain their jobs. Even though they still fought for equal rights, the beauty standards flight attendants upheld pitted them against some who took part in second wave feminism.

Not all supporters of second wave feminism pitted themselves against flight attendants. Many reached out to help flight attendants to become a part of the movement by taking on the flight attendant cause, as well as inspiring them to start their own organizations. One of the women’s liberation organizations that came to the aid of flight attendants was the National Organization for Women or NOW. Betty Friedan and women with ties to unions and media

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<sup>215</sup> Rosenberg, 192.

<sup>216</sup> Rosenberg, 192-3.

<sup>217</sup> Rosenberg, 192.

<sup>218</sup> Rosenberg, 193.



formed this organization in late June 1966.<sup>219</sup> NOW sought to establish an organization that could bring attention to women's rights and push the government for legal or legislative action in an effective manner. One of the ways that this was accomplished was by putting direct pressure on the executive branch rather than targeting the legislative branch through lobbying.<sup>220</sup> Among the founding members of this flagship organization was ALSSA president Colleen Boland, who picked up the complaints of flight attendants and used the discrimination that they faced in the airline industry as one of the first causes taken on by NOW.<sup>221</sup> Many flight attendants joined the group, and the organization supported them when they legally challenged airlines for discriminatory issues using Title VII. Patricia Ireland, a flight attendant for Pan Am in 1968 would even go on to become NOW's president in 1991.<sup>222</sup> These actions gave hope to flight attendant activists and provided a foundation on which some would attempt to build their own organizations.

Stewardesses for Women's Rights, or SFWR, formed in 1972. Paula Kane had grown sick of what her job had become and set out to remodel the flight attendant image into one that women could be proud of: A safety professional rather than an over sexualized waitress.<sup>223</sup> SFWR worked to help spread the ideas and messages behind women's liberation in order to gain members and educate those previously uninterested in the movement.<sup>224</sup> This was done in order to mobilize those who worked for airlines in a way that unions had failed to accomplish. Unlike unions who fought for short-term industry related inequalities, the SWFR focused their efforts on the issue of gender and how it could be used to redefine the identity of their occupation. Starting

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<sup>219</sup> Rosenberg, 189.

<sup>220</sup> Rosenberg, 190.

<sup>221</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 188.

<sup>222</sup> Vantoch, 202.

<sup>223</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 189.

<sup>224</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 190.

small with a newsletter that was first distributed in 1973, the SFWR soon gained a large media following and funding from different foundations to further their cause.<sup>225</sup>

The SFWR focused on issues that furthered the safety of the women who worked within the airlines. This meant increasing the public's awareness of flight attendants as safety professionals, as well as increasing safety regulations for the women themselves. This included the complaints of excessive fatigue and health issues that flight attendants had been striking over since the beginning of the jet-age. Some issues had been discovered accidentally: in 1974 the extreme flammability of synthetic fabrics used to make the flight attendants' outfits was discovered at a protest where they burned uniforms they found degrading.<sup>226</sup>

Beyond safety and health issues, SFWR teamed up with organizations like NOW to help end the degrading image of flight attendants that the airlines used to promote their services. The two organizations brought to the public's attention how degrading the sexy "stewardess" portrayal was to women. The SFWR worked to prove that this sexual portrayal was downright dangerous to both the flight attendants and their passengers. Sexual advertisement campaigns made flight attendants targets for sexual harassment and assault, which kept them from properly fulfilling their jobs as safety professionals. Commercials created by the group explained the dangers of the sexual advertising campaigns of airlines that aired on several networks during news programs.<sup>227</sup> This drive for awareness and a safer, professional atmosphere benefitted flight attendants and inspired women in other careers. The awareness campaign is considered among the women who participated in SFWR as one of their most effective efforts in the fight for

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<sup>225</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 192-3.

<sup>226</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 193.

<sup>227</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 196.

equality among flight attendants. The campaign also served as a contribution to the broader women's liberation movement.

As the SFWR's campaign brought safety to the forefront of discussion, the general public became aware of the technical side of flight attendant school that had previously gone unnoticed. While flight attendant schools in the 1960s still taught beauty skills and regimens, they also provided women with a mass of technical knowledge. Flight attendants had been trained in meteorology, knowledge of air traffic control and countless safety drills.<sup>228</sup> Handbooks for jet age flight attendants discussed plane mechanics, including how a plane is flown and operated.<sup>229</sup>

In an article in a 1964 issue of *Esquire*, Richard Joseph received a glimpse of the training that the general public never before witnessed. He began discussing how flight attendants learned to walk, serve, and sit without revealing what was up their skirt. Then he described how United's flight attendants in training calmly navigated their way through a fully simulated plane crash in a mock up cabin.<sup>230</sup> This simulation managed to scare a Joseph senseless, even though he had been briefed on what was going to occur, yet the flight attendants in training remained calm and collected.<sup>231</sup> This side of the flight attendant is what SFWR sought to be properly recognized, not the sexualized stewardess in hot pants that wished for passengers to "Fly Her". While SFWR dispersed in 1975, the former members went on to work within unions. SFWR would be remembered for harnessing the media to spread the message that a flight attendant should be viewed as a highly trained safety professional, not a sexy waitress.

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<sup>228</sup> Smith, 65.

<sup>229</sup> Smith, 7-8.

<sup>230</sup> Richard Joseph, "Travel Notes," *Esquire*, August 1964, Vol. 62, 23-4.

<sup>231</sup> Joseph, 24.

The influence of second wave feminism caused flight attendants to look inward to their own unions in regards for how they could be improved. It was no secret that in the recent years, with the arrival of the jet-age, flight attendants had been growing frustrated with the unions that supposedly supported them. Frustration could be seen during the Trans World Airlines walkout, when the union chose to enter arbitration while many flight attendants had expressed wishes to hold out until the airline offered a better deal.<sup>232</sup> As early as 1960 flight attendants tried to take charge of their unions. The ALSSA broke ties their ties with the ALPA, with whom they had been considered a subsidiary of for years.<sup>233</sup> A small article that appeared in *Newsweek* on August 22, 1960 discussed the ALSSA's decision to find a separate headquarters in the early stages of their break with the ALPA.<sup>234</sup> The article discusses the issue with a rather blatant gender bias towards the ALPA. Pilots had been addressing the issue "in a logical male fashion" so the ALSSA may "founder on their classic, ladylike inability to make up their minds."<sup>235</sup>

Taking flight attendant unions back into the hands of women emerged during the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970s in response to the demand to restructure unions. The catalyst was Title VII cases that would emerge and dominate the minds of many airline officials. During this time many women, especially those who belonged within the Stewards and Stewardess Division of the ALPA, or S&S Division, had long grown tired of the constant uphill battle they had to fight against the pilots. After the separation of the ALSSA from the ALPA in early 1960, many pilots within the ALPA had become wary of the S&S Division, fearing their growing

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<sup>232</sup> "TWA Speeds Substitute Training To Relieve Stewardess Walkout" *Aviation Week*, July 11, 1960.

<sup>233</sup> "Girls Against the Boys" *Newsweek*, August 22, 1960, 73.

<sup>234</sup> "Girls Against the Boys," 73.

<sup>235</sup> "Girls Against the Boys," 73.

power in the public sphere.<sup>236</sup> The ALPA decided to show their dissatisfaction when the S&S Division became particularly close with Delfina Mott: a powerful political player and a woman who stood on relatively good terms within the ALPA. Higher-ranking members of the ALPA had Mott relocated from her office on the second floor to what was essentially a windowless closet on the seventh floor.<sup>237</sup> While Mott would fire back with several direct complaints, the message the ALPA sent to the members of the S&S Division was quite clear. Their growing power was a threat to the men of the association, who feared that they could soon be overcome by the flight attendants, and be forced to work with a female president elected by the S&S Division.

The ALSSA met similar resistance from its male members. They used their small numbers to form resistive groups within the union, as well as elect a male leader as president to the union in 1973. This broke a long chain of strong female leaders who had previously held this position.<sup>238</sup> In many cases, the resistance women faced in trying to gain equality unsettled many flight attendants within unions. They found dissatisfaction in the ways that the unions handled arbitration in both court cases and in settling grievances with the airlines. This issue was by no means a new one, and can be seen as far back as the early TWA strikes; however, the level of dissatisfaction now resided on a much larger scale.<sup>239</sup> Unsettled tension reverberated through almost every flight attendant union, both large and small, and resulted in a major shake up for the structure and number of flight attendant unions.

Most notably, this period of revolt by dissatisfied flight attendants within their unions resulted in a shake up of the unions themselves. Sick of dealing with the wary pilots of the

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<sup>236</sup> Nielsen, 106-7.

<sup>237</sup> Nielsen, 109.

<sup>238</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 199-200.

<sup>239</sup> "TWA Speeds Substitute Training To Relieve Stewardess Walkout" *Aviation Week*, July 11, 1960.

ALPA, the S&S Division broke away from the union to form the Association of Flight Attendants, or AFA, in the early 1970s.<sup>240</sup> The AFA's popularity soared upon the first few years of its formation. They used their numbers to help fight for the flight attendants both in court and in contractual agreements with airlines. Most notably, the AFA is responsible for the Green Book, or the contractual agreement that took place between the AFA and United Airlines between 1974-1977.<sup>241</sup> This landmark agreement raised the base pay for flight attendants, as well as the beginning salary that now came with a cap on how many hours a flight attendant could fly on a monthly basis.<sup>242</sup> The agreement also brought about the major change of allowing flight attendants single rooms for layovers, an issue that had been fought over for decades.<sup>243</sup> Previously flight attendants had to share rooms, with each getting their own bed, while all the stewards and male members of the flight crew had received their own rooms at layover points.<sup>244</sup> The Green Book was a victory for the AFA after years of difficult negotiations with United Airlines and served as a major breakthrough in the formation of contractual agreements between unions and airlines.

This period, especially the 1970s, led to the formation of four new and independent flight attendant unions. The dissatisfaction by flight attendants of existing unions such as the AFA, TWU or even associations like the teamsters, caused many air carriers to switch between different major unions, or form their own. The largest independent union was the Independent Union of Flight Attendants who looked after flight attendants from Pan American World Airways

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<sup>240</sup> Nielsen, 114-5.

<sup>241</sup> Nielsen, 124.

<sup>242</sup> Nielsen, 124.

<sup>243</sup> Nielsen, 124.

<sup>244</sup> Nielsen, 124.

and later National Airlines when the companies merged.<sup>245</sup> The INFU formed between 1976 and 1977 as the result of the Pan Am flight attendants becoming fed up with the TWU after they responded to an attempt to better the flight attendants' contract in a hostile manner.<sup>246</sup> After gaining bargaining rights in 1977 the INFU would go on to secure the flight attendants a new contract to replace the oppressive contract that the group had been stuck with for years.<sup>247</sup> The success that came to the INFU inspired the formation of other small, independent unions to represent flight attendants who worked for Trans World Airlines, American Airlines, and Continental Airlines.<sup>248</sup> While none of these small unions could compete against larger unions, these unions demonstrated the transformation that resulted from flight attendants taking action to gain the rights they believed they deserved.

Even though they underwent massive transformations and reorganizations, unions played a key part in the struggle for the recognition of the right of flight attendants. Unions would help to sponsor court cases both before and after the ratification of Title VII.<sup>249</sup> Some of these would go on to become landmark cases against some of the issues that stood in the way of equality for women within the industry. While unions like the ALSSA would not make it to the end of these cases, as it was dismantled in 1974, others emerged to support flight attendants in their place.<sup>250</sup> This shift in power within the structure of unions would prove to be vital for flight attendants deeply involved in second wave feminism. By refusing to be bossed around by the men that dominated union hierarchy, flight attendants placed themselves within a new position of power that would help them on their quest for equality within the workplace.

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<sup>245</sup> Nielsen, 132.

<sup>246</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 203.

<sup>247</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 203.

<sup>248</sup> Nielsen, 132-3.

<sup>249</sup> Nielsen, 81.

<sup>250</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 201.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 served as the strongest catalyst within the fight for equality. Signed into action in July 1965 this section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would be used to give flight attendants legal standing for their complaints in court. Specifically, Title VII “prohibited employers and unions from discriminating on the basis of sex, race, religion, or national origin.”<sup>251</sup> This was accompanied by the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, or EEOC, whose purpose was to investigate and ensure that there was compliance with these new antidiscrimination laws starting at the beginning of 1965.<sup>252</sup> However, the creation of both Title VII and the EEOC did not serve to be the instant cure all that flight attendants had hoped. In fact, for the first two years that the law went into effect, the EEOC failed to enforce Title VII regarding sex. Many believed that the law’s primary purpose was to be used for issues regarding race, and scoffed at the actual enforcement of discriminatory cases that claimed sex.<sup>253</sup> Instead of waiting around for the EEOC to change their rulings on what parts of Title VII the EEOC enforced, some like Betty Bateman took their case to court and used Title VII to help her sue Braniff in 1964.<sup>254</sup> Flight Attendants turned to the help of unions and second wave feminist organizations like NOW for support. Airlines fought back by setting up their case defending their marriage and age policies and their hiring policies for women.<sup>255</sup> However, airlines could not keep the act up forever. Several key lawsuits would help create history in defeating the airline industry’s sexist policies.

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<sup>251</sup> Kathleen Heenan, “Fighting the ‘Fly-Me’ Airlines,” *The Civil Liberties Review* (December 1976/January 1977):48-49.

<sup>252</sup> Vantoch, 201.

<sup>253</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 153.

<sup>254</sup> Vantoch, 201.

<sup>255</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 157.



While the airlines tried their hardest to keep their discriminatory policies in place, key lawsuits helped to deal blows to lessen if not end these policies. It took several cases for the EEOC to reach an agreement on how the committee viewed the policy and how it was defined and if said definition agreed with Title VII. In the matter of the marriage rules, cases such as *Colvin v. Piedmont Airlines* demonstrated that the marriage ban was enforced on only the female flight attendants and not the males. In *Neal v. American Airlines* the EEOC stated that there could still be gender discrimination practiced toward the flight attendants even though there had been no males within the position to which they could be directly compared.<sup>256</sup> In a third case, *Dodd v. American Airlines*, the EEOC came to the conclusion that there was no legal justification in not allowing flight attendants past the age of 32 fly on planes.<sup>257</sup> These initial lawsuits gave flight attendants legal justification to move forward with their own cases. However, just because the EEOC agreed that it was discrimination, flight attendants still had to fight the airlines for reinstatement or compensation that came with these decisions.<sup>258</sup> These three cases mark only the beginning of the legal onslaught flight attendants used against airlines in the courts in the 1960s and 1970s.

The no-marriage rule was dealt a major blow in *Sprogis v. United Airlines*, a case that emerged in 1966. Former United flight attendant Mary Burke Sprogis fought against United's no-marriage rule that forced out a majority of flight attendants. Until the case, it had been a practice that the unions had previously agreed to uphold.<sup>259</sup> The case was first filed with the EEOC, who agreed that United's practice was in violation of Title VII and illegal; however,

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<sup>256</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 161.

<sup>257</sup> Heenan, 49-50.

<sup>258</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 161.

<sup>259</sup> Heenan, 50.

United did nothing to change their no-marriage rule.<sup>260</sup> The case would go to court and was followed directly by an appeal from the airline, but in 1971 Sprogis emerged victorious with the Court of Appeals awarding her seniority as well as full back pay.<sup>261</sup> United revoked its no-marriage rule in 1968, with many other airlines quickly following suit.<sup>262</sup> This proved to be both a victory and another challenge to flight attendants. It began the new challenge for those who had been unfairly fired to obtain back pay or job reinstatement.<sup>263</sup> *Sprogis v. United Airlines* proved that the no-marriage and later the age limit rule could be successfully challenged in court. This inspired flight attendants to press on to further fight other discriminatory airline practices.<sup>264</sup>

While women took the spotlight on a majority of the Title VII cases in the commercial airline industry, 1972 brought about great strides for men in the flight attendant profession. While men had held a small presence as stewards and pursers within the airline industry, their number had shrunk to a handful with the coming of the jet-age. Due to the popularity of women as flight attendants, most airlines had stopped hiring men as stewards.<sup>265</sup> In 1967 Celio Diaz Jr. applied for the position of flight attendant for Pan American World Airways. His application had been rejected because Pan Am had applied a policy in 1965 to only hire females to their flight attendant position, therefore discriminating against Diaz due to his sex.<sup>266</sup> Diaz had not been the only male whose application for a flight attendant position Pan Am had denied, which made it an unlawful employment practice under Title VII. While the case went through a series of appeals,

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<sup>260</sup> Heenan, 50.

<sup>261</sup> Heenan, 50.

<sup>262</sup> Heenan, 50.

<sup>263</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 164.

<sup>264</sup> Heenan, 51.

<sup>265</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 53-57.

<sup>266</sup> *Diaz v. Pan American World Airways, Inc.*, 346 F. Supp 1301 (1972), United States District Court, S.D. Florida, August 10, 1972.

bringing the case up to the federal level, Diaz ultimately won the case. The court ruled that being a female did not qualify as a “bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary for the normal operation of that particular business.”<sup>267</sup> As a result, men won their way back into the service portion of the commercial airline industry. This forced airlines to choose the more gender-neutral title of “flight attendant” for the position.

Some practices used by airlines to discriminate against female flight attendants were harder to fight in court, even with the use of Title VII. These major barriers appeared in the form of the strict policies airlines held regarding the weight and appearance of their flight attendants. Despite minor success in the early 1970s, many courts held the belief that weight restrictions and their enforcement could not be considered discriminatory in nature, and therefore could not be claimed as discriminatory under Title VII. This is due to courts comparing the airlines’ weight restrictions with personal grooming standards. Because of this comparison with grooming standards, courts believed that it did not fit into the “immutable characteristics” or “fundamental rights” guaranteed by the Constitution: which were the basis on which employee policies could be built to distinguish between the sexes that Title VII was supposed to target.<sup>268</sup> This meant that weight restrictions could not be challenged successfully in court. Airlines could continue enforcing them, as long as they extended the policy to some of the male flight attendants.<sup>269</sup> Due to this decision, no major victory against weight restrictions until the 1980s, when flight attendants would eventually overturn the rules with the help of the court. During the women’s

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<sup>267</sup> U.S. Congress, *Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1964, via <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm>

<sup>268</sup> Barry, “Lifting The Weight,” 53.

<sup>269</sup> Barry, “Lifting The Weight,” 53.

liberation movement, the issue of weight restrictions was one of the few problems that flight attendants remained unable to affect with any sort of change.<sup>270</sup>

The 1960s through the 1970s was a tumultuous time for flight attendants. With the arrival of the jet-age in commercial aviation, flight attendants had to face a multitude of new challenges that arrived with the technology that the jet. The arrival of this new technology brought about a new marketing strategy. The flight attendant was transformed from a nurturing friend for the flight to an over sexualized media figure who was there to serve customers more than just drinks and meals. However, female flight attendants and their unions used this new sexualized image to fight sexist policies put in place by airlines. The second wave of feminism brought vigor to flight attendants, giving them further cause to fight for their rights to further their own rights. This process brought forth an unprecedented shake up within the unions for flight attendants. They shook off the chains caused by male-dominated leadership and embraced policies such as Title VII to fight for rights that they deserved in the workplace. Within this era, flight attendants demanded the attention of the commercial airline industry, and no longer allowed their voices to go unheard. The airplane became a tool in the fight for equality for the commercial airline industry, and a platform for women's rights in the professional world.

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<sup>270</sup> Barry, "Lifting The Weight," 53-4.

## Epilogue: Deregulation and the Present Day

The arrival of airline deregulation posed the biggest threat that flight attendants had yet to face. The Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 removed government control over the commercial airline industry, including control over airline fares, routes and companies access to the market.<sup>271</sup> The act served as the government's solution to handling the pressures the airline industry had been facing throughout the 1970s. Problems such as the oil crisis, which caused airline fares to skyrocket and fear of bankruptcy had sent the industry into turmoil.<sup>272</sup> The effects of the implementation of deregulation, however, would serve to completely change the position of flight attendant forever.

Without help from government subsidies, the commercial aviation industry underwent a massive upheaval. Some of the largest names in commercial aviation, such as Eastern, Pan American Airlines, and TWA collapsed under the weight of the financial burdens.<sup>273</sup> With the government no longer regulating who entered the industry, many new airlines appeared and disappeared trying to offer the cheapest airfare to consumers.<sup>274</sup> This would start the extremely competitive environment that makes up the airline industry in the present day. One that puts cheap fares and customer incentives over the glamour and glitz that once dominated the industry. This extremely volatile environment created worries over job security for flight attendants who faced layoffs or face steep pay cuts.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> U.S. Congress, *Public Law 95-504*, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, October 24, 1978 via <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-92/pdf/STATUTE-92-Pg1705.pdf>

<sup>272</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 212.

<sup>273</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 212.

<sup>274</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 213.

<sup>275</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 213.

This new environment created by deregulation starting in the mid 1970s and lasting into the 1980s became strongly anti-union. Flight attendants relied on unions for support in their fight for equality. In this new anti-union environment, flight attendants stood together to establish regulations and benefits for the flight attendants. While many of the previous barriers flight attendants faced had been broken thanks to union action and countless Title VII cases, deregulation and the anti-union environment brought new struggles. Part of these struggles emerged from new tougher working conditions and passenger frustrations.<sup>276</sup> With the frustrations caused by airlines, the term “air rage” was coined in the 1990s. The increased number of passenger attacks on flight attendants became a cause for alarm. Flight attendant unions demanded that air rage become an issue that the government address and put forth measures to prevent further attacks.<sup>277</sup>

Despite the anti-union environment caused by deregulation, flight attendant unions once again reshaped themselves to fight for issues that they demanded the airlines fix. In one instance The Association of Flight Attendants, of the AFL-CIO managed to almost shut down American Airlines with a major strike during the holiday season. Other unions developed new successful strike tactics that they hoped would bring work to a complete stop. This became a maneuver that threatened many airlines’ revenue in the new competitive environment. While strikes sometimes resulted in the loss of jobs to strike breakers, strikes like the American Airlines strike in the early 1990s proved that flight attendants still held a strong union voice within this new anti-union environment.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Vantoch, 213.

<sup>277</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 214.

<sup>278</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 215.

Airline deregulation allowed flight attendants to redefine their position on their terms, instead of the image that the airlines wished to use to sell seats on their planes. Flight attendants once again actively promoted their positions as safety professionals, well- trained for a multitude of emergencies to guarantee customer safety from general first flight jitters to a terrorist attack.<sup>279</sup> This redefinition allowed flight attendants through their unions to once again push for improved safety measures for themselves and their passengers. In 1990, flight attendant unions pushed for a federal ban of smoking on all domestic flights.<sup>280</sup> Flight attendants also used this redefinition of their position to fight for a bill that would require flight attendants to become licensed safety professionals, as they had tried decades before.<sup>281</sup>

Airline deregulation resulted in airlines moving their marketing away from their flight attendants and towards cheap fares and consumer incentives. This meant that flight attendants finally escaped the remaining barriers that stood in their way after the barrage of Title VII cases in the 1960s-1970s. The once overly sexualized attires that flight attendants wore in the 1960s and 1970s gave way to conservative and professional looking pantsuits in the 1980s.<sup>282</sup> These new uniforms only reinforced the new serious professionalism that flight attendants demanded to be recognized within their profession. Finally in the early 1990s flight attendants managed to break the last remaining barrier that remained from the glamorous days of yore: the harsh weight restrictions. After a series of lawsuits that resulted from flight attendants being fired for being

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<sup>279</sup> Deborah G. Douglas, *American Women And Flight Since 1940* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 223.

<sup>280</sup> Vantoch, 213.

<sup>281</sup> Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 214.

<sup>282</sup> 1980s United Airlines uniforms. *From the Association of Flight Attendants Collection; courtesy of American Airlines*, via Douglas, 224.

“overweight,” many major airlines managed to relax any remaining weight standards or completely eliminated the restrictions.<sup>283</sup>

It seems one of the biggest trade offs that flight attendants experienced was the total loss of glamour that coincided with the introduction of airline deregulation. As a child, Martin Gertel recalled that flying in an airplane had been a suit and tie event. When he and his family flew on vacation, he and the other passengers dressed in attire reserved for fancy dinner parties.<sup>284</sup> A photograph shows him and his family in suits and dresses in front of an airplane from a family vacation to Florida in the 1960s.<sup>285</sup> Today, the idea of dressing in a suit and tie on a plane seems laughable, unless one has to depart for a business meeting directly upon landing. This loss of glamour and glitz seems to be a repeated sentiment among some flight attendants. They had once been considered ambassadors of their airlines, and friends to the passengers they served. Now airline deregulation brought the total de-glamourizing of the flight attendant position in the world of the commercial airline industry. While flight attendants may have come a long way since the small group of nurses that flew for Boeing back in the 1930s, flight attendants go virtually unnoticed in present day air travel. To many in the present day, flight attendants are nothing but airborne waitresses, there to try and sell headphones and offer the world’s smallest snacks.

Even if the position has declined in status in the present day, it remains a highly sought after job. A recent article in *USA Today* describes how Southwest received more than 10,000 résumés for about 750 openings that they have for flight attendants.<sup>286</sup> American Airlines

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<sup>283</sup> Vantoch,213.

<sup>284</sup> Martin Gertel Oral Interview.

<sup>285</sup> Authors personal collection.

<sup>286</sup> “Thousands apply for flight attendant jobs at Southwest” *USA Today*, December 30, 2013 via <http://www.usatoday.com/story/todayinthesky/2013/12/30/flight-attendants-hiring-southwest/4248543/>



received a similar overflow of applications when they too put out the call for about 1,500 new flight attendants back in 2012.<sup>287</sup> While both articles openly acknowledge that the job is nowhere near the glamorous position that it was once considered to be, it has not stopped the overflow of applications every time an airline puts out a call.<sup>288</sup> The articles even harken back to the original ads that promised the opportunity for air travel to all who apply by talking about the opportunity for those who get the job are able to receive “flying benefits if there are open seats.”<sup>289</sup>

In many ways this flood of applications proves that while the job is no longer the glamorous position that it once was, that has not stopped people like Rita Gloyd who hold an untamable passion to fly. While in the present day flight attendants are no longer registered nurses, glamorous friends to accompany you on your flight, or even over-sexualized symbols of the changing times, flight attendants are still a crucial part of the commercial airline industry. Many of the women who served time as flight attendants look back at it as some of the best moments of their lives; saving different parts of this moment in time through pristine uniforms or corporate memos or stories of passengers.<sup>290</sup> The evolution of the flight attendant also reflects how the airplane stood as a different symbol for each generation. The airplane served to these women as a symbol of freedom, opportunity and equality, and flight attendants took advantages of the powers the position and the machine itself possessed to help further women as a whole in whatever way they could manage. While the modern day passenger may never take notice of the

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<sup>287</sup> “Thousands apply to become flight attendants for American” *USA Today*, November 16, 2012 via <http://www.usatoday.com/story/todayinthesky/2012/11/16/american-bankruptcy-flightattendants/1708653/>

<sup>288</sup> “Thousands apply for flight attendant jobs at Southwest” *USA Today*, December 30, 2013 via <http://www.usatoday.com/story/todayinthesky/2013/12/30/flight-attendants-hiring-southwest/4248543/>

<sup>289</sup> “Thousands apply for flight attendant jobs at Southwest” *USA Today*, December 30, 2013 via <http://www.usatoday.com/story/todayinthesky/2013/12/30/flight-attendants-hiring-southwest/4248543/>

<sup>290</sup> Vantoch, 214.

flight attendant giving the safety speech at the front of the plane before take off, flight attendants have done great things to help women in the commercial airline industry and give hope and provided dreams to many who want nothing more than to fly.

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