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Rubbing out gender: women and merchant ships

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Rubbing out gender: women and merchant ships

1.0 Introduction

In the current maritime setting, female presence on board ships account for a very small minority of about 6% on cargo ships (Belcher et al., 2003) such that work practices remain tailored for an all-male environment. A strong sense of seafaring's occupational culture broadly referring to professional skilled expertise, knowledge of maritime jargon, work rhythms and rituals are often associated with good seamanship (see for instance Lane, 2002; Knudsen, 2009). Given current features of practice on working and living at sea along with a militaristic approach to cadet training, merchant seafaring is fundamentally attributed as a male preserve. The traditional ascription of the ship as a man's world remains to be one of the key challenges of integrating female seafarers in the seafaring industry (Walker et al., 2003). From this view, this paper explores female seafarers' experience aboard merchant vessels and maritime colleges. In particular, the paper examines how notions of masculinity and femininity are discursively drawn upon by seafarers to manage female presence in a male-dominated environment. The notion of hegemonic masculinity (HM) which privileges male dominance as authority and power is used to understand the pattern of gender practices in the colleges and the ships (Connell 1995, 2000; Kerfoot and Knights 1993, 1998; Collinson and Hearn 1994).

The paper is divided in five parts. First, existing literature on HM and gendered workplaces are examined to show how they convey discourses within an organization. Second, the occupational culture of seafaring is discussed to situate gender construction of female seafarers. Third, the authors explain their methods, pointing out how they collaborated to examine two independent sets of data that both present gender-related themes. The fourth

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section analyses the experiences of cadets in maritime colleges and of the main author as a female researcher aboard a commercial vessel to show how gender difference is actively constructed in a process of devaluing women's presence. Finally, this paper concludes that the contradictory rubbing out and reproducing of gender distinctions as a way to manage gender relations impedes the integration of women on board.

2.0 Literature Review

This section argues that studies on merchant seafaring using broadly the concepts of gender and/or gender relations as conceptual frameworks have to deal with masculinity because seafarers have been considered traditionally as 'exemplars of masculinity' (Hohman 1956; Reid 1993; Connell 1995, 2005). It will tease out this argument by reviewing some of the analytical insights of critical masculinity studies in order to understand and explore the experiences of female seafarers. In this paper the concept of hegemonic masculinity (HM) will be used because studies on HM have demonstrated that it is a helpful analytical tool that could explore critically the experiences of both male and female seafarers. Based on Connell's work (1995, 2005), hegemonic masculinity means

> *the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 2005: 77).*

The definition points out that a particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to certain images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated. HM has shown that masculinity and the values associated with it have demonstrated a military-like masculinisation of the merchant vessel as a workplace, and of seafaring as an occupation (McKay, 2007). Its analytical value as a theoretical perspective allows for scrutiny of

hegemonic gender regimes in terms of how these are contested or reconciled in a particular organization, occupation or workplace (see for instance Luton, 2000, Pullen and Simpson, 2009, Collinson and Hearn, 2005).

The use of HM in exploring the experiences of women seafarers is rooted in the dominance of a soldier-like masculinity that permeates merchant seafaring owing to its historical affinity with the military navy (Barrett, 1996). That is, the hegemonic ideal of seafarers' masculinity involves an image of physical strength, confidence and bravery akin to the military navy (Barrett, 1996) and broadly to the military (Morgan, 1994; Karner, 1998; Higate&Hopton, 2005; Carreiras, 2006). Thus, exploring how female seafarers discursively construct and resist traditional masculinity on board is largely concerned with hegemonic masculinity's ideological, symbolical and material subordination of women.

Furthermore, the literature has also exposed how HM in the merchant seafaring operates by revealing various masculinities that exist on board. For example, McKay's (2007) work on Filipino seafarers have demonstrated the conflicted character of the masculinities of Filipino seafarers, that is, masculinities that assert their manhood but often labeled by other national groups of seafarers as effeminate. These conflicted versions of masculinities of Filipino seafarers are rooted in a racially divided workplace where Filipino seafarers occupy the lower ranks and Western seafarers dominate the officer ranks. The lower status of Filipino non-officer seafarers on board means doing menial jobs associated with traditional sex roles of women such as cleaning cabins and washing dishes and clothes (Burton 1991). However, back in the Philippines, the state portrays the seafarers as 'national heroes' because of their willingness to sacrifice for their families and country (McKay, 2007). In line with Connell's

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(2005) view that heroes are the exemplars of masculinity, the Philippine state confers the dominant status of heroes to all Filipino seafarers irrespective of their ranks. As a consequence, the Philippine state and the Filipino seafarers exploit the image of a sacrificing hero, which in the cultural context of Filipinos highlight the traditional role of men as family breadwinners (Burton, 1991). In other words, the Filipino seafarers particularly the ratings (i.e., non-officers) occupy a conflicted view of masculinity where aboard the ship they are considered of low status whilst back at home they are viewed as the exemplars of masculinity because they are the sacrificing heroes (McKay and Lucero-Prisno, 2012).

Collinson and Hearn (2005) in considering the connections between organizational structures of an occupation nature of work and workplaces, highlight the impact of patriarchal values, that is, taken-for-granted masculine norms and practices. Organizations are intrinsically gendered sites yet how workplace power relations are shaped by masculinities is seldom questioned in most studies. The processes that shape the constitution of the organization therefore has a bearing on the experiences of female cadets because maritime education and training are part of the activities and processes of forming future seafarers. The literature outlined above explains the manner in which the traditionally gendered relationships of power, by virtue of hegemonic masculinity, are perpetuated and overlooked. Particular attention to the shipboard occupational culture discussed next illuminates the highly masculine nature and challenges faced by women.

2.1 Occupational culture of seafaring

The occupational culture of seafaring provides the context of understanding the gendering of female seafarers. Paoline defined occupational culture as “a product of the various situations and problems which all vocational members confront and to which they equally respond”

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(2003: 2). Seafaring's occupational culture is said to be very traditional (Mack, 2007; Hope, 2001; Fricke, 1973). It is traditional in the sense that values, practices and symbols have been passed on from generations of seafarers. It can also be thought of as traditional in the sense that seafaring is resistant to change such as admitting women to the profession. For centuries this occupation was also characterized as dangerous (Walters & Bailey, 2013; Roberts & Marlow, 2005; Hansen *et al.* 2002), undertaken in an enclosed environment (Sampson, 2013; Knudsen, 2005), which is hierarchical and regimented (Lane, 1986; Knudsen, 2005). Seafaring is also described as dominated by shipboard work composed of a set of routinised and ritualized tasks (Lamvik, 2002; Knudsen, 2005) in an all-male environment (Kitada, 2010; Thomas, 2004) that is isolated and set apart from life at shore (Acejo, 2013; Thomas *et al.*, 2003).

Significantly, the post-1970's changed seafaring's occupational culture because of changes in the maritime sector. Particular factors were a more pronounced multi-national crewing (Alderton *et al*., 2004) including ethniticized crewing practices and the introduction of women seafarers (Chin, 2008), and the impacts brought about by technologies in general and by information and communication technology (ICT) in particular (Kahveci & Nichols, 2006; Sampson & Tang, 2011). The introduction of international regulations for shipboard work and for maritime education and training by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Labour Office (ILO) were also significant factors which contributed to the changes within the maritime industry. The masculine character of seafaring's occupational culture and the changes that took place within it, particularly the introduction of women seafarers, meant that the sector has to educate and train these new seafarers. As this paper will explore, the education and training of female seafarers pose challenges to the women as they have been traditionally left out of the maritime workplace environment.

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3.0 Research methods

The overall study looks at gendering in maritime education and shipboard work by exploring how the female presence disrupts HM. By taking into account the cadets and female researcher's shipboard fieldwork experience, this paper focuses on the attitudes to and experiences by women in their pursuit of a seafaring career. Reflections on the ethical, moral, personal and physical dilemmas encountered during the voyage are utilised in understanding the impact of gendered interactions in a male-dominated setting. To achieve this, the paper draws it data from two PhD theses. The first thesis explores Filipino seafarers' integration on board a container ship and ashore in a community. The data on shipboard fieldwork lasting for forty-one days (i.e. 30 March to 10 May 2009) included semi-structured interviews of 25 seafarers and observations documented in fieldnotes. The term 'seafarers' as used in this study refers to merchant sailors working on ocean-going vessels. Seafarers who work on luxury passenger ships were not included. Meanwhile, the second thesis looked at the occupational socialisation of Filipino cadets during their training period. A total of 74 participants were interviewed individually or as part of a group and they included cadets, seafarers, representatives from seven maritime schools, managers of cadetship programmes, and government officials. Semi-structured interviews (individual and group), use of fieldnotes, document analysis of different texts such as school records, websites of cadetship programmes and government documents were utilised. All the interviews were personally translated into English, transcribed and coded by the authors.

The data for both theses were revisited in the context of gender theories and issues. Shipboard fieldnotes relating to gendered interaction between a lone female researcher with male seafarers were re-examined. The themes identified in the second thesis, which included

practices of gender bias in training cadets served as the starting point of the authors' analysis. Meanwhile, the codes developed accorded to what Patton (2002: 456) referred to as sensitising concepts for "a general sense of reference.' These then provided a starting point for exploring gender relations in the context of commercial ships where the researchers' role and risks were recognised reflexively (Cunliffe, 2003; Tomkins and Eatough, 2010).

4.0 Findings

Taking into account earlier studies on organizational construction of HM, it is important to look at the nature of women's integration in maritime academies and on board ships. The analysis of interviews of cadets, seafarers and fieldnotes observation aligns with the previous studies on military regimes and its impact on the institutionalisation of HM on gender integration. Broadly, the finding refers to the rubbing out of gender in both education and shipboard organisation which perpetuates the overtly dominant view of military masculinity. As the following sections will discuss, gender differentials in both formal and informal policies in colleges and on board reinforce each other. Disruptions to the accepted order in the presence of a female researcher show the gendered nature of the interaction on board. Within the limited physical space of a highly masculine ship, erasing femininity to build professional and social rapport poses some risks and should not be overlooked. The crux of gender integration of female seafarers is therefore rubbing out gender to validate HM and not just mere perpetuation of HM to maintain the gender hierarchy.

Of rituals and routines: (de-)constructing female seafarers in the maritime academy

This section examines interviews with cadets enrolled in maritime colleges in the Philippines conducted between 2011 and 2012. Maritime education and training in the Philippines

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typically involve three years of study in a college campus and then one year of shipboard training. Students enrolled in both private and state-run maritime colleges are called cadets. Within the policies of cadetship programmes, cadets are rigorously disciplined and socialised to a military-like professionalism on a daily basis. A similar approach is found among the private maritime campuses (n=7) in this study. Rote rituals, for instance, fastidious attention to proper uniforms and use of rank titles are strictly observed and enforced. Such official requirements ensure occupational enculturation of cadets into the ethos of seafaring, in particular the appropriate conduct it requires. Cadets have to observe the proper way of 'wearing the uniform' as this interviewee recounts:

> Training was tough... We (female cadets) had same treatment as the male cadets. When we became 3rd class (that is, the second of a four year maritime degree), we were also called "SIR". We were required to have short hair, same uniform as the male cadets, and we were marching everyday when going to our classrooms. - Female Officer-in-Charge, Interview 27

As military uniforms codify rules of conduct, certain normative assumptions of masculine repertoires involving haircut and body techniques must be internalised and exhorted. These are all necessary to exude the masculine discipline and formality encoded in it. In a male-dominated occupation such as seafaring, it appears that the organizational practices of wearing college uniforms and sporting prescribed haircuts rub out gender distinction by routinely denying feminine qualities.

Coded forms of dress such as occupational wardrobe or uniforms of nurses or the armed forces has been ascribed symbolic significance both by those who wear them and those who do not (see for example, Ugolini, 2010; Barnes & Eicher, 1993; Bradby, 1990). Ugolini suggested that once new recruits put on their military uniform, this act allowed them to be transformed into servicewomen/servicemen and fostered *esprit de corps* (Ugolini, 2010).

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Bradby (1990) noted that the process of nurse's entry into the profession involved for some the ascription of the title 'nurse' associated to wearing their uniform. In other words, "coded forms of dress are used to mark a sense of 'belonging', whether to a family, community and eventually a nation" (Taylor, 2002: 209). Thus, the wearing of similar uniforms and hairstyles may appear to foster the value equality and sense of belonging thus giving a semblance of an even playing field for all cadets. In doing so, however, female cadets who were given a similar "treatment as the male cadets" meant it literally whereby their gender is subsumed to that of the masculine gender. This is illustrated in the practices of, first, requiring them similar uniforms and hairstyle as their male counterparts, and secondly, addressing the female cadets as 'Sirs'. Rubbing out gender distinction appears to enable women to be in equal footing with men. Symbolic vested interest in removing femininity assures a high quality of performance often seen exclusively with manliness. It allows for recasting women to be eligible for evaluation in the same terms as men.

A cadet's daily routine for four years is reminiscent of van Gennep's (1909) understanding of rite of passage as transitional phase for an inductee. Cadets will start with physical exercises early in the morning followed by a series of activities that revolves around the classroom and the dormitory thereafter. The over-all picture of the cadets' to-and-from movement between buildings for 'classrooms' and 'dormitory' resembles the training schedules of cadets in the armed forces (see for example McCoy, 2000) or the police (Loftus, 2010; see also Marquis, 1987). On board ships, hierarchy is simulated with the appearance of a dorm master in the person of the ship captain who makes decisions about deviations from routines.

A cadet explained that the emphasis on daily physical exercises meant to make them physically fit for the intensive labour demands on ships:

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> About the physical exercises in the dormitory…, I realized its importance onboard, as the work on board is not easy. Uhm, we need to do the hard work, the hard tasks, added to that are the big waves that smashes the ship, (inaudible) the changing weather and also the work on board that we do is somewhat endless… - 4th yr. cadet, Interview #16

Shipboard work is hard, physical, and perilous (Walters & Bailey, 2013). Coping with physical exercises during training is a good preparation for the gruelling demands on board. The link between physical fitness and meeting the demands of an occupation has also been noted in another working-class occupation, the police (see Greg Marquis, 1987). Female cadets undergo the same physical training as their male counterparts because these feats require masculine prowess which is also the criteria for which they are evaluated. The physically tough work in the face of perilous waves is something that cannot be overcomed by fragility and gentleness typifying women. The ability to withstand pressures by way of defeminizing women during the training regimen is part of the first formal training in joining the seafaring profession. Yet, this denial of gender difference is simultaneously contradicted by the sex segregation practices in dormitories and toilets which reinforces gender distinction.

Dormitories as spaces of gender divide

Female cadets retire to their respective dormitory after the morning rituals and at the end of their academic duties. Often it is located in a different building and a few distance away from the male dormitory. Relaxation hours, however, remain regimented. Cadets have to abide by certain rules as shared by a male cadet who recalled the commencement of his cadetship programme:

> After we were accepted to the programme and before the school year started, we were restricted to stay in the dormitory for three months as part of our

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> orientation. This included rules regarding not using our mobile phones, our laptops, and the Internet. After 3 months, it was ok, they granted us access to our mobile phones, laptops, and the Internet but we have to stay in the dormitory. We were only allowed to go out, uhm, every Friday, and, we were expected to be back on Sunday. It is like being granted a "shore pass". –4th Yr. Cadet, Interview #17

The experience of staying in the dormitory (or 'dorm') is a reference point for years of training experience characterized by the observance of rules imposed by a training programme. Female cadets however are given more lenient rules when it comes to sleeping arrangements and other informal activities. While women are generally expected to observe the same rigour and discipline during training, they are exempted from enduring severe hazing which is commonly done at night. A male cadet recalled his first year as a new entrant in the dormitory:

> We do have our own building which is very far from the female's dorm building. So at night time they can just sleep soundly while we get strenuous exercise or physically harassed. – 4th yr. cadet, Interview #16

The sex segregation in dorms excludes female cadets from what is a normatively male tradition of seniority and bonding. Such physical separation of dorms which is also commonplace in military academies highlights the male-female dichotomy which, Corroto (2001) argues makes achieving equal participation of both sexes quite difficult. The arrangement of dormitory spaces influences the social relationships among cadets by maintaining the gender division and deriving masculine power and privilege. Traditional hazing rituals as part of the socialisation process that transform neophytes to full-fledged members is quite a pervasive practice found in most military and police academies (see for instance, McCoy 1995, Linhares de Albuquerque &Paes-Machado 2004). In a study involving cadets from a U.S. naval academy, men and women are equally likely to experience hazing during the first year but in terms of willingness to report hazing, female cadets are less likely to report owing to their 'double-outsider' status as plebes and as women

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(Pershing 2006: 486). The risks of informal isolation and retaliation deter women from exposing such misconduct. After hurdling the first year, some forms of severe humiliation that hazing inflicts mostly becomes the realm of the male cadets. Female cadets' exclusion from such ritualised display of machismo, denies them that shared sense of suffering experienced by the majority of the members of the academy. Gendered ideas and notions even in unofficial rites secretly practiced by cadets makes more explicit the masculine context. The separation of dormitories between male and female and the exclusion of female cadets from hazing show a process of keeping intact men's masculinity. The cadets' segregation in training and in official policies is but a 'veiled attempt' to subdue threats to masculinity making it difficult for women to integrate which is likewise akin to the experience of female marines in the United States (Williams 1989:66).

Recasting female cadets as male (in terms of having a short hair, wearing male uniforms and in being addressed as 'Sir') seemingly rubs out gender distinction but this becomes mere surface attempts when sex segregation, in both official and unofficial training and policies, remains practiced. Managing the presence of women in an all-male environment in such a contradictory way make it difficult for women to gain equal acceptance if their difference with men is continually maintained.

All aboard (?) the ship

Erasing femininity on board: A familiar contradiction?

On board ships, cadets have to follow strict rules on schedules, addressing officers and donning proper uniforms. In the conduct of daily shipboard work, wearing overalls, gloves

and safety boots when engaged in deck or engine work is required. Crew members have to use their ranks or titles (e.g. 'captain', 'bosun', etc.) to address one another. While these are simulated in maritime colleges as described, seafarers are exposed to a wider variety of mechanisms of control and pressure, such as for example coordination with shore side personnel for cargo loading/unloading, port entry and food supply provision. Whereas cadet life involves academic responsibilities encompassed in two separate spaces such as the dorm and formal learning spaces (a swimming pool, gymnasium and other facilities are also part of the college grounds), this is drastically changed once they become seafarers when work and leisure is restricted within the limited physical space of the ship. A female cadet may then find that her cabin is in the same floor level as other male seafarers which was not the case during her cadet training. Public spaces on board such as the mess rooms and day rooms are open to both sexes. Toilets too will not be segregated according to gender.

For crew complements of about 20-25 seafarers, two at most will be females. This is in contrast to maritime colleges where they may have more than five. During the primary author's shipboard fieldwork, she was the lone female on board. The presence of a female researcher could have been regarded by the crew as highly unusual, even anomalous. In the same way, presence of female seafarers and cadets on board present some challenges in integrating to the seafaring's occupational culture. Routines, rituals and codes of conduct on appearance and behaviour reiterate a male-coded form of conformity which serve to rub out gender differentials similar to that experienced in the academy.

However in spaces that are considered private such as cabins, gender differences are reproduced. In a mini-gathering in one of the cabins held one weekend, the "host" appeared embarrassed by his dirty toilet:

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> The messman told me that I can come in but that I cannot use the toilet as he cannot find the time yet to clean it. It is very dirty. He then suggested another cabin that we can instead use for the party. (Fieldnotes April 2009)

After about a month into the research, an Engine ratings revealed what it was really about:

> William divulged to me that more than the dirty toilet, it was really about the sexy posters of women that makes it awkward for the messman to let me in. He said that when it was announced that I was coming on board, they have to get rid of those. (Fieldnotes April 2009)

Ordinarily, the ship as an all-male workplace allows for masculine acts and expressions. In anticipating my presence in and around the ship, seafarers modified their private spaces in order to downplay their masculine practices on the ship and make it more accessible to a female researcher. These modifications reflect an incipient gesture of deference and an example of how seafarers reframe their behaviour in relation to women. The act of removing potentially offensive pictures is akin to Goffman's (1976, pp. 69-70) notion of 'gender display' where portrayal of gender is highly conventionalised and yet optional. Gender is performative and can be reconstructed such that its gestures can be invoked or not to fit a particular situation. The seafarers' own initiative in appropriating their intimate, private spaces accommodatively reflects adjustments of male norms. This, however, shows how gender differences are crucially reproduced despite practices to rub out gender in making living and work spaces accessible to both sexes. The seafarers' effort to modify their behaviour, although perhaps minor and fleeting as the presence of female crew members or researchers on board, only engages with the cosmetic aspect of gender. According to Carreiras and Kummel (2008), dealing with pornographic images (posters and videos) is part of the coping challenges for women in in the military. A 'misogynist imagery' offers a form of resistance to threats against masculinity and also maintains the marginal perception of

women (Williams 1989:69). Objectification of women highlights the entrenched sexism making it difficult for women to integrate.

Taking control: professional female image on board

In an attempt to manage this situation and following from other female researchers who undertook shipboard fieldwork, I likewise opted to wear apparels that de-emphasize my female gender. In short, I avoided disrupting the normalcy of shipboard life. As a lone female researcher on board, I chose to wear clothing that reflected the shipboard norms:

> I wore hooded jacket, t-shirt, jeans and trainers. Not much variety of clothes in my suitcase. I noticed they are all wearing hard boots, I did not bring that here. (Fieldnotes April 2009)

> I wore no make-up and no perfume. Hopefully this relaxed look is acceptable. (Fieldnotes April 2009)

There was no explicit rule about how women researchers should conduct themselves on board but as a lone female researcher, donning clothes suited to the all-male environment showed deference to the professional setting of the ship. My aim was to conduct research and as such, I made sure that the seafarers recognised an appearance that expressed more of that purpose instead of my gender.

Female seafarers wearing appropriate shipboard uniforms, despite its inherently masculine attributes, impart a sense of conformity and order to the ship. The use of everyday workwear on board assures everyone that conventions and rules of engagement are consistently performed in both professional and social contexts. Such practice is more complex for female researchers whose lack of work role and accepted symbolic marker like work uniforms make

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blending in difficult. Hence, adopting a dress code entailed getting a balance that is neither quite masculine nor too feminine. Although in observations conducted in the engine room, an ensemble of safety gears like coverall, helmet, ear defenders and safety boots were used, the rest of the time everyday wardrobe as a female researcher consist of trousers, loose tops, jacket and trainers. In the male-dominated environment of the ship, clothing choices should be neat and presentable but not attention-seeking. In other words, conservative, not form-flattering and in keeping within the standards of formality expected on board. Whether as a female seafarer or a researcher, carefully managing one's presence within an enclosed space helps reduce that sense of vulnerability and detracts from the slippery slope of being misunderstood or misappreciated.

Despite efforts to maintain such professional demeanor, this proved difficult as most of the seafarers, as if on cue, would often figure a way to romantically link me to the unmarried men on board:

> In the day room this afternoon, I get teased a lot with Romeo. Earlier in the morning while I was in the engine room they keep trying to ask me if I like Joseph who is planning to profess his admirations for me openly. This is getting awkward! (Fieldnotes April 2009)

Despite careful self-presentation to the seafarers by rubbing out my gender to some extent, gender distinctions featured in everyday encounters with the seafarers. Tagging along with the seafarers when on ports during shore leave made the married male seafarers a bit wary in terms of explaining my presence both as a female and a researcher to their wives. One seafarer even avoided my company in the day room to avoid getting his wife jealous and maintained a quiet distance all the time I was on board. Another one decided not to inform his wife about having a female researcher in their voyage. Making my female identity less

obvious, either by my own efforts or by the seafarers, shows how gender permeated the way I interacted with the seafarers on board.

Taking control: fostering rapport and socialisation on board

Shipboard norms define what is gender-appropriate and provide a way for getting along with other seafarers. Whilst understanding the routines and general rules helps in actively developing positive relationships with the men on board, there are tensions, both consciously and unconsciously, that could arise from power relations. At the outset, certain improvisations are useful in forging interpersonal relationships. In the course of cultivating rapport, great care was undertaken in order not to compromise seafarers' position on board and to avoid ruffling a few feathers unnecessarily. However, maintaining a professional distance proved to be complicated like when I was told by another seafarer that:

> 'You are now the girlfriend of the Second Mate. Yesterday it was the Chief Engineer.' – Engine Ratings (Fieldnotes April 2009)

My attempts of fostering rapport was misconstrued as romantically inclined. A conversation that took a few minutes longer than what was considered ship-appropriate was regarded as totally something else. Although I was on board to observe seafarers' work practices, it was not immediately apparent that I was scrutinised more than I did to them. Owing to my schedule that closely followed the shipboard's timetable, my actions can be visibly traced and therefore open to critical curiosity. This form of surveillance is inevitable within the highly restricted space of a ship where routines are rote and places for encounters are pre-defined and limited. The physical design of the ship leads to produce an environment that are predisposed to display behaviours that ensure order and compliance. Belousov et al (2007) in

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looking at researchers' situation in places difficult to monitor and access, such as ports and ships, referred to it as a 'frontier'-like experience, therefore more risky. As a lone female novice researcher on board, building relationships can thus be fragile owing to the isolation of being at sea, an experience shared by other female shipboard researchers (see Sampson and Thomas 2003).

If mismanaged, the issue of being a 'girlfriend material' can engender division among seafarers and can be potentially disruptive. Given the gender-segregated features of the ship, a female presence poses challenge to the traditional notions about how seafarers behave. What Coffey (1999: 57) regard as the need for researchers to engage in 'emotional craft work' in forging friendly relations on the field must thus also recognise the role of image management and the amount of time spent to accommodate challenges of shipboard access. As certain vulnerabilities, whether emotional or sexual, can be unduly exposed and stimulated during fieldwork, taking account of such distinction refines reflection on how gender differentiation is manifested and managed in a confined environment. Learning to develop the expected decorum, in manner of dressing and disposition, involves understanding what the space prohibits and suggests. The ship as a masculine space, that constructs female seafarers as an irregularity or somewhat against the norm enforce, if not fortify, gender hierarchy. This can be seen in the demeanour of female seafarers whose professional competence as equal peers need to be proven. Momoko (2011) for instance showed how female seafarers try to actively exhibit masculine traits as part of performing their roles on board. The need to provide proof that they deserve to be on board is constantly felt and undertaken (see also Belcher et al. 2003). Part of the dynamics of token women in a male-environment is the exaggeration of commonalities and differences by both men and women due in part to the low number of women that makes them more visible and therefore more

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open for scrutiny (Kanter, 1977). As a female outsider to the ship, part of my emotional labouring involves the availability to contend with such intrusiveness to avoid social isolation and therefore further confinement. 'Undoing' gender as part of gender rituals on board and the assurance of being accepted as part of the group may not align all the time. It is tenuous and simultaneously contested and modified in a number of ways. This resonates with seafarers' formative years as cadets in maritime campuses.

In terms of socially mixing on board, drawing the line either by virtue of my researcher or gender status made some situations unpredictably challenging to handle:

> I got invited by the Captain to go to his cabin after dinner to watch a movie. After some hesitation, I went. I noticed that the movie *Basic Instinct 2* was already playing. I asked if it was possible to change it. (Fieldnotes April 2009)

> I had a little encounter at the corridor today. I met Joseph and he again, for the third time, noticed my mole on my lips. He joked that, 'you must be a good kisser.' I mentioned in passing that he had a mole as well… (Fieldnotes April 2009)

Although I made sure that I conducted myself appropriately by not attracting too much attention as a female researcher this was fraught with challenges. Treading on delicate situations beyond one's control, if managed poorly, could be unpleasant not only for the research but also for the researched. Sampson and Thomas (2003) in conducting their shipboard study went so far as managing private spaces (such as their cabins) to deflect gender stereotypes during their on board study. They further noted that the act of establishing rapport with seafarers was quite complicated because sexism and long-term containment on board could potentially prompt seafarers to opportunistically attempt to derive some form of sexual power over female researchers. Such situational risks, or the risks brought about by one's presence on the site, could be further magnified given the potential hazards of the ship

as a dangerous setting. Managing distance by adhering to a 'shipboard wardrobe' as a female researcher made it easier to interact with seafarers in terms of getting along and establishing trust. Appearing less feminine by managing appearance on board was similarly practiced by female seafarers to emphasize professionalism and be comfortable in interacting with male seafarers (Kitada, 2010; 2013). Performing according to the demands of the ship, that is, dressing accordingly, likewise reflects West and Zimmerman's (1987) 'doing gender.' To the extent that it is perceived as useful to the performance of a particular role, 'doing gender' takes into account the space in which it is performed but in the masculine space of the ship, it is not as acquiescent to change and accommodation. The ambivalent and contradictory way by which gender differential is rubbed out and reproduced simultaneously highlight that gender relations are difficult to manage.

5.0 Conclusion

This article explored the dynamics of gender relations in maritime academies and on merchant vessels given the atypical female presence. The pervading influence of military serves as the backdrop by which education, training and practices are constituted through gender. The notion of hegemonic masculinity was a useful analytical tool by which to understand the ways in which male seafarers maintain a leading and dominant status over female cadets and researchers. By exploring the patterns of practices enacted in both the contexts of the ship and the colleges, this paper provided additional empirical evidence on how HM in the seafaring profession is maintained but not without contradictions due to attempts to simultaneously rub out and reinforce gender differentials. Rubbing out gender distinction by officially requiring female cadets to dress and be addressed as a man but at the same time separating them in dormitories thereby excluding them from the informal masculine practice such as hazing reinforces gender distinction. This shows how female

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cadets' training remains perceived as deficient for shipboard life because of the ambivalent ways by which these are formally and informally conducted.

The ethnographic detail of a female researcher's presence showed a similar scenario on ships where efforts of rubbing out gender difference is simultaneously reinforced. In particular, how underplaying femininity or emphasizing masculinity remains unsuccessful as the effects of hegemonic gender regime seemed to oppose it. Controlling gender is thus difficult for it is ascribed as it is performative. The small but growing presence of female seafarers in 'male' spaces of the ship highlights the precarious situation of women seafarers in the face of contradictions in the way gender is managed. The continual demonstration and affirmation of the 'can-do' attitude, risk-taking and physical toughness subject women to masculine criteria that can be performed (and sometimes exceeded) yet women remain downgraded ideologically for they can never 'man up' enough. Male seafarers' complicities to remove gender distinction and accommodate female seafarers show that HM's control is not total, yet practices that serve to control women to act like men prevails. As seafarers' HM controls gender politics on board, women's efforts to carve out work identity is consistently resisted, and this calls for effective change in education and training of seafarers.

This paper resonates with the wider literature dealing with masculine work spaces and their effects on lived experiences of workers across gender. The findings of this study suggest convergences of experiences in male-dominated professions (e.g., Holdaway and Parker, 1998; Newell et al., 1995) and reflections of female researchers' challenges in the field (Rowe, 2014; McQueeney, 2013; Gurney 1985) in particular the novice (Lumsden 2009; Bruni 2006). This also has other implications related to gender mimicking such that imitating male practices to project masculine countenance poses grave concerns on their health (Hansen and Jensen, 1998). Further studies in exploring range of masculinities on board across ethnicities can give more nuanced understanding of gender relations on board. The

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paper did not elaborate on how presence of female seafarers seems to reduce stress by relaxing the work mentality of those on board. From an ethnographic standpoint, this can be part of future studies on seafarers' masculinities in terms of how counter-hegemonic tactics are employed to cope on board.

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