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Flying the Unfriendly Skies: How Flight Crew Members Perceived and Communicatively Constructed the Emotional Labor of their Positions throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic

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FLYING THE UNFRIENDLY SKIES: HOW FLIGHT CREW MEMBERS PERCEIVED AND COMMUNICATIVELY CONSTRUCTED THE EMOTIONAL LABOR OF THEIR POSITIONS THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented levels of volatility to all hospitality industries, including aviation. Such levels of volatility have highlighted a need to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on flight crew communication. This study explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on intra-flight crew communication and the emotional labor flight crew members experienced. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of facework, politeness theory, emotional labor, and emotional management, this study examined how participants communicated through the tumult of this time period. This study discovered heavy usage of surface acting and increased levels of emotional labor through 28 qualitative interviews with flight attendants, first officers, and captains, that flew during this time. Most significantly, flight attendants experienced the most emotional labor, but felt they could not share this burden with others on the flight crew.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2021 the ten biggest U.S. airlines safely carried 579.9 million domestic passengers and reported fulfilling over 13,028,643 flights (FAA, 2022). In addition to the number of passengers served, these same ten carriers generated revenue streams of $193.58 billion in 2021 (Statista, 2022). To keep these flights operating, the U.S. aviation industry employs a total number of 735,592 individuals as of January 2022 (Bureau of Transportation Services, n.d). As safety-minded organizations, air carriers operate to the highest standards available with almost zero room for error. Due to this safety culture, in seven of the past ten years, there have been zero fatal passenger accidents involving Part 121 air carriers (classification excluding private and charter carriers), equating to a fatal accident rate of 1.049 accidents per 100,000 flight hours (NTSB, 2020). To put this number in perspective, the National Safety Council concluded the odds of fatality in a motor vehicle accident to be 1 in 98 for a lifetime (Jenkins, 2017). In contrast, the odds for an air transport-related fatality is 1 in 7,178 for a lifetime (Jenkins, 2017). Such a low accident rate occurs at the intersection of high safety standards, stringent maintenance inspections, and highly trained professionals who call the sky their office.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world, specifically hospitality-centered industries, to a grinding halt. This caused not only a public health crisis but also unforeseen challenges for the aviation industry. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, airlines amended their flight schedules as late as six months before their actual departure date (Keys, 2021). This inflexibility was necessary to communicate and coordinate the many logistical elements before many passengers had even contemplated their booking date. However, due to the volatility caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, airlines had as little as two months to schedule flights and

plan for the ever-evolving nature of international travel restrictions (Keys, 2021). While the demand for cargo flight movement increased dramatically, passenger flights suffered significant cancellations. According to the International Civil Aviation Organization (the governing body for international air transportation), 3,336,145 total flights were completed in February 2020, followed by an almost 70% reduction to 1,134,269 total flights completed in May 2020. With such a dramatic decrease in flight schedules worldwide, an unprecedented era of instability befell the aviation industry for the first time since the first passenger flight on January 1, 1914. In response to this disruption, flight crews had to manage understanding of and adapt to new requirements of their roles. This thesis considers this research and seeks to revisit the theme of flight crew communication as applicable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The individuals employed within the aviation industry are at the forefront of this volatility. By June 2020, airlines furloughed, fired, or communicated short-term termination notifications to nearly 400,000 workers (Kelly, 2021). $15 billion in stimulus funding was allocated in June 2020 for airline payroll support, but airlines such as United utilized funds to support their labor force through Sept. 2020 before terminating an additional 14,000 employees (Kelly, 2021). American Airlines also cut or furloughed 17,500 union workers, including 1,600 pilots and 8,100 flight attendants (Rucinski, 2020). Such a vast amount of job insecurity amongst flight crew members far eclipsed that of the 2008 recession and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. For flight crew members, this spurred an identity crisis and further exacerbation of an already present crisis in the industry, a lack of future flight crew members.

Before understanding the current staffing, shortages and risks facing the industry, it is important to understand the origin of flight crew members. The history of flight attendants has been traced back to as early as the 1920s and originated as a male-only role. Following the great

depression of the 1930s, United Airlines became the first to hire women stewardesses who were also registered nurses (OSM, 2021). Following World War II, “air stewardesses” or “air hostesses” joined pilots as a group of elite professionals. On the other side of the flight deck door, pilots do not have as streamlined of a history. Instead, the first certified pilot can be traced back to 1911, when the term aviator was used to describe an individual who manipulates a flying craft through flight controls (Britannica, n.d.). Due to the amount of specialized training involved in certification on different aircraft types, pilot shortages have been a consistent issue facing the aviation industry. Historically, the first shortage was noted in 1929 as regulations and advancements in aircraft technology took shape (Hopkins, 2001). Flashing forward to 2019, Oliver Wyman’s poll of flight operation leaders found that 62% of respondents listed a pilot shortage as a critical risk to organizational growth (Murray & Green, 2019). Also noted in this study is a global gap shortage of 34,000 pilots, which travelers would start feeling by early 2023. A 2021 survey on aviation recruitment concluded that 38% of pilots are not flying despite large recruiting drives (Goose, 2021). This shortage was seen in the summer of 2022, as cancellation and delay rates soared due to overpromising flight schedules that did not have the staffing to match.

Exacerbating this shortage, an increase in passenger misbehavior has caused recruitment rates for flight crew members to drop even further. According to a 2022 FAA report, between January 1st and April 12, 2022, 1150 incidents of disruptive passengers were reported by flight crewmembers (Green, 2022). In January 2021, the FAA instituted a “zero-tolerance mask policy” that led to 7,200 unruly passenger reports in just one month (Green, 2022). Despite a threat of fines totaling up to $7 million for each offense, flight crew members are put in a unique

position to address unruly passengers. This offers one unique opportunity for research on the occupational identity of flight crew members.

The unique challenges facing the aviation industry come together to create a supply issue that cannot meet demand. When a challenge such as this supply and demand issue has arisen in the past, a contradiction between safe operational standards and meeting expectations has led to deadly consequences. Crew fatigue has been found to be a cause of 15-20% of airline accidents (BBC, 2012). One example occurred in 1999 on American Airlines Flight 1420 in Little Rock, AL. According to the accident report, the flight crew's failure to make an appropriate deviation had links to impaired performance resulting from fatigue and situational stress to land under suboptimal conditions (NTSB, 1999). This accident resulted in the fatalities of 11 passengers and crew members. This is just one of the many applicable contradictions between the need for safety and the need to meet consumer expectations. Noted as the face of the brand, flight attendants operate in a liminal space between safety and customer service. This liminal space can invoke a phenomenon of emotional labor in which feelings are managed and expressed based on the positional requirements of being a flight attendant (Hochschild, 1979). With the amount of passenger misbehavior and the increase in safety management that is required to discipline these events, this offers a unique opportunity for updated communication research on the emotional labor current flight crew members experience.

To explore these issues, this thesis utilized a qualitative approach and interviewed modern-day flight crew members currently employed by private and commercial carriers. This study consisted of 28 virtual semi-structured interviews with pilots and flight attendants. Interview questions focused on the emotional labor experienced in flight crew positions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This thesis sheds light on the complex emotions felt by

flight crews throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in an effort to understand and help provide knowledge on issues flight crew members face in the skies.

Preview of Chapters

The next chapter, Chapter Two, will review publications covering four topics: organizational communication studies, emotional labor and emotional management, facework & politeness, and organization studies of aviation. Chapter Three will cover the methods used in this study, including participants and recruitment, data collection, and analysis. Chapter Four discusses three themes and subthemes that emerged from the data: FA emotional labor as a two-fold experience, FOs and the metaphor of Chameleons, and occupational precarity. Chapter Five discusses the contributions of this study to the research areas of emotional labor, facework, and aviation studies. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the limitations, directions of future research, and a summative statement of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Organizational Communication Studies

This thesis is grounded in organizational communication research. Defining organizations and our relationships with them has become an increasingly complicated issue (Mumby & Kuhn, 2018). One such way that we can seek to define our organizational relationships is through the very basic act of communication. Accordingly, organizational communication scholars have not only sought to study the linear transmission of communication within organizations but also go as broad as to research the way that social interaction, discursive processes, and symbolic meanings constitute organizations (Putnam & Boys, 2006). Recognizing that this can have such broad implications, organizational communication scholars have developed their focus from theorizing narrow conduit models aimed solely at improving organizational efficiency to more diverse formulations that emphasize the importance of participation by multiple stakeholders in the development of public, private, and nonprofit institutions (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). To understand the development of this subfield, I will now discuss the shift in organizational communication research as defined by Mumby and Stohl (1996).

Organizational communication research emerges from a set of four central problematics that represent a significant focus on communication as a principal element in organizations (Mumby & Stohl, 1996). These four problematics emphasize a central set of tensions that all organizational communication scholars explicitly seek to address in their research. These problematics are voice, rationality, organization, and the organization-society relationship. The problematic of voice asks who can speak in organizations, rather than analyzing the voice of management team members alone. In this way organizational communication scholars work to understand the multiple voices that embody an organization. The second problematic of

rationality positions the tension between the managerial view of effectiveness and the communicatively constructed reality of employees as central in the research process. Moreover, this tension reflects the need to understand organizational life as more important than other standards of efficiency. The third problematic, problematic of organization, identifies that communication and construction of messaging is not only central to our understanding of organizations but is a defining characteristic in the action of organizing. Therefore, we can look at communication as an integral substance of organizations. Of the most importance to this thesis, the fourth problematic identified is the problematic of the organization-society relationship. This problematic identifies that scholars give specific attention to the ways society, culture, organizations, and communication are inextricably and reciprocally bound (Mumby & Stohl, 1996). Using this tension is essential to understand how organizations and the society surrounding them influence each other. The organization-society relationship is relevant to the study of flight crews because societal issues, like COVID-19 and associated safety procedures, impacted organizational procedures flight crews had to follow. Consistent throughout these problematics, scholars have recognized that both communication and organizations are ever-evolving. This perspective on organizations may allow us to shed light on how flight crews communicatively deal with organizational pressures created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The following sections will discuss pertinent research in the areas of emotional labor, emotional management, facework, politeness theory, and current aviation studies.

Emotional Labor & Emotional Management

Humans demonstrate thousands of emotions every day, and consequently, communication is a central actor in all emotional displays. Communication scholars have also recognized that culture and individual decisions always play a role in emotional expression

(Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Emotions are intrinsically linked to the way in which we organize and create organizational processes. Emotions can also be linked to job performances, for example, in the way we expect flight crews to be welcoming and accommodating.

The workplace is a rational environment where emotions are expected to be managed so as not to get in the way of sound judgment (Grandey, 2000). Emotions as a state of being are inherently communicatively constructed and grounded in interaction (Hochschild, 1979). Interaction in the instance of customer-facing professionals can take on the form of constructing meaning through emotional displays, such as smiling during a customer-facing interaction or providing empathetic messaging to a customer in visible distress. These emotional displays are grounded in the norms of the organization and match the emotional display required for the positional needs. Further, emotional displays can also be seen as compliance for various positions. Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) discussed these emotional displays and display rules in the role of wait staff. Workers complying with emotional displays such as facial expressions, posture, and tone, believed that they were successfully performing their roles. Emotional displays are only one example of emotional management in organizations. Terms such as "professionalism" and "professional etiquette" serve as communicative examples of an organization's attempts to create a rational workplace environment and assert the constriction of emotional displays. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) provided additional research on the term professionalism, as the term alone is inherently ambiguous for communication scholars. Relevant to this study, Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) found that "professionalism is used both to suppress individuals and groups (e.g., "you're not professional enough") and to elevate others ("we are now among the professionals in our field")" (p. 158). Building on these definitions of emotional management, I now move to further define emotional labor.

Hochschild (1983) defined the term emotional labor as the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display. She also offered a dramaturgical perspective of actors (employees) managing emotions in two ways: surface acting, where one regulates their emotional expression, and deep acting, where one consciously modifies feelings to express their desired emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild (1983) studied flight attendants (FAs) and concluded that their emotional labor is collective as FAs heavily rely on each other for emotional support and being able to check in with each other. Building on Hochschild's (1983) research, Ashforth and Humphry (1993) defined emotional labor as the act of displaying appropriate emotions with the goal of engaging in a form of impression management for the organization. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) were more focused on observable behaviors than emotional management. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) also concluded that emotional labor in service roles can become routine and not require conscious effort.

Building on both approaches, Morris and Feldman (1996) defined emotional labor as "the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal interactions" (p. 987). Morris and Feldman (1996) proposed that emotional labor consists of four dimensions: (a) frequency of interactions, (b) attentiveness (intensity of emotions during interactions), (c) variety of emotions required, and (d) emotional dissonance. Of the most important note here is the dimension of emotional dissonance. Connected to Hochschild's original theory, emotional dissonance connects to the action of both surface and deep acting. This dimension of emotional labor is activated when the emotional display required of specific role conflicts with the emotional state of the laborer. With the main characteristics and definitions of emotional labor discussed, I will now transition to discussing literature surrounding emotional management and its connection to emotional labor in service workers.

The line between emotional management and emotional labor is thin. This line becomes further muddled as organizations make ambiguous or contradictory demands of employees (Fraher & Gabriel, 2014; Alvesson, 2010). In a position like that of FA, this line between emotional management and emotional labor can become all the more muddled as airlines require contradictory demands for customer experience. For example, the mask mandate of the COVID-19 pandemic put further strain on the duties of flight attendants. Due to the controversy surrounding the mask mandate, a non-compliant passenger might utilize derogatory language toward an FA. This interaction invokes emotional labor on the FA as they are engaged in surface acting to prevent a possible safety incident. In this example, emotional labor as a public performance occurs through face-to-face and voice-to-voice contact (Steinberg & Figart, 1999). With the increase in travel demand, FAs are at the forefront of performing this emotional labor and, as service providers, encounter high levels of customer misbehavior leading to customer misbehavior being viewed as a regular duty expectation (Hsu & Liu, 2012). FAs are also not fully compensated for these interactions; as Kruml and Geddes (2000) concluded, emotional labor is not fully compensated or recognized for a vast majority of service-based positions.

FAs are not the only position that experiences emotional labor as a regular job expectation. Revisiting Hoschschild's (1983) work, debt collectors were also viewed as another position that relied on the usage of emotional labor to excel in their roles. Much like FAs Hoschschild (1983) concluded, debt collectors must also utilize voice-to-voice contact with the public, are also required to produce an emotional state in another person—such as gratitude or fear, and also have supervision that exercises a degree of control over their emotional activities. These three dimensions of emotional labor are also found in positions that are more ingrained in the corporate structure. This includes an unlikely suspect, secretaries, who perform emotional

labor as a positional requirement (Hoschschild, 1983). A third example of positions where emotional labor is performed daily is in the work of psychiatrists, social workers, and ministers. These positions require individuals to sustain feelings of concern and empathy that match the expressions of the individual they are accompanying (Hoschschild, 1983).

Emotional labor and emotional management primarily act as job duties for service-based workers such as FAs. Such theories and previous research serve as a strong baseline for analyzing flight crew perceptions in modern-day contexts. With emotional labor acting in the public-facing environment and the *face* being such a large part of emotional labor flight crew's experience, facework and politeness theory serve as further frameworks for analysis.

Facework & Politeness Theory

Operating at the crux of our social interactions, the face is one of the most dynamic tools in human communication. Erving Goffman developed face theory to define the metaphorical *face* as the communication of a desired social identity. Goffman (1967) proposed a set of cooperative principles whereby individuals acted out displays and agreed to support each other's face (Cupach & Metts, 1994). From these principles, the notion of a public face was used as the primary method of explaining many public interactions, including deference, demeanor, impression management, embarrassment, storytelling, and conversational patterns (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Goffman also found that when individual people communicate, they are emotionally invested in the preservation of their face and will exert effort to save the feelings of other people (Cupach & Metts, 1994). The second half of the term facework emanates from this interactional and communicative definition. As *face* communication varies based on cultural background, the term *work* can describe the actions taken to avoid or recover from a face threat.

Facework is an important concept to tie to emotional labor because emotional labor and management can be used to preserve the face of the self and others.

Face threats occur when a person's desired identity in a particular interaction is challenged (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Tracy (1990) found that on a broad level, any interaction can potentially lead to a face-threatening action. Based in large part on investigating these face-threatening behaviors, Brown and Levinson (1987) developed politeness theory. Politeness theory focuses on two universal face needs: positive face needs and negative face needs (Cupach & Metts, 1994). A positive face references the universal desire to be liked and respected by significant people in our lives (Cupach & Metts, 1994). The negative face references the universal want to be free from constraint and the ability to act freely. Brown and Levinson (1987) defined positive face threats as emanating from the devaluation of one's face. Tying into organizational dynamics, an example of a positive face threat can be a manager or leader questioning a team member's competency. Conversely, Brown and Levinson (1987) defined negative face threats as the infringement on one's desired actions or interference with one's autonomy. Using the same example of organizational dynamics, an example of a negative face threat can be a manager dismissing the ideas of a team member in a meeting. To address these face-threatening behaviors, politeness theory sought to define strategies that redirect away from face-threatening actions. Apologies are one example of a redress strategy following a face threat.

Face threats have been found to be one of the most significant relational conflicts individuals experience in organizational settings. Donohue & Druckman (2022) argued, "when face attacks are reciprocated, individuals become emotional and substantive goals become temporarily derailed during exchanges aimed at restoring face" (p. 409). Due to the large number of possible interactions revolving around criticism, and the possibility of defensiveness, power

distance between employees and leadership in an organization opens the door for further face threats. Power distance refers to the degree to which individuals, groups, and or societies accept inequalities as unavoidable, legitimate, or functional (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). In organizations, power distance can stem from the accepted hierarchy of positions. For example, in flight crews, the clear ranking between the pilot and the first officer can lead to power distance with the potential for face threat. With the positive and negative attributes of face-threatening actions now discussed, I will now transition to discussing power and the relationship to politeness in organizational environments.

The need to be polite to protect face is also tied to power within organizations. Morand (2003) concluded that formal authority plays a role in the selection of politeness strategies within organizations. Donohue and Druckman (2021) also argued that higher power individuals appear less concerned with if they are viewed as polite or respectful of others. Although politeness strategies can be used by leaders in organizations, more times than not, negative face-threatening actions are used by leaders in organizational settings (Donohue & Druckman, 2021). Moving past power dynamics and facework, interaction order is also important in organizational environments. Interaction order is defined as situations of social gathering and instances of prolonged face-to-face contact that have communicative rules or conventions of engagement (Morand, 2003). Morand (2003) concluded that interaction order is imperative to the success and avoidance of face-threatening acts in certain environments. Further, Monrad (2003) also noted that the ambiguity surrounding interactional support and politeness is directly related to understanding differences in how cultures perceive and understand power, face, and societal values.

This understanding of gender, cross-cultural interaction order, and politeness strategies have also been applied to the organizational setting of the flight deck in research on face-saving and mitigation. Linde (1988) described the usage of mitigation strategies in the real-world environment of the flight deck in emergency and accident situations. A mitigated statement is defined as an expression or statement that is given in an alternative form to avoid offense (Linde, 1988). This mitigated statement differs from an aggravated form in which a face-threatening action is more likely to occur (Linde, 1988). Based on these definitions, Linde (1988) found that certain types of mitigated speech in crew-recognized emergency situations failed based on the social rank and ranking of pilots on the flight deck. An example of a mitigated statement given by Linde (1988) occurs between the captain and first officer: "if I might make a suggestion-you should put you should put your coats on" demonstrates a statement that goes above and beyond to mitigate a face-threatening action and respect the addressee's autonomy. Given the nature of aviation as a high-reliability industry, it became all the more important to train crews on negotiating language during critical situations. One example of the solution is the safety voice. Safety voice is the act of speaking up about potential hazards (Noort et al., 2021). Facework and politeness theory provides a framework to examine further the implications of safety voice and other effective communication processes modern crew members utilize. This study can also provide context for understanding flight crew adaptation to COVID-19 through the lenses of politeness and facework. Further, the understanding of mediated communication amongst crew members also provides a framework for research in application to crew communication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organization Studies of Aviation

Given the growth of the aviation and aeronautical science fields over the 20th and 21st centuries, a great amount of research has been conducted into subject matters such as organization dynamics, the perceived identity of flight crew members, and the communication that takes place within these organizations. This section will cover the research that has been conducted by organizational scholars in relation to these themes.

It is important to note that despite being one flight crew from the perspective of the customer, two very different occupational identities exist between pilots and flight attendants. FAs take on a number of glamorous and often idealized positions in western popular culture. This identity was constructed by airlines as early as 1930 to help sell seats (Barry, 2006). Further, this unique occupational identity began in American popular culture through printed magazines that portrayed FAs as "glamor girls" or "sexy swingers" that are either recruited into the occupation or socialized into this lifestyle (Moles et al., 1973). Complicating this identity further, FAs complete a mixture of safety tasks and customer service that make a unified occupational identity harder to separate from this public image. These identity aspects also define FAs as a gendered position subject to patriarchal norms. Given the glamourized view of this position, FAs possess the occupational identity of being highly visible for their organizations.

On the other side of the flight deck door, pilots also possess a unique identity within the scope of their occupational environment. Much like FAs, pilots are also subject to gendered work as the act of flight is inherently linked to the popular image of masculinity (Ashcraft, 2005). Moreover, Ashcraft (2005) explored a newer tension faced by many pilots today: how to reconcile the legacy of a potent popular image with the increasing organizational emasculation of

their routine role. As stated in chapter 1, of the 130,000 airline pilots worldwide, only 4,000, or roughly 3%, are women (McCarthy et al., 2015). Ashcraft (2007) also demonstrated the construction of commercial and military pilots' occupational identity as revolving around manliness and rugged individualism that has perpetuated the gender imbalance we see today. Such identity aspects create an environment highly reliant on authority and power. Building on this notion, Milanovich et al. (1998) presented evidence that flight crews possess high levels of superordinate and subordinate actions that represent cases of status generalization. Status generalization theory is built on the understanding that a person's race, gender, age, or occupational status can influence the perception of competence in real-world task groups (Milanovich et al., 1998). These findings suggest the delegation of tasks puts higher performance expectations on the Captain as opposed to the First Officer (Milanovich et al., 1998). When both elements are in play on the flight deck, this creates room for incidents and disastrous errors. The unique contradiction of a safety-reliant environment and the intersection of power has also led to the perception that pilots are "fatherly" or patriarchal figures from a popular culture perspective (Barry, 2006).

Further, intercultural dynamics can lead to miscommunication. Pratama et al. (2018) analyzed 53 Indonesian Aviation incidents from 2001-2012 utilizing Hofstede's Human Factor Analysis and Classification System (HFACS). The results of this study demonstrated that high collective, low uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, and masculinity dimensions were cultural characteristics that played an important role in these 53 Indonesian incidents. Also mentioned in this study is the need to further research communication between crews and external support systems. Building on this idea, Ishihara & Lee (2021) analyzed this communication phenomenon in the relationship between pilots and ground controllers. One of

the key pieces of communication throughout routine flight operations occurs as radiotelephony communication. Radiotelephony communication is defined as verbal communication between pilots and ground controllers that occurs on a largely transactional basis and puts a direct emphasis on accuracy, conciseness, and clarity for the success of messaging (Ishihara & Lee, 2021). Ishihara & Lee (2021) concluded ground controllers and pilots navigate these complex communication pathways through the engagement of facework in an attempt to fulfill their transactional and relational needs. Building on these findings, the impact of politeness in crew communication can be further researched.

Conclusion

This literature review served as a comprehensive summary of pertinent and current research on the topics of organizational communication, emotional labor and emotional management, facework, and politeness and provided an overview of the organizational studies regarding aviation. As defined above, organizations exist through communication and are largely influenced by the communal construction of an identity through communication. Beyond the work of Ashcraft (2007), this question of occupational identity and communication has not been investigated in application to flight crews. Further, building off the work of Hochschild (1983) and given the increase in customer misbehavior, an area of investigation also opens in understanding the emotional labor exhibited by flight crews in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this thesis proposes the following research question:

RQ: How do flight crew members perceive and communicatively construct the emotional labor of their positions throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Chapter 3: Methods

This thesis sought to answer the research question mentioned above surrounding the occupational identity of flight crew members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This study used a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews (Tracy, 2020). Semi-structured interviews identified how study participants rationalized their identity through a more conversational and relaxed manner of interviewing. The primary advantage of using semi-structured interviews revolves around the ability for more emic, emergent understandings of positional narratives to blossom and for the interviewees' complex viewpoints to be heard without the constraint of scripted questions (Tracy, 2020). These semi-structured interviews were conducted around a 10-question interview guide (Appendix A) that guided but did not dictate the interviewee's responses. The following section will explain the qualifications for participation and the recruitment of participants. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with how data was collected and analyzed.

Participants & Recruitment

Interview participants for this study were initially recruited based on a professional network of 68 individuals who met the participation criteria. This participation criterion defined that any active crewmember who held the position of captain, first officer, and or flight attendant during the period of February 2019 and beyond would be eligible to participate in this study. Flight crewmembers working for regularly scheduled air carriers (i.e., Part 121, United Airlines, Delta Airlines, etc.) and commuter-on-demand air carriers (i.e., Part 135, JSX Airways, Medical Charter, etc.) were eligible for recruitment and participation in this study.

This study received amended IRB approval (Protocol UNLV 2022-113) in late November 2022, with recruiting emails to potential participants following shortly. All participants were

recruited through snowball sampling through email messaging and recruitment through a current participant for any out-of-network participants (e.g., colleagues, friends, and family members) (Tracy, 2020). A recruitment script was emailed and direct messaged to potential participants that were available through social media platforms such as LinkedIn (Appendix B). Of the 68 contacted, 28 flight crew members participated across ten air carriers[1] (see Table 3.1). For any participants out-of-network participants, a recruiting poster was sent by referral participants (Appendix C). A pre-interview survey was also conducted to determine eligibility of participants and for scheduling purposes (Appendix D).

Table 3.1 Table of Air Carriers & Participant Totals

Category	Value	Carrier Name	Value
Total Number of Participants	28	Total Number of Carriers	10
Total Number of FA	9	Gamma Airlines	6
Total Number of FO	10	GSX Airways	4
Total Number of PIC	9	North East Airlines	4
		Divergent Airlines	1
		Medical Transport	1
		Private-Contract	3
		Concession Air	1
		Cargo Carrier	1
		Atmosphere East Airlines	1
		Aeriform Technologies Inc.	2

[1] Airline and carrier names and participant names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Due to the physical barriers and necessity for locational flexibility, interviews were conducted through a digital meeting software (Cisco Webex and Google Meets). At the beginning of these interviews, I informed participants of the minimal risks associated with this study and the ability to terminate the interview without consequence. Further, participants were required to electronically sign a consent form that gave permission to interview and video record. All video recordings were transcribed from a video file into a word-for-word transcript. This transcript and any identifiable information found within were anonymized. All participants were given an interview identification number and pseudonym. Transcription software was used to convert the file from video to text which was then cleaned for the accuracy of interviewee statements.

Interviews were conducted based on the positional criteria of each participant (i.e., captain, first officer, and flight attendants). The interview script was designed to conduct a 45–60-minute interview. Interviews ranged from 19-63 minutes, with the average length being 36 minutes. Following preliminary questions such as “what is your role?” and “how long have you been flying?” participants were then asked questions regarding emotional labor management and intra-crew communication. The questions in the emotional management and labor sections were posed differently for each position. For flight attendants, I asked, “how do you balance misbehaving passengers and a safety threat?” When interviewing pilots, I asked, “Do you feel a layer of communicative separation from the rest of the flight crew as you have both a metaphorical and physical barrier?”. For the entire list of questions, please see Appendix A.

This study is also informed by a prior pilot study conducted in April 2022. This study received initial IRB approval (Protocol UNLV 2022-113) and involved twelve participants.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and prior professional relationships. The preliminary results revolved around the efficient team communication that is apparent in modern flight crews and revealed an increase in crew fatigue caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and passenger misbehavior. Based on the results of this study, the IRB application was amended to encompass the new study parameters and themes explored by this study. The interview script used in this prior study informed the formatting for this latest interview script with shifts in theme investigation from flight crew communication to analyzing gaps in research identified by participant responses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a phronetic iterative approach defined by Tracy (2020). With 1,034 minutes of potential codes, the phronetic iterative approach allowed for a reflexive process in which the researcher can visit and revisit the focus of the study based on the responses of participants as opposed to the exact methodology and direction being defined at the beginning of the study (Tracy, 2020). In other words, this approach moves between existing theory and guiding research questions that are informed by emergent qualitative data (Tracy, 2020). This section will now discuss the route of data analysis from primary cycle coding through thematic analysis.

Coding through this approach is defined by Tracy (2020) as "the active process of identifying data as belonging to or representing some type of phenomenon" (p. 213). Further, the word *codes* refer to a concept, belief, action, theme, cultural practice, or relationship that emerges from participant responses (Tracy, 2020). The data went through a phase of open coding, also known as general coding, to generate an initial codebook. Due to the heavy usage of aviation jargon and industry terms, this primary cycle of coding also included the usage of *in*

vivo coding (Tracy, 2020). *In vivo* codes in this study pertain to the usage of participants' local language and revolve around the question of "what is going on here?" (Tracy, 2020). This first round of primary coding yielded 391 codes covering various topics, including organizational conditions through methods of communication during irregular operations. An example includes this statement regarding surface acting from FA participants, "I think you do hide your emotions. Because in my mind, I hide my emotions, because that's how I feel right now. But just kind of soak with it. And I try to understand, okay, was this person like having a bad day?" Given the language used of "hide" and "understanding", a code of "masking emotions" was assigned.

Throughout this phase, I assigned codes different colors to link together and filter from 391 to 51 codes. This was accomplished through open-level coding. During open-level coding, a statement regarding occupational feelings was labeled "occupational feelings: emotion-position name." An example of this labeling surrounding a statement of surface acting looked like "surface acting/emotional masking; Flight Attendant (Part 121 Carrier)." A definition was assigned to these descriptive codes. In this example, occupational feelings were defined as any emotion required of individual positions.

During second-level coding, I lumped together these codes where the data made conceptual sense (Tracy, 2020). Using the same example as before, I paired codes with others that involved language such as "masking annoyance" and "learning to hide" to fit within a larger second level code such as "FAs performed emotional labor through surface acting by hiding their emotions." I then returned to the data for a third round of coding, axial coding, where these second-level codes were reassembled by theme (Tracy, 2020). I related the emerging themes to the research question by considering how the data demonstrated emotional labor and/or

occupational identity issues among flight crews. The three themes that emerged will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

This study sought to understand the relationship between flight crew members and the communication methods used during periods of stress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the research question, "how do flight crew members perceive the emotional labor of their position and communicatively construct their occupational identity throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic," three themes emerged across the 28 semi-structured interviews. The study ultimately found that emotions were a shared experience among all three positions during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, each position did not experience the same level of emotional labor and therefore spoke to different levels of emotional management. Based on three rounds of coding, the following themes became apparent: 1) Flight Attendants (FA) experienced emotional labor both within the flight crew and in the cabin with passengers, 2) First Officers (FO) used the metaphor of "being a chameleon" to describe the emotional management of their position, and 3) Pilots in command (PIC) dealt with emotional dissonance in regard to their career path. A succinct table of quotes for each theme can be found in each section (see Tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4).

Theme 1: FA Emotional Labor is Two-Fold

In response to the research question, flight attendants (FAs) reported that due to organizational, occupational, and physical separation (i.e., in the cabin versus behind the flight deck door), FAs experienced emotional labor from multiple directions. As expected with the significant increase in passenger misbehavior reports, FAs within the cabin experienced numerous occasions of emotional masking with misbehaving passengers. FA respondents reported an increase in the emotional demands of their position throughout this time period of March 2020 through May 2022. However, FAs also could not remove their emotional mask with fellow crew members (FO and PIC) as they were physically separated on the ground during layovers (different hotel locations) and in the cabin (separation with the flight deck door). This separation of FAs in the cabin and on the ground furthers the notion that FAs experience emotional labor both within the flight crew and in the cabin with passengers. FAs experience emotional labor within flight crews as they are not able to share the emotional burden of their flights. Further, FAs experience emotional labor in the cabin with their need to surface act with passengers. This creates a two-fold experience of emotional labor for FAs.

FAs Experience Emotional Labor in the Cabin with Passengers

A prominent sub-theme in the data arose around the notion that emotional labor became more prevalent for FAs during the pandemic. All respondents noted a shift in the level of emotional labor they experienced, whether this was a disruption in their occupational routine (e.g., daily preparation of the aircraft) through their experience with passengers. These specific emotions included annoyance and generalized anxiety. Many FAs responded that they encountered episodes where surface acting was required throughout COVID-19. Hochschild (1983) defined surface acting as the action of modifying emotions and emotional expression as

required by a position. Surface-acting is a process that does not change how the employee internally feels. Deep acting is defined as the process where an employee changes their internal feelings to align with organizational expectations, therefore, producing more genuine emotional displays (Hochschild, 1983). FA One respondent, Patty, reported,

> Oh, I just didn't want to feel like I don't want to come to work just because of the mask. I feel like you'd have to overcome those feelings much like [an] annoyance. If you feel like it's kind of ruining your day, your day is [going to be] very stressful. I'm not the type of person that would get angry before [COVID-19].

Patty demonstrated a sense of fatigue that is a direct result of the increase in COVID-19 policies. However, she masked these emotions to avoid a stressful work environment. Patty's experience of surface acting in regard to overcoming these moments of fatigue matches the surface displays required by positions in which emotional labor is a positional component.

Much like Patty, some FA respondents reported that these feelings of annoyance were also feelings of pure exhaustion. When asked, "how did you demonstrate your emotions during COVID-19?" Meredith, a FA at the same organization as Patty, stated, "You're masking that exhaustion. You're masking that inner turmoil of, like, I am so close to just like, one little thing." Meredith here noted her lack of bandwidth for disruptions, such as a passenger not wanting to wear a mask. Also, Meredith indicated that FAs mask their emotions, including inner turmoil, without being prompted.

Zooming out on the specific organization Meredith and Patty share, they are not the only FAs to respond that their emotional status changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, they are not the only FAs to apply emotional labor to COVID-19 regulations. With COVID-19 regulations changing the very nature of flying and the action of creating a safe-hospitable

environment, FAs reported being caught in the crosshairs of responsibility. Scott, a tenured FA at a large legacy carrier, stated,

> Um, before COVID, I used to think that I was not emotional at all, I was the strongest in the pack, and nothing can shake me, and I want to say COVID really made me become in tune with my emotions. And a lot of the times, I found myself mentally exhausted in the galley [and] in the lavatory, just crying. And it's, it's something so simple as, like, [passengers] just didn't want to listen to wearing the mask. But it was like, there were so many feelings behind it, because I couldn't go visit my family. Because I still had to work. And it was like I had family members who are high-risk. So nobody really knew how it was spreading. And nobody really knew how to test for it.

Scott here shared that as an FA, he experienced twofold emotional labor. He was isolated from the passengers as an airline policy enforcer and away from his family members as he did not want to expose them. Much like Patty, Scott reported that enforcing the airline safety regulations required more emotions and created more significant feelings of burnout, some of which happened in the shared space of the cabin.

Given the need to enforce airline regulations and policy, some FAs reported that this also created an internal struggle between personal views. One FA, Regina, said,

When COVID happened, a lot of the issues were the mask. And the thing with a mask was I had my own beliefs. Our mask when it first started? I was not a fan of it. And I understand people's frustration. But it was one of those things that it was my job to let them know they had to wear a mask. So before COVID, it was more of like you'd have drunk passengers who just didn't want to listen.

Also noted here is the difference in passenger misbehavior. Prior to COVID, passenger misbehavior revolved around once-in-a-blue-moon situations, such as an intoxicated passenger. Regina's response indicated the increased nature of handling these once-in-a-blue-moon situations. Now with regard to mask-wearing, Regina also indicated masking her opinion on this regulation. This response suggests that emotional labor was invoked through surface acting.

FAs also reported that a shift in emotional labor during COVID occurred with their ability to mask emotions. One FA, Amy, stated, "And so I think that the masking is part of the gig. It's part of the gig. From a very kind of like technical standpoint, the masking is important because it keeps, [rather] it helps you keep control of the cabin." Amy here indicated that emotional masking is a central component of being an FA throughout COVID. Much like Meredith, this emotional labor shifting occurred in response to the question, "how did you demonstrate emotions throughout COVID-19?" As a result of COVID-19, FA respondents indicated higher levels of emotional labor, including moments where surface acting was used to alleviate the stress of this time period.

Limited Opportunity for Discussion of Emotional Labor

Throughout the interviews, a secondary sub-theme arose surrounding the opportunity for FAs to communicate the emotional labor they experienced to other crew members. Due to the diverse operating conditions of the various air carriers, some FAs reported that they were the only inflight personnel responsible for the cabin, so they faced this emotional labor alone. Further, both FAs and pilots (FO & PIC) reported that the physical separation of the flight deck door could increase a communication division. Both FAs and pilots reported that while on the ground, they were also separated by being housed in separate hotel locations. Due to this

physical separation both on and off the job, FAs did not have the opportunity to discuss their emotional labor with the rest of their crew.

In response to the question, “do you feel there is a communicative separation between FAs and pilots” all FA respondents reported yes for various reasons. Beryl, a FA for a regional carrier, stated,

> And it can be so like alienating and lonely in the air when you're by yourself, and you don't have a crew you can talk to. So, you know, I think about the conversation in my head. And a small situation might become bigger because I have no way to let it out.

In addition to dealing with passengers, certain air carriers do not have additional FAs on board. Respondents like Beryl reported feelings of isolation and increased workload demand due to the need to perform all safety procedures and the additional policy of regulating passenger face masks. FA respondents also reported that this additional emotional labor was not mitigated on the ground as pilots and FAs did not use the same hotel between flights. Respondents suggested that this created an environment for FAs in which they could not vent out feelings from intense periods of passenger misbehavior, and pilots were unaware of the amount of emotional labor they performed.

Adding to the subtheme of pilot and FA separation, FAs also responded that it was harder to convey the emotional labor of their position due to the vast differences in role knowledge. Many FAs reported that an additional barrier to crew communication came about due to their inability to understand specific pilot tasks and jargon. Amy, a FA at a larger air carrier, said,

> And I feel a lot of times, the pilot will stop and start talking pilot stuff and pilot jargon and we wouldn't understand what was going on. And a lot of times, we would start talking about what's

going on in the cabin and stuff like that. And the pilots wouldn't understand what was going on. I think that it does create a divide in a way.

Amy's feelings about pilot jargon were reflected in many FA interviews. Despite many respondents being well experienced in their role, interviewees often pointed to the division of two occupational environments as a barrier to sharing the emotional labor of their positions. Further, FA respondents remarked that they would welcome the opportunity to shadow pilots (and vice versa) to communicate better the emotional labor of their position as a FA. In other words, although FAs and pilots share a work environment, they perform very different professional roles and know little about each other's roles.

On a more individualistic level, FAs experienced challenges communicating with pilots due to characteristics like age and gender. Many FAs reported that although the industry is becoming more diverse, objectification, sexism, and homophobia still riddle the industry. Once again, Amy stated, "I mean, sexism can be, you know, prevailing in the flight deck. It's clear, it's not tolerated, but you know, people have their own, like, views on things and stuff." Amy indicated that even though discrimination is not permitted according to official airline policies, it still occurs depending on who FAs are working with. Another FA noted an episode of sexism occurred through the language used in a situation. Mildred, a FA for a private carrier, disclosed,

> So we've definitely had some different communication breakdowns when dealing with a little bit of a specific type of chauvinistic, macho kind of Captain who's on board. I had one instance with a captain when I was kneeling down on the floor, like loading our closet with snacks. So we're closing right in front of the flight deck door, and I'm down, squatting down, putting snacks in, and the captain comes up the stairs, it was air stairs behind me. And he's standing; if you imagine, I'm kind of kneeling down, he's standing.

> So he calls me, and I turn around, and I'm face to face with his belt, so to speak. And he's saying, 'Listen, sweetie, if you don't get these snacks [put] away right now, we're gonna have a problem because I will not delay a flight for you.' So I feel like just the language used, and the timing, everything was so inappropriate because we weren't near delaying a flight.

Unlike Amy's disclosure, Mildred indicates a specific occasion where surface acting was invoked to deal with a less-than-professional pilot. FA responses suggest that although not an everyday experience, episodes of subpar professionalism occur in which FAs must emotionally mask and manage their expressions for the sake of the operation.

Due to the organizational, occupational, and physical separation FAs experienced, FAs reported increased levels of emotional labor. This included the need to mask their feelings of annoyance, exhaustion, and anxiety. FAs also reported feelings of insecurity with pilots as vastly different skill sets hindered their ability to share the emotional load of flights. In some instances, identity aspects such as age and gender hindered the ability of FAs to feel comfortable communicating their emotional labor. However, FAs were not the only position to indicate occasions of emotional labor while in flight.

Theme 2: FOs and the Metaphor of Chameleons

As the second position in command, FOs sometimes have to blur their identity to communicate effectively and establish a safe occupational environment with the captain. In response to interview questions such as "can you tell me a time when you had to mask your emotions" all FO respondents reported that masking was not only a common practice but also deeply ingrained in their approach to their position. Interviewees also reported that they often mimic the captain to keep order on the flight deck. Completely unprompted, all FO interviewees

discussed the need to act as a chameleon within the flight deck. This metaphor of acting as a chameleon was necessary to keep conversation devoid of sensitive subject matters and utilized as a technique for ensuring a safe operation. Two subthemes emanated from this metaphor, 1) FOs sometimes conceal themselves as chameleons for the operation, and 2) a large amount of mimicry is used by FOs acting in a chameleon capacity.

FOs Sometimes Conceal Themselves as Chameleons for the Operation

When approaching the subject matter of emotions with FO interviewees, I asked, "can you tell me a time when you had to mask your emotions for the operation?" Without hesitation, all ten FOs reported that they had to mask emotions in front of certain pilots and that there was an industry-known term for this, *acting as a chameleon.* In follow-up questions, FO respondents were asked to define this metaphor. Common elements of subservience, flexibility and the proverbial biting of one's tongue arose across all interviews. When asked if this chameleon metaphor affected their ability to communicate, FO Amelia stated,

> At the major airline level, especially as a first officer, you're kind of in that subservient role where you're just like, 'okay, sure, Yes, sir.' So it's a little bit harder to have that kind of genuine connection with somebody. So it's just, it's easier to chameleon. [That] is what we call it.

Amelia indicated an essential action of subservience that concisely summarized other respondents' statements. Respondents defined the chameleon metaphor as using specific communication methods to appease individuals in the PIC position and maintain a harmonious flight deck. Respondents also stated this technique is compared to a chameleon as FOs blend into the flight deck dynamic the PIC wants to be established for a flight. This technique is highly individualistic as the PIC sets the dynamic and communication precedent for the flight. Amelia

indicated here that this technique of acting as a chameleon helps them to avoid further conflicts that could lead to face-threatening conversations. Many FO participants, like Amelia, responded that they utilize shortened phrases out of politeness to avoid these face-threatening conversations.

Amelia is not the only FO to suggest that politeness strategies mediate face-threatening statements and actions in this metaphor of acting as a chameleon. When asked, "how do you communicate during episodes where you have to act as a chameleon" Besse, a FO at a larger carrier, posited,

> So again, part of that chameleon process is sometimes you'll have somebody that's like, 'No, my way or the highway, this what we got to do.' [I respond] 'Okay, you're right, we do need to do that. But have we considered XYZ?' You know? And I always try to, whenever I make a suggestion, make it very clear when I go, 'Hey, have you thought about doing this, captain? Have you thought about, you know, how can I suggest this?' Things like that.

Like Amelia, Besse responded that she utilizes a strategy of appeasing the captain to convey her opinion on the matter. Besse's response also demonstrated that when she, as a FO, is faced with a face-threatening situation, she acted as a chameleon by providing support in a more mediated form rather than directly communicating her opinion.

A Large Component of Being a Chameleon is Mimicking the Captain

Adding to the components found in Amelia and Besse's responses, an additional subtheme of mimicry arose across FO interviews. When asked a follow-up question, "what techniques do you use when you are acting as a chameleon" FOs reported that adaptability is

required as captains often have a particular routine that they want followed. When asked the question mentioned above, Jimmy, a FO at a regional airline, responded,

> The technique that I used to try to work with the captain was basically a mimicking technique, which is something that is kind of known in the industry. The first officer needs to be kind of a chameleon when it comes to how the captain likes [the flight deck] because every captain is slightly different. And it's more like within our culture that the first officer adapts to a certain degree [of] how the captain wants things done.

Jimmy's response highlights a common subtheme in which FOs are more or less expected to adapt to how the captain would like things to occur. Further, the mimicry noted in Jimmy's response was seen across other FO interviews as the FO is expected to adapt to possible face-threatening behaviors. The behaviors seen across FO interviews include elements of redirection and modified communication practices following a possible face threat. An example of this was found in Eunice's response where she stated, "you know [sometimes] I might phrase something differently if I see the captain is reserved. I'll ask 'captain what if we do this?' instead of 'I think we should do this." In this response, Eunice uses a modified question to avoid a face-threatening situation and uses the chameleon to adapt to the PIC.

Upon learning the metaphor of acting as a chameleon, a follow-up question of intent was posed to respondents. Specifically, FO respondents were asked, "why would you want to appease the captain and chameleon?" Across the responses, a consistent theme of career progression and positive face needs arose as a possible motive. When posed this question, Harriet, a recently promoted FO, shared,

> Because the captains are supposed to be leaders, they're supposed to be mentors, no matter what, because first officers are pretty much groomed to be captains. You know, it's

> how the progression of the career, you know, 80% of the time goes. So if they are not [as open], [or] they're so close-minded, I'm like, it's fine. But I think it's a missed opportunity. Um, so, you know, it's not going to change the operational part, but I will, I will definitely communicate with them with a little bit different style.

Harriet highlighted another message found across FO interviews; this act of being a chameleon is required for references and career progression. Many FOs indicated the next step in their career revolved around continuing to grow within their position and beyond. This serves as another example of the mitigation tactics found as a consistent theme throughout the FO interviews. Despite both positions experiencing emotional labor, FOs and FAs responses did not indicate that they experience emotional labor in the same way.

FOs respondents noted that they experienced emotional labor within their team, specifically with the PIC. Further, this emotional labor is not explicitly required of their position. Rather, these respondents suggest that this form of surface acting protects their future career opportunities. Despite an emotional requirement being explicitly stated as a positional requirement, FOs still experienced emotional labor as they feel required to modify their emotions around the PIC in their work environment. FAs, on the other hand, indicated that they felt emotional labor both internally with the crew and externally in the cabin. FAs emotional labor is also explicitly required by both position and organization requirements.

Theme 3: PIC Emotional Dissonance

While FOs and FAs reported emotional labor during the pandemic, PICs did not indicate large amounts of emotional labor. However, the COVID-19 pandemic did create situations of emotional regulation in the PIC position due to perceived career insecurities. A consistent theme of emotional dissonance emerged explicitly with individuals in the PIC position. This is different

from the emotional labor enacted by FO and FA crew members as the emotional labor exhibited by FO and FA personnel involved the management of emotions in a professional setting with a clear exchange value (e.g., FOs adjusting for the PIC due to career prospects and FA adjusting for the passengers as required by their role). Rather, PICs demonstrated emotional dissonance with regard to managing their perceived career insecurity. Emotional dissonance refers to a feeling of unease that occurs when someone evaluates an emotional experience as a threat to his or her identity (Jansz & Timmers, 2002). As a dimension of emotional labor, this theme of emotional dissonance suggests that PICs felt smaller amounts of emotional labor. This occupational dissonance resulted in feelings of gratitude for continual employment throughout COVID-19.

PIC Did Not Indicate Changes in Occupational Routine

As discussed in the prior section, FOs indicated a prominent theme of emotional labor regarding interactions with the PIC. Most PICs did not indicate the same emotional labor or masking level as the FOs. PICs did not indicate the same large shifts in occupational routine and emotional labor as seen with FAs. When asked how COVID had emotionally affected his occupation, Fred, a PIC at a legacy carrier, stated, “It (position as PIC) remained pretty much the same. The only reason I felt [shifts] during COVID is that it gave us so many opportunities [for] our pilots.” Fred here indicated that because of COVID, many pilots had opportunities for further career growth. This sub-theme was consistent across all interviews, as all PIC respondents indicated relatively minor changes to their occupational status within and outside the organization.

When asked, “how did COVID-19 change the way you approach your position” many PICs noted that there was some insulation from career-threatening actions such as layoffs. Pete, a PIC with high seniority, reported,

> Not so much. We're a little bit insular; we're a little bit more insulated. The company that I worked for has been very successful for a long time. So we haven't seen the ripple effects. I think the biggest thing from what I've heard of people in the industry, that's the most stressful and taxing, is if you were to get laid off, or there was a time period where layoffs is a big thing, and we've never really experienced that.

Much like Fred, Pete reported that his organization and his position as a PIC had not been primarily affected by COVID-19. These responses, on the opposite end of the spectrum from both the FO and FA positions, suggest that most PICs encountered small shifts to their occupational trajectory.

Occupational Precarity

Unlike prior respondents (Pete and Fred), not all PICs fared well through the tumult of COVID–19. Four respondents did indicate significant shifts away from a state of occupational precarity and more towards a state of gratitude for being back in their office in the skies. One PIC, Orville, stated, “well, I feel like my emotions when I had started my flight was, I'm happy to be flying again, I'm happy to have a job again.” In response to the question, “how did COVID-19 affect your position and approach to the industry” Orville had previously indicated that he had been temporarily laid off for six months during the second round of layoffs at his airline. Despite his seniority in his organization, he did not have enough rank to remain fully employed.

Like Orville, some other PICs were demoted back to the FO position as a result of COVID. When asked, “how did COVID-19 affect your approach to the aviation industry” Wiley, a PIC before COVID-19, stated,

> Well, I mean, of course, there was some disappointment with taking a pay cut in a downgrade like this, but for the most part, I was just pretty much letting it all play out, as I mean, there was the knowledge that eventually I would be going back to the captain's seat.

This statement indicated the emotional dissonance some PICs encountered when returning to the industry. Despite displaying emotions of positivity, Wiley still recognizes emotions such as disappointment causing dissonance in the emotions he portrays and internally feels. Wiley’s statement also demonstrated an understanding of industry growth, as he believed he would be back in the position of PIC shortly. Orville was not alone in managing his emotions in this way, as another current PIC, Gerald, also responded,

> This is a rough patch, but we gotta do what we gotta do, to keep occupied and keep ourselves positive. And that was the attitude I carried when I was displaced into a different base, or a different situation like ‘hey, this sucks’ but this is also actually helpful.

Much like Orville, Gerald indicated here that despite feelings of temporary insecurity, he is hopeful for the future. Further, both respondents demonstrated a particular experience of renegotiating the boundaries of understanding their roles within flight leadership.

Across those with stable and unstable employment, a consistent sub-theme of gratefulness arose amongst all PIC respondents. When asked, “what emotions did you feel

during the time period of the COVID-19 pandemic" all respondents noted a sense of optimism and gratitude to be flying. One PIC, Noel, summarizes this best,

> [I] definitely approach my position with a lot more gratitude, I'm grateful to you know, have a job. And I take it, I take my job, I mean, I've always taken my job very seriously. But I also think that's coming from a flying standpoint. But from an HR standpoint, or a company standpoint, I'm a little bit more cautious now, and I'm a little bit more forgiving. Only because I know the business side is very, very hard to deal with. So if a company were to tell me, you know, 'hey, we're going to hold off on training, or we're going to hold off on this, or we're not going to start you yet' you know, I'm not gonna be that guy to argue and be like, 'Well, what's going on, I need to get paid, I need to do this' you know? I gotta get going. Just because I, know that, hey, things are starting to ramp back up. And it's gonna take some time.

Noel indicated in this response that he has more flexibility when approaching his position now that COVID has shown the rapidly changing tides of the industry. Other PIC respondents reported living more within their means based on the number of positional cuts thwarted by different air carriers. In addition to Noel's response, when asked the same question as above, Chesley, a PIC at a private carrier, responded,

> A lot of times right now, I get a feeling of gratitude. I can't believe I was able to do it this quickly. And with a bit of luck, most likely getting into the hiring wave that was caused by COVID. So kind of a little bit of a silver lining to the whole pandemic was the early outs accelerating the hiring of replacements.

Chesley indicated here that the pandemic invoked a sense of gratitude for not only the ability to fly again but also a sense of a silver lining to the tumultuous time period. Chesley also joined all

other PIC respondents in stating that the pandemic left a sense of optimism toward the future of flying. Despite feelings of unstated stress throughout this time period, PICs indicate a positive outlook for the future. This is a unique result as this demonstrates emotional dissonance can lead to positive feelings. Further, this result aligns with the notion that individuals can regulate their emotional expressions in the workplace (Grandey, 2000).

Conclusion

These 28 interviews demonstrated the complex nature of operating an aircraft throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants discussed various topics, from communication through the individual emotional labor and management required of their positions. Three themes arose in pursuance of the research question, "how do flight crew members perceive and communicatively construct the emotional labor of their positions throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic?" These three themes were: 1) Flight Attendants experienced emotional labor both within the flight crew and in the cabin with passengers, 2) First Officers used the metaphor of "being a chameleon" to describe the emotional labor of their position, and 3) Pilots dealt with less emotional labor. Within each theme, a subset of smaller themes arose: 1. FAs experience emotional labor in the cabin with passengers, 2. FAs had limited opportunity for discussion of emotional labor, 3. FOs sometimes conceal themselves as chameleons for the operation, 4. a significant component of being a chameleon is mimicking the captain, 5. PIC respondents did not indicate significant changes in occupational routine, and 6. occupational precarity struck PICs. All themes and subthemes interlock to provide a detailed description of the experiences of being a flight crew member throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The following chapter will discuss these findings.

Table 4.1 Theme 1: FA Responses

Theme	Characteristics of Theme	Exemplars
FA Emotional Labor is Two-Fold	FA respondent notes that she has to use surface acting to continue on with her day.	***"****Oh, I just didn't want to feel like I don't want to come to work just because of the mask. I feel like you'd have to overcome those feelings much like [an] annoyance. If you feel like it's kind of ruining your day, your day is [going to be] very stressful. I'm not the type of person that would get angry before [COVID-19]"*
	FA respondent notes that she has to mask her inner emotions for the sake of her passengers.	*"You're masking that exhaustion. You're masking that inner turmoil of, like, I am so close to just like, one little thing."*
	FA respondents notes that COVID has caused a shift in his ability to manage his emotions. Response suggests that emotional labor has increased as he vents out his emotions in work locations such as the galley.	*"Um, before COVID, I used to think that I was not emotional at all, I was the strongest in the pack, and nothing can shake me, and I want to say COVID really made me become in tune with my emotions. And a lot of the times, I found myself mentally exhausted in the galley [and] in the lavatory, just crying. And it's, it's something so simple as, like, [passengers] just didn't want to listen to wearing the mask. But it was like, there were so many feelings behind it, because I couldn't go visit my family. Because I still had to work. And it was like I had family members who are high-risk. So nobody really knew how it was spreading. And nobody really knew how to test for it."*

Table 4.2 Theme 1: FA Responses

Theme	Characteristics of Theme	Exemplars
FA Emotional Labor is Two-Fold	FA respondent discuss the emotional labor of these interactions. Further, FA response also indicates a level of surface acting with the shielding of her personal opinion.	*"When COVID happened, a lot of the issues were the mask. And the thing with a mask was I had my own beliefs. Our mask when it first started? I was not a fan of it. And I understand people's frustration. But it was one of those things that it was my job to let them know they had to wear a mask. So before COVID, it was more of like you'd have drunk passengers who just didn't want to listen."*
	FA respondent discusses the emotional labor she felt throughout this time period and also discusses the isolation felt.	*"And it can be so like alienating and lonely in the air when you're by yourself, and you don't have a crew you can talk to. So, you know, I think about the conversation in my head. And a small situation might become bigger because I have no way to let it out."*
	FA respondent discusses the lack of ability to voice the emotional labor of her position with pilots as there is a great divide.	*"And I feel a lot of times, the pilot will stop and start talking pilot stuff and pilot jargon and we wouldn't understand what was going on. And a lot of times, we would start talking about what's going on in the cabin and stuff like that. And the pilots wouldn't understand what was going on. I think that it does create a divide in a way."*

	FA respondent discusses her usage of surface acting within the crew. Further, respondent discusses elements of condescending and unprofessional language towards her position as FA.	*"So we've definitely had some different communication breakdowns when dealing with a little bit of a specific type of chauvinistic, macho kind of Captain who's on board. I had one instance with a captain when I was kneeling down on the floor, like loading our closet with snacks. So we're closing right in front of the flight deck door, and I'm down, squatting down, putting snacks in, and the captain comes up the stairs, it was air stairs behind me. And he's standing; if you imagine, I'm kind of kneeling down, he's standing. So he calls me, and I turn around, and I'm face to face with his belt, so to speak. And he's saying, 'Listen, sweetie, if you don't get these snacks [put] away right now, we're gonna have a problem because I will not delay a flight for you.' So I feel like just the language used, and the timing, everything was so inappropriate because we weren't near delaying a flight."*

Table 4.3 Theme 2: FO Responses

Theme	Characteristics of Theme	Exemplars
FOs and the metaphor of Chameleons	FO respondent stated that there are elements of flexing around the PIC when acting using the chameleon technique.	*"At the major airline level, especially as a first officer, you're kind of in that subservient role where you're just like, 'okay, sure, Yes, sir.' So it's a little bit harder to have that kind of genuine connection with somebody. So it's just it's easier to chameleon. [That] is what we call it."*
	FO respondent stated that when acting as a chameleon, it is easier to mimic and adapt to the precedent the captain wants to set.	*"The technique that I used to try to work with the captain was basically a mimicking technique, which is something that is kind of known in the industry. The first officer needs to be kind of a chameleon when it comes to how the captain likes [the flight deck] because every captain is slightly different. And it's more like within our culture that the first officer adapts to a certain degree [of] how the captain wants things done."*
	FO respondent indicates here that mitigation strategies such as shortening phrases are used to prevent possible face-threatening exchanges with the PIC.	*"You know [sometimes] I might phrase something differently if I see the captain is reserved. I'll ask 'captain what if we do this?' instead of 'I think we should do this."*
	FO respondent indicated that the PICs support is important to career progression. Using the chameleon technique is once way to help preserve that relationship.	*"Because the captains are supposed to be leaders, they're supposed to be mentors, no matter what, because first officers are pretty much-groomed to be captains. You know, it's how the progression of the career, you know, 80% of the time goes. So if they are not [as open], [or] they're so close-minded, I'm like, it's fine. But I think it's a missed opportunity. Um, so, you know, it's not going to change the operational part, but I will, I will definitely communicate with them with a little bit different style."*

Table 4.4 Theme 3: PIC Responses

Theme	Characteristics of Theme	Exemplar
PIC Emotional Dissonance	PIC indicated small shifts from their occupational routine.	*"Not so much. We're a little bit insular; we're a little bit more insulated. The company that I worked for has been very successful for a long time. So we haven't seen the ripple effects. I think the biggest thing from what I've heard of people in the industry, that's the most stressful and taxing, is if you were to get laid off, or there was a time period where layoffs is a big thing, and we've never really experienced that."*
	PIC indicated positive feelings after returning from layoffs.	*"Well, I feel like my emotions when I had started my flight was, I'm happy to be flying again, I'm happy to have a job again."*
	PIC response indicated that despite a downgrade in seniority, he is happy to be through the tumult of the pandemic and excited for the future.	*"Well, I mean, of course, there was some disappointment with taking a pay cut in a downgrade like this, but for the most part, I was just pretty much letting it all play out, as I mean, there was the knowledge that eventually I would be going back to the captain's seat."*
	PIC response indicated that he approaches his position with more flexibility as a result of COVID.	*"This is a rough patch, but we gotta do what we gotta do, to keep occupied and keep ourselves positive. And that was the attitude I carried when I was displaced into a different base, or a different situation like 'hey, this sucks' but this is also actually helpful."*

Table 4.4 Theme 3: PIC Responses

Theme	Characteristics of Theme	Exemplar
PIC Emotional Dissonance	PIC response indicated that he has a greater understanding of how the organization influences his position and therefore, approaches his position with more flexibility.	*"[I] definitely approach my position with a lot more gratitude, I'm grateful to you know, have a job. And I take it, I take my job, I mean, I've always taken my job very seriously. But I also think that's coming from a flying standpoint. But from an HR standpoint, or a company standpoint, I'm a little bit more cautious now, and I'm a little bit more forgiving. Only because I know the business side is very, very hard to deal with. So if a company were to tell me, you know, 'hey, we're going to hold off on training, or we're going to hold off on this, or we're not going to start you yet' you know, I'm not gonna be that guy to argue and be like, 'Well, what's going on, I need to get paid, I need to do this' you know? I gotta get going. Just because I, know that, hey, things are starting to ramp back up. And it's gonna take some time."*
	PIC response indicated that there has been positive outcomes to COVID.	*"A lot of times right now, I get a feeling of gratitude. I can't believe I was able to do it this quickly. And with a bit of luck, most likely getting into the hiring wave that was caused by COVID. So kind of a little bit of a silver lining to the whole pandemic was the early outs accelerating the hiring of replacements."*

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study sought to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on flight crew communication. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted the aviation industry, especially in the way flight crews grappled with the unprecedented challenges of managing their roles. The results from interviews with 28 active flight crew members demonstrated that different crew positions dealt with varying emotional labor and management, with flight attendants (FA) dealing with emotional labor while pilots in command (PIC) and first officers (FO) dealt with internal emotional management. Further, the results of this study indicated that flight crews used face mitigation strategies to appease those who were perceived to have higher authority in the crew. The implications of these findings and their contributions to the fields of aviation research and organizational communication are discussed in the following sections.

Contributions to Emotional Labor

Flight crews work in close-knit teams with an inherent hierarchy. This hierarchy begins with the captain (PIC) at the top and ends with junior flight attendants (FA) at the bottom. This study found that within one aircraft, there are two distinct occupational environments. Flight attendants generally work in smaller teams and are responsible for the cabin environment. FAs were expected to perform the highest amount of emotional labor of the flight crew throughout COVID. The results of this study contribute to scholarship on emotional labor among FA crewmembers throughout COVID-19 and will be discussed throughout this section.

Based on Hochschild's (1983) research on emotional labor, emotions as a state of being are inherently constructed through communication and are therefore grounded in interaction. This leads to the first contribution to emotional labor research: FAs reported higher levels of emotional labor throughout COVID-19. When asked about the emotions they felt throughout

COVID-19, FA participants noted an increase in the level of "emotional masking," which strongly relates to the concept of "surface acting," or the way FAs regulated their emotional expression (Hochschild, 1983). Many FAs noted that despite having a physical mask on their face, they still had to generate empathetic messages and emotional displays that invoked a sense of calm for passengers traveling throughout this time. These participants also noted a larger increase in the occasions they had to consciously modify their expressions for the sake of their positional duties. For some participants, the effects of this emotional labor created episodes of literal tears in more private areas, such as the aircraft lavatory and staff galley. FA responses such as these moments of intense emotional outbursts suggested that the emotional displays FAs had to manufacture created larger, taxing experiences of emotional labor.

The results of this study also demonstrate that emotional labor is sometimes not shared amongst colleagues. Many FAs felt increased isolation throughout COVID-19. As discussed in the results section, FAs indicated that there were limited opportunities to discuss the emotional labor of their position Respondents reported that they couldn't fully share the emotional labor of flights during debriefings and did not possess the opportunity to share as they were often in different hotels than pilot crew members. Hochschild (1983) conversely defined emotional labor as a collective experience of flight attendants. Hochschild (1983) noted that FA crew members possessed the unique ability to share out their emotional labor and demonstrate care for one another as they worked in smaller teams. Further, Hochschild (1983) found through interviews that FA crew members were not able to work well unless there was team cohesion. FA respondents in this study indicated that they did not have these same opportunities to share as they might have been the only FA in the cabin or were restricted by space-distancing requirements. This study updates Hochschild's (1983) emotional labor research to understand

how the pandemic changed emotional labor for flight attendants and finds that FA crew members were left to process their emotional labor in a routine that was far more individualistic.

Contributions to Facework

The results of this study not only add to the field's understanding of emotional labor, but also provided insight into the Facework first officer (FO) crew members engage in. Within the flight deck, participants reported a continual theme of putting on a "unique face," one that is not required by any manual but is an accepted practice in maintaining a harmonious environment. FO participants indicated that this unique face is known as acting like a chameleon. Despite being a well-known industry term, this technique points towards an aspect of politeness theory and facework to help create a more dynamic and peaceful flight deck. This section will explore the concept of facework and the relevance of the chameleon metaphor with current facework literature.

The concept of face is used to understand the relationship between a person's desired identity and everyday interactions (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Tracy (1990) concluded that on a broad level, any interaction can potentially lead to a face-threatening action. To manage face threats, scholars have concluded that individuals engaging in facework strategies, such as deference, demeanor, impression management, storytelling, and conversational patterns, help protect an individual's public face. In this study, FO referred to the chameleon metaphor as one method they used to avoid face-threatening subject matters within the flight deck. Further, FO respondents indicated that this method of facework aided in keeping exchanges within acceptable boundaries.

This contribution also highlights a different way emotional labor is experienced within flight crews; the FO experiences emotional labor within the flight crew, as opposed to the FA

dealing with the public environment. FO respondents did not speak to emotional labor in the traditional sense, such as putting on a required smile like that of FAs. However, FO respondents demonstrated through their usage of the chameleon face that they adhere to the emotional standards put forward by the PIC. Each FO participant responded with a different mitigation strategy when using the chameleon method. However, the consistent theme of mitigated statements arose amongst many FOs.

The chameleon metaphor also speaks to unstated power differences in flight crews and how they engage with emotional management to save face. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the hierarchical order begins with the PIC at the very top. All respondents, regardless of position, spoke about how the communication precedents are set by the PIC. The flight crew engages with an interaction order, or a social gathering that has communicative rules or conventions of engagement (Monrad, 2003). As Monrad (2003) argued, interaction order is imperative to the success and avoidance of face-threatening acts in certain environments. FO respondents knew and understood this when they acted as chameleons toward the PIC. This contribution adds to our understanding of hidden facework that is not explicitly stated, as none of the PIC respondents discussed the chameleon metaphor.

Finally, the chameleon finding also contributes to research on power distance and emotions. Power distance was noted between Pilots and FAs as well as FOs and PICs. The power distance between employees and leadership in an organization opens the door for further face threats. Power distance refers to the degree to which individuals, groups, and or societies accept inequalities as unavoidable, legitimate, or functional (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). In organizations, power distance can stem from the accepted hierarchy of positions. The usage of

the chameleon technique adds to our understanding that power distance still plays an important role in the decision-making of FOs and PICs.

Implications for Airlines

The aviation industry is a unique environment that involves multiple elements working in sync to accomplish a central goal of safe travel. With an error margin of zero, research into effective teamwork strategies and communication approaches has been conducted. Throughout the 20th century, preventable human errors such as miscommunication caused many tragic crashes. Therefore, researchers produced industry-specific concepts such as crew resource management (CRM) that put all crew members in one occupational environment with equitable access for communicating safety concerns. However, this study concluded that despite CRM, high levels of power distance in interactions are still being exhibited by flight crews. These contributions will be discussed in the following section.

Generally, respondents stated that they could address safety concerns without repercussion. However, when asked if two occupational environments exist on board the aircraft, respondents in all three positions reported that not only two occupational environments exist, but so do two occupational identities. This finding contributes to our understanding of intra-crew dynamics and communication methods, as this conclusion could conflict with the premise of CRM, which assumes every crew member feels like part of a shared team. Further, this study demonstrated that despite receiving training on CRM, crews are not singular in operation. Both FA and pilot respondents indicated that this does not impair their ability to respond in an emergency situation but that it can cause a divide amongst positions.

Despite the acknowledgment that crew members can communicate safety issues, high levels of subordination were noted amongst multiple interviewees. High levels of subordination

in flight crews have been found to increase the risk of safety-related incidents. Milanovich et al. (1998) presented evidence that flight crews who possess high levels of superordinate and subordinate actions represent cases of status generalization. Status generalization theory is built on the understanding that a person's race, gender, age, or occupational status can influence the perception of competence in real-world task groups (Milanovich et al., 1998). These findings suggest the delegation of tasks puts higher performance expectations on the Captain as opposed to the First Officer (Milanovich et al., 1998).This contributes to the notion that higher levels of delegation could pose a greater risk for flight crew members to miscommunicate and incur preventable incidents.

While respondents did not feel that the divide created any safety issues, it is possible that this could contribute to problems in the future. FAs did not feel that they could share the stress of their emotional labor with pilots. While FAs did believe they could share safety concerns, they could not share everything with pilots, and emotional labor concerns have the potential to become safety concerns (e.g., consider the unruly passenger who opened an emergency exit midflight). This stress could also contribute to flight attendant burnout, which may impact alertness to safety issues while flying. This speculation is not meant to blame flight attendants for their occupational environment, but to point out that despite the promise of CRM to create cohesion in the flight crew, the separation in emotional labor currently makes this cohesion impossible.

This study also provides practical implications for airlines to understand the mental toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout these interviews, many flight crew members shared the lack of resources available to share the burden of their emotional labor they experienced. The results of this study suggest that all three positions could benefit from access to trained mental

health professionals in addition to the allocation of mental health resources. This could include counseling, and therapy not yet in place. By doing so, airlines can support the well-being of their employees and ensure a safe environment for passengers and flight crews.

Summary

The results of this study generated contributions that shed light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on flight crew communication. The findings demonstrate that FA crew members experience significant levels of emotional labor throughout the pandemic. Further, FA crew members were expected to set the emotional tone for flights and had to modify their expressions to invoke a sense of calm for passengers. These FAs also contributed to our understanding of emotional labor as they had fewer opportunities to share their emotional labor with their colleagues and higher levels of isolation. These findings also indicated that FO crew members engaged in chameleon-like behavior to avoid face-threatening subject matters within the flight deck. The implications explicated in this chapter offer new contributions to the fields of organizational communication and aviation studies.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study interviewed 28 active flight crew members (flight attendants, pilots in command, and first officers) across ten air carriers. Three themes emerged across all interviews: And found three themes: FA emotional labor is two-fold, FOs and the metaphor of the chameleon, and PIC emotional dissonance. This study addresses the research question, how do flight crew members perceive and communicatively construct the emotional labor of their positions throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic? This chapter will address the limitations of this study followed by suggestions for future research. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with a summary of this study.

Limitations

Despite ten air carriers being represented in this study, a total representation of the aviation industry is not reflected in these results. Nuance and organization-specific regulations such as standard operating procedures (SOP) could exist outside the scope of the carriers represented in the interview data. This study also sought to analyze the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This time period is regarded as a once-in-a-century event that is well outside normal operating conditions. Additionally, all participants were recruited from air carriers located with the United States, limiting the applicability of these findings to international carriers. This study does not address effective communication practices in flight nor communication practices utilized by flight crew members in crisis situations. Due to the scope of this study, and all positions being evaluated a lack of depth also occurred. Further analysis can be conducted on either position as both teams incurred different challenges and experiences. Finally, owing to the project's timeline as a thesis and the time intensive nature of the phronetic iterative approach, a

greater amount of analysis could have been undertaken given the copious amount of available data.

Future Directions

This study adds to the general field of aviation studies and communication research on the frameworks of emotional labor, emotional management and facework. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown lasting a relatively short time, the effects have been felt by flight crew members as they return to the skies. Future research can investigate the effects of face management and emotional labor on the occupational identity of being a pilot. Further, future researchers can further integrate the finding of the chameleon metaphor into other crew frameworks such as CRM. Lastly, future researchers can also investigate the possible effects of face mitigation strategies and the use of safety voice during irregular flight operations.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented level of volatility for the aviation industry. To understand the effect of this time period on flight crew communication, this study sought to answer a single research question. The findings of this study add to the fields of aviation studies and organizational communication. Although this study presents unique findings, it is just the beginning of the conversation on flight crew communication and the emotional labor they face in the 21st century. It is vital to continue conducting this research as the public returns to traveling and new crew members enter the friendly skies.

Appendix A

Pre Interview Survey: All participants to fill out the survey linked here before the interview.
(Survey link: https://tinyurl.com/FlightCrewStudy)

Interview Script: Flight Crew Identity and Emotional Labor

Pre-interview information:

- Ask the interviewee for consent to be recorded.
- Explain that interview data could appear in research, and if so, the participant's name/ role in the research will be given in pseudonyms.

  Explain the consent form with signature of the form for procession of the interview.

Emotional Labor and Emotional Management

1. Can you tell me a story about a time when COVID disrupted your work?
    a. Can you describe the communication practices utilized in this event?
    b. What emotions did you feel during this event?

FA Specific:

a. What emotions would you say you experience on a flight?
b. How do you balance a misbehaving passenger and a safety threat?
c. Can you tell me about a time when you had to mask your emotions or "fake it" at work?
    i. If so, is this a recurrent event or a one-off situation?

Pilot Specific:

1. What emotions would you say you experience on a flight?
2. How do you express emotions during abnormal events such as safety threats?
3. Can you tell me about a time when you had to mask your emotions or "fake it" at work?

Intra-crew communication

1. How would you describe your relationship with others on a flight crew?
2. Can you tell me about a time during COVID when you and the rest of your flight crew got along well?
3. Can you tell me about a time during COVID when you and the rest of your flight crew did not get along well?
4. How do you define successful communication within a flight crew?

Do you feel like there is a separation between flight attendants and pilots? If so, how and why?

5. Do you think COVID has changed how you view your position?

Closing

Is there anything else you would like to discuss, or feel is pertinent?

Appendix B

Recruiting Script: Flight Crew Identity & Emotional Labor

Hello {potential participant name},

You are invited to participate in a research study about flight crew identity and the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will involve a short interview, roughly 45-60 minutes in length, which will be conducted over the video conference program Zoom. Recording of this interview will take place. The interviewer will ask questions regarding your role as a flight crew member in addition to questions regarding communication training and practices. Any flight crew member is eligible to participate in this study.

This request for participation comes from me, William Ingelson, conducting this study as a graduate student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). This study occurs under the supervision of Primary Investigator Dr. Rebecca Rice Ph.D.

If you wish to participate, please email William Ingelson at William.ingelson@unlv.edu to schedule an interview. Interviews can also be conducted over a differing video conference platform. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at any time (William.ingelson@unlv.edu) or Primary Investigator Dr. Rebecca Rice Ph.D at Rebecca.Rice@unlv.edu. Many thanks in advance.

Appendix C

Invited Participant Recruiting Poster

Appendix D

Pre-Interview Survey

Flight Crew Communication Study: Pre-Interview Survey

Hello,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please kindly fill out this survey prior to the start of the interview. Many thanks!

* Required

Email *

Cannot pre-fill email

What is your role? *

- ◯ PIC (Pilot in Command)
- ◯ FO (First Officer)
- ◯ FA (Flight Attendant)
- ◯ Other: _____

Have you been flying consistently throughout the time period of January 2019 through present? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

How many flight hours do you currently possess? *

Your answer

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

M.A., 2023 — University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Master of Arts-Communication Studies
Thesis Project: Flying the unfriendly skies: How flight crew members perceived and communicatively constructed the emotional labor of their positions throughout the covid-19 pandemic

Project advisor: Dr. Rebecca Rice, Ph.D.
Cumulative GPA: 4.0
Graduate Certificate in College Teaching

B.A., 2021 — University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Bachelor of Arts-Communication Studies
Undergraduate Certificate in Leadership and Civic Engagement

PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY EMPLOYMENT

2022-Present Public Speaking Coach, COM Lab, Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

2021-Current Graduate Teaching Assistant, Communication Studies, Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

Course taught: Communication (COM) 101: Oral Communication and Public Speaking (3 sections; Fall 2021, Spring 2022, Summer 2022, Fall 2022, Spring 2023)

2019-2021 New Student Orientation Assistant Coordinator, UNLV Office of Admissions

2018-2020	Resident Assistant, UNLV Office of Housing and Residential Life **Additional leadership roles attained under this position**: Diversity Advocate, Mentor, and RHA Liaison
2019	Research Assistant, Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering
2019	Community and Operations Manager, UNLV Student Union, and Event Services
2018-2019	New Student Orientation Leader, UNLV Office of Admissions

UNIVERSITY AWARDS AND HONORS

2023	Graduate College Medallion Recipient
2020-2021	UNLV New Student Orientation Keynote Speaker
2020	UNLV Admitted Student Friday Student Speaker
2019-2021	UNLV College of Education Dean's List
2018-2021	Greenspun College of Urban Affairs Dean's List
2019	Resident Assistant of the Year
2019	Orientation Leader of the Year
2018	Most Inspirational Resident Assistant of the Year

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Ingelson, W. (2020). Leading Student Communities Through Service Learning. NODA Region I-II
Conference, February 26-27th.

Ingelson, W. (2020). Putting the RA in Leadership. UNLV Housing and Residential Life Summit Conference, January 12-13th.

Ingelson, W. (2019). LGBTQIA+ 101. UNLV Housing and Residential Life Summit Conference, August 19th-23rd.

Ingelson, W. (2019). LGBTQIA+ Programming for Heteronormative Environments. 25th Resident Assistant Programming Conference, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho, October 12-13th.

Ingelson, W. (2019). Privilege with Paperclips. 25th Resident Assistant Programming Conference, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho, October 12-13th.

SERVICE COMMITMENTS

Service to the University

2023-Present Dean search committee, Honors College, UNLV

2022-Present Grad Rebel Ambassador, Graduate College, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

2022-Present Council Member and Department Representative, Graduate & Professional Student Association (GPSA), University of Nevada, Las Vegas

2021-2022 Member at Large, Graduate & Professional Student Association (GPSA), University of Nevada, Las Vegas

2017-2018 Undergraduate Volunteer, UNLVolunteers Service Organization, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Service to the Department

2023 Communities in Schools: Public Speaking Module

2021-Present Course redesign volunteer, Course development with Dr. Nick Tatum for reconstruction of COM 101: Oral Communication course, University of Nevada, Las Vegas