



Ships have no gender? Displaying gender in a maritime museum

We examine the display of gender as an abstract concept in the Maritime Museum of Finland. It is compared with the portrayal of workforce control in *Portsmouth Panopticon* exhibition.

Women's shipboard uniforms on display at the Maritime Museum of Finland's main exhibition.

From left to right: purser's assistant, sea captain, cabin hostess, waitress and cruise manager. All uniforms originate from the latter part of the 20th century.



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We examine the representation of gender issues in the main exhibition of the Maritime Museum of Finland. The structure of the exhibition and the way maritime history is understood, as a technological subject, tend to marginalise women as seafarers and gender and social history issues in general. This reinforces the myth of the seafarer as white, male and heterosexual. The problems of representing gender in the exhibition stem largely from a lack of content management at the scripting stage. Abstract concepts such as gender are challenging to display in a museum environment which relies heavily on material objects. We present two approaches to solving the issue of abstract concepts. In the Maritime Museum of Finland, tour guides use storytelling to concretise the issue of gender. The guides were interviewed about their experiences of interpreting the exhibition content to the public. As a second case study we use *Portsmouth Panopticon*, a small poster exhibition about the industrial revolution of the navy. The exhibition portrays the abstract and controversial idea of workforce control as a central element of industrialisation. The concept was embedded in the exhibition from the outset, and we argue that strong content management was the key to the success of this exhibition.



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