

Original Paper

Educating Future Female Seafarers in the Maritime College from the Perspective of Masculinity

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Abstract

Recently, the Maritime Bureau and Seafarers Policy Division of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism have been working to promote gender equality in the seafarer industry. Moreover, in 2017, the “Committee on the Promotion of Female Seafarers’ Activities from a Female Experts’ Perspective” was launched to discuss the issue. I participated in this committee as one of three academic experts. The committee has reported that the percentage of female seafarers in the Japanese shipping industry is only 2%, and less than 10% of shipping companies have shown a positive attitude toward the employment of female seafarers, indicating that the employment of female seafarers is not being promoted. The purpose of this study is to train female students in maritime colleges to be able to work as seafarers with leadership skills in the future using “masculinity” as a keyword.

Keywords

female seafarers, gender consciousness, career development, masculinity, diversity, maritime education, female students, female education, shipping industry

1. Introduction

The idea of stereotyping social roles based on gender persists, and gender is a major factor in employment. One of the most prominent examples of this is the seafaring industry. Recently, the Maritime Bureau and Seafarers Policy Division of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism have been working to promote gender equality in the seafarer industry, and in 2017, the “Committee on the Promotion of Female Seafarers’ Activities from a Female Experts’ Perspective” was launched to discuss the issue. I participated in this committee as one of three academic experts (Note 1). The committee has reported that the percentage of female seafarers in the Japanese shipping industry is only 2%, and less than 10% of shipping companies have shown a positive attitude toward the employment of female seafarers, indicating that the employment of female seafarers is not being promoted. In contrast, nearly

70% of female students at maritime colleges have expressed their aspiration to work as seafarers; thus, the working environment should be improved, and female students employed by shipping companies should remain employed as “female seafarers” for a long time after marriage or childbirth. The purpose of this study is to train female students in maritime colleges to be able to work as seafarers with leadership skills in the future. This study also aims to activate women’s education in maritime colleges, promote the activities of female seafarers in the maritime industry, and achieve gender equality in the maritime industry. A unique aspect of this study focuses on “masculinity studies.” It demonstrates through the workings of female seafarers that seafaring should have “diversity” and emphasizes the “masculinity” in women to foster female seafarers who can play an active role in the shipping industry.

2. Consideration of the Seafaring Using “Masculinities” as a Keyword

Even though the promotion of women seafarers has been recognized in Japan a long time ago, whether gender equality has been sufficiently promoted in the shipping industry remains doubtful. Why has the promotion of gender equality in the shipping industry failed to produce any results? Why is this “simple truth” of “gender equality” so difficult to implement in the shipping industry? Why do women still remain a “subclass” in the seafarer industry? In fact, only a few shipping companies are still proactive about employing women, and the reasons for this factor may be partially due to problems with shipboard facilities and the high turnover rate of women on board. However, many companies do not recognize the value of hiring women because of the stereotype of seafarers as men. Why have such stereotypes existed? Why has such an ideology existed? The ideological problem, such as the renovation of on-board facilities, cannot be solved with funds; however, it requires a fundamental change in the structure of attitudes. Rather, they require a fundamental change in the structure of consciousness.

I thought the keyword here was “masculinity,” since in previous eras, masculinity has never been as articulated as in the world of ships. The masculinity of men who sail the oceans, even among men, has been constructed in contrast to that of men who live on land, much less as the opposite of women. In other words, the masculinity of seafarers has been formed with “what women cannot experience” at its core, such as the unique life on board a ship.

However, the latest masculinity studies have suggested that “masculinity” is not necessarily unitary. In the 1970s, masculinology began as part of the academic field of gender studies in the West. The leading researcher in this field is Robert W. Connell. For example, R. W. Connell, in addition to referring to the plurality of masculinities, focused on the power relations that arise from gender by defining hegemonic masculinity as a form of masculinity. Two agreements support Connell’s treatment of masculinity as a plural form. First, gender is constructed differently in different cultural and historical contexts. Based on his recent research results, Connell concluded that masculinity has no universal form. Therefore, masculinity should be recognized as a plural form, not a singular one (Note 2). Second, multiple forms of masculinity coexist, even within the same period and society (Note 3). As the interplay of gender, race, and class was discovered, the perception of multiple masculinities became widespread. For example,

regarding Connell's theory of masculinity, the gender role division of labor, which is strongly rooted in society, is also clearly meaningless. This concept is due to the gender role division of labor, based on the assumption that masculinity and femininity are fixed, from which gender roles emerge. In other words, if one relies on Connell's theory, which asserts the existence of diverse masculinities, gender roles based on gendered characteristics do not exist from the beginning. Nevertheless, in light of the fact that gender roles exist, they can be interpreted not as being based on gendered characteristics but on power. In other words, even if an individual appears to deviate from the established gender roles, the individual is not the abnormal one but rather the social customs that are too focused on the fixed gender that are abnormal. However, in reality, the fixed gender roles probably show that men and women are complementary to each other. In fact, this context is only because gender roles are imposed on them by power. This feature becomes apparent when women seek to enter male-dominated occupations, such as the seafaring industry. In other words, the Connell theory becomes highly convincing when women enter the seafaring industry.

3. Educating Future Female Seafarers at Our Maritime College

As mentioned in the previous section, if one considers that gender-related "character" is diverse, the conventional concepts of "masculinity" and "femininity" tackle a very skeptical connotation. For example, "masculinity" tends to be interpreted as synonymous with "labor;" however, essentially, "masculinity" and "labor" should be unrelated. These concepts are linked because the system of "gender role division of labor" has been established. In essence, "masculinity" has nothing to do with a system in which men do the work and women do the housework and childcare.

In particular, the concept of "gender role division of labor" is likely to have a significant impact on the determination of whether women can work as seafarers, especially in occupations, such as "seafaring." This occupation is a special type of work, that is, where the work period (embarkation period) and leave period rotate over a long period of time.

Remember that "masculinity" and "femininity" are not monolithic, as described above; this study focused on the "diversity" of seafarers and enlightened female students in the school's merchant marine department by investigating the activities of female seafarers in the present shipping industry. This section discusses the contents of the study. This study was conducted not only for female students but also for male students. It also aims to help students become seafarers with leadership skills in the future, regardless of gender, in the maritime industry, where gender stereotypes are strongly rooted. Through the exchange of information among female faculty members of maritime educational institutions, the following points were identified:

- Seafarers should be flexible and open to the opinions of others. As in all professions, communication skills are especially important for seafarers, as they will be living together on board for extended periods of time.

- Unsurprisingly, female students lack arm strength; however, in recent years, arm strength is not so much required in both men and women on many types of vessels. Furthermore, some male students also lacked arm strength.

- Seafarers should have the ability to operate the ship safely, which is completely independent of gender differences. Even if female students lack arm strength, they can still be active in other areas. The important thing is not to run away from something because you cannot do it from the beginning but to give it a try anyway. Experiencing everything, regardless of gender, and developing one's own areas of expertise are important. This factor also applies to male students. If you can do that, even if you have no arm strength, you can work as a seafarer without any problems, even if you are a woman.

- Few men and women work on board their entire lives. This is because work at sea and on land is alternately assigned at intervals of several years. A human-to-human relationship transpires when managing ships and seafarers on land. In other words, the ability to manage with an understanding of the situation on the ground should be cultivated. Regardless of gender, seafarers should acquire the ability to work not only as seafarers but also as land-based workers, that is, the ability to communicate and make good judgments.

(1) Furthermore, interviews with current female seafarers and shipping companies revealed their true sentiments regarding hiring female seafarers and the current situation of female seafarers. While more and more shipping companies are intensifying their efforts to hire female seafarers in light of the growing awareness of gender equality in the shipping industry, most of them are initially clearly lost. After all, the crucial difference between men and women is that women are always faced with the problems of marriage and childbirth. The main reason is that the ideologies of “patriarchy” and “division of labor” persist. In societies where these ideologies have taken root, women who are responsible for domestic labor are restricted from economic activities outside the home, and men who are responsible for work outside the home are restricted from engaging in domestic labor. At present, an increasing number of men and women are becoming resistant to the division of gender-based roles and do not form the organization of a family. This activity has clearly shown that today, we must deconstruct the concept of the gender role division of labor. Of course, men and women who do not feel uncomfortable with the system of gender role division of labor can do so; however, this option should be a choice among various ways of life, and gender should not be the standard for all.

(2) Finally, through this study, we enlightened female students on two major points. First, long-term planning is crucial for someone who wants to live as a seafarer. Women are likely to experience major life stage changes, such as marriage and childbirth; therefore, finding a job with a shipping company that will allow them to return to seafarers' employment without leaving the register when such changes occur, rather than quitting seafarers' employment, is important. Second, “seafarer-ness” is not synonymous with “masculinity” and “androgyny.” For female students who aspire to become seafarers, the stereotypes that they have had up to now should be dispelled, and they should ask themselves, “What is the masculinity that is unique to women?” Essentially, female students who want to become seafarers should form their

own images of what they want to be as seafarers from the time they are students. This key point is important when pursuing career development as a seafarer in the future.

4. Conclusion

For the same academic ability and skills, many shipping companies often pursue males, not because females are inferior but because the companies are not accustomed to hiring females and are anxious to do so. However, the survey in this activity revealed that, other than arm strength, gender differences are minimal between men and women in, for example, knowledge and judgment. Ultimately, this does not mean that women are less capable as seafarers; rather, women tend to be excluded by the stereotype of “seafarer = male.”

Importantly, the “image of seafarers” as a group should be changed, and the qualities of individual seafarers should be considered. As a matter of fact, in the author’s sense, the expression “gender equality” is out of date. This is because neither male nor female gender characteristics are unique. June Singer described the state in which a person maintains a balance between masculinity and femininity as psychological bisexuality (androgyny) (Note 4). In other words, human existence is not monistic.

Furthermore, this concept is consistent with Connell’s concept of masculinities. If this is the case, the notion that seafarers must be men, or that women are not suited for the job, is then rendered meaningless. The first priority in the seafarer industry should be to be a “seafarer” and to “look like a seafarer.” The qualities required of seafarers should be wide-ranging, including skills, judgment, and communication skills, all of which must be acquired through study and experience. Learning and experience are directly related to individual efforts and ambitions. In this regard, I wondered if the concept of male or female seafarers can be considered. The “new image of seafarers” can be described as “androgynous seafarers.” Gender has a multifaceted interpretation. The fact that “gender” has multiple interpretations means that those of us who specialize in gender studies have a responsibility to disseminate information.

Importantly, seafarer culture and values unique to seafarers that have been created over the long history of seafarers should be remembered, and a “new seafarer culture” and a “new image of seafarers” that can promote the success of female seafarers from multiple perspectives should also be established. At the same time, we should educate students enrolled in maritime educational institutions to be more flexible in their gender awareness and to deepen their understanding of diversity.

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Notes

Note 1. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) established the "Study Group on Promoting Female Seafarers' Activities from a Women's Perspective" in 2009.

The recommendations of the "Study Group on Women's Perspective to Promote Women Seafarers" established by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism in 2009 can be viewed at the following URL. It is clear on page 2 that seafarers with no experience of employing female seafarers are small companies. <https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001209058.pdf>

Note 2. R. W. Connell. *The men and the Boys*. California: University of California Press, 2000.

Note 3. R.W. Connell. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

Note 4. June Singer. *Androgyny: Towards a New Theory of Sexuality*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1977.