

## Chapter 12

# Epilogue: A Research Agenda for Putting Gender Through Its Paces

Kirrilly Thompson and Miriam Adelman

The introduction to this volume recalled some of the most stereotypical ways in which human-horse relationships have been popularly gendered. These included ideas about sensual women seeking self-pleasure through their intimate relationship with the horse juxtaposed with rough men using the horse to publicly enhance their personal power whilst simultaneously using the horse for greater means such as expanding the nation. However, the contributions to this volume have shown that within the context of equestrian sport, women and men find and deliberately locate themselves in positions from which gender stereotypes are renegotiable and renegotiated. Be they male or female, polo player, fiction reader or bullfighter, riders contribute to and experience gender through their resources and personal desires and skills – regardless of how differentially these may be allocated. Sometimes, equestrian sports facilitate expressions of normative masculinity and femininity which reinforce tradition or the *status quo* (Chap. 7 by Gilbert and Gillett, Chap. 5 by Adelman and Becker, Chap. 4 by Butler, this volume). At other times, equestrianism facilitates open defiance to cultural norms and social legacies of inequality, thereby providing a platform for renegotiation and change (Chap. 3 by Dashper, Chap. 5 by Adelman and Becker, Chap. 11 by Knijnik, this volume). In addition to demonstrating the ways in which the male/female and masculine/feminine binary can be challenged in, by and through equestrian sports, the contributions to this volume also illustrated some of the ways in which women and men reveal themselves as complex social subjects whose class, race/ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual

---

K. Thompson, Ph.D. (✉)  
Appleton Institute,  
CQUniversity Australia, 44 Greenhill Road, Wayville, South Australia 5034, Australia  
e-mail: kirrilly.thompson@cqu.edu.au

M. Adelman  
Graduate Program in Sociology/Undergraduate Program in Social Sciences,  
Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil  
e-mail: miriamad2008@gmail.com

orientation and localisation within the geopolitics of the world also defy binary prisons. Sometimes, it is these complex articulations of multiple, constructed and shifting ‘differences’ (Stuart Hall 1996; Brah 1996) that make all the difference in the lived worlds of individuals, including those who live with and through horses.

The contributions to this volume support the idea that gender *always* matters. However, in what ways do interactions with horses and within the institutional, social and cultural context of the equestrian world affect *how* it matters? In the pages that follow, we extend the preceding chapters to suggest some salient areas for further research that can deepen our understanding of gender and equestrian sport.<sup>1</sup> Our suggestions are made with the aim of developing breadth in studies of gender and equestrian sports. However, this should not occur at the exclusion of depth. With this in mind, it is important to note that our suggestions for further research do not preclude research into the same topics and areas represented in this volume. Extended research can be achieved by considering the same activities in different places or by conducting research at different times, with different methods and different researchers (with different genders). These ideas are developed in more detail below.

## Areas for Further Research

The chapters in this volume have demonstrated that horses, horse sports and human-horse interactions provide illuminating areas for thinking through gender. This has included women and men’s relationships to horses through history, work and leisure; current gendered interaction within equestrian sport; considerations of the meaning that ‘feminisation’ and other reconfiguration processes have for women, men and equestrian institutions; literary narratives as forms of discursive production on gender and horses; embodied experiences of riding; changing masculinities; and women and men as professional and amateur equestrian athletes, amongst others. None of the contributions considered gender in isolation from other sociopolitical dimensions. This is because gender intersects – and is intersected by – a breadth of social, political and economic issues that are touchstones in the social sciences and unavoidable in equestrian worlds. The ability of the preceding contributions to capture this broader context within which gender is experienced and made meaningful is a strength of this volume. To encourage further fortification, we have identified ten different areas of further research (in no particular order); class, culture, risk, parity and equality, aesthetics, sector, identity, age, the environment, and the media. Addressing these interrelated areas will not only enrich our understandings of gender and equestrian sport, it may contribute to a broad literature on our social world today.

---

<sup>1</sup>See Thompson (2010) for suggestions on further research on human-horse relationships in general.

## *Class*

Class has been a mainstay in research about the role of the horse in human society. The industrialised world has witnessed the role of the horse change from a beast of burden and transport working alongside the human proletariat, through to a status symbol of the leisured class (Raber and Tucker 2005), and more recently as a source of leisure and competition that is accessible by most social classes in one way or another. Cassidy's (2002) research into horse racing in the United Kingdom demonstrates how different kinds of interactions with the same kinds of horses (the English thoroughbred) characterise social hierarchies. Not only have horses been able to confer class status and identity to humans but humans have socially constructed different classes of horses (Garkovich 1983; Thompson 2012).

Mason (2000) considers class, gender and equestrianism in research comparing the disciplining of horses and the shaping of femininity in a nineteenth-century novel, whilst Landry (2001) explores instances of 'gender bending' that were accessible through horse riding to middle and upper class women travelling in the eighteenth century. A stimulating avenue for further research into gender, equestrianism and class is the impact of socio-economically defined class on the experience of riding, which is usually understood as personal, experiential, sensory, intercorporeal and phenomenological – in short, transcendent of external factors and free from the limitations posed by material wealth. However, money can facilitate access to better education, better horses, more child-minding, more time to ride and so on. The question thus becomes, can money or status buy a 'better' human-horse relationship? There may also be an impact of emotional and intellectual skills on one's 'experience of horse'. The role of (and relationship between) economic/material factors and personal attributes in relation to human experiences of interactions with horses requires greater delineation. As male and female bodies are constructed, perceived and treated differently, and subject to different pressures which detract from opportunities to ride and 'experience horse', future research in the area of class, access and personal experience should be conducted with an awareness of the kinds of gender issues discussed throughout this volume.

## *Culture*

In this volume, class and gender were considered in a number of chapters: Coulter's, Butler's, and Gilbert and Gillett's discussions of particular types of riding (polo, racing, show jumping) that require particular types of (gendered) social and economic capital, together with Adelman and Becker's study of popular rodeo and Knijnik's consideration of race and gender in dressage. These chapters also engaged in discussion of the ways in which the class-gender relationship intersects race, ethnicity and cultural meanings in the creation of particular horse cultures and sub-cultures. This suggests the potential for work both within and between countries and geopolitical regions (e.g. Latin America, Northern Europe, the United States and Canada)

and would most likely point to some significant differences between countries where popular, folk and peasant equestrian cultures have survived into the twenty-first century and those countries that follow the route that Hedenborg's historical work (2007) has described, where modern forms of sport and leisure riding have dominated. Take, for example, traditional 'fantasia riding' in North Africa where young women are currently daring to and succeeding in setting up their own teams (Guedda 2006). This form of equestrianism coexists alongside horse racing and elite European-style equestrian competition (Belabbas 2012). Of related interest is the translation or dislocation of traditional forms of riding from their 'home' culture. This includes Spanish *doma vaquera* riding being practised in England, or bloodless bullfighting being undertaken in California. Whilst these forms of equestrian activities have been adopted outside of their sociocultural and geographic origins, other activities such as polo-cross, which is popular in Australia, have failed to gain popularity elsewhere.

As traditions are 're-signified', or as they come into contact with other equestrian cultures – as equestrian practices travel around the globe – how do dislocations, relocations and processes of 'cultural translation' produce and make possible differently gendered configurations? The movement or otherwise of equestrian traditions, sports and activities could be researched within a context of class and colonialism, if not of post-colonialism and globalisation. Again, gendered issues cannot be overlooked when considering cultural differences betwixt and between equestrian activities, performances and competitions, especially as gender is expressed in and through cultural norms.

## **Risk**

The size and weight of horses, their herd animal flight instinct and their unpredictable behaviour have implications for human and horse safety (Thompson 2011). Horse riding has a reputation for being a particularly risky activity, especially the Olympic discipline of eventing. One study suggested that the cross-country phase of eventing was more risky than motorbike riding (Paix 1999), although this risk was calculated per riding hours rather than per jumping attempt. The risk involved in horse riding is aptly demonstrated by studies of horse-related injuries and fatalities (Bixby-Hammett 2007; Cripps 2000; Exadaktylos et al. 2002; Murray et al. 2005; Paix 1999; Singer et al. 2003; Thomas et al. 2006). It drives the 'safety first' approach of horse organisations and educational institutions (Finch and Watt 1996; Myers 2005; Wofford 2008) that is sweeping industrialised, safety-conscious nations and can be understood as an aspect of modern 'risk society' (Beck 1992). The risk of death to rider and horse is striking in activities such as the mounted bullfight described by Thompson (Chap. 8, this volume). However, there is a need to understand the actual and perceived risks in more mundane equestrian activities, where death might not have horns and cloven feet but lurks in all human-horse interactions.

The risks of riding and interacting with horses require that riders be mindful about their personal safety. There is a need to understand how riders incorporate knowledge of risk and safety into their daily and competitive interactions with horses, especially from a sports psychology perspective whereby people want to be safe, but don't want to 'tempt fate' by thinking about what could go wrong. Eventing riders, for example, often talk about being aware of and mitigating risks but emphasise the need to clear their minds of any potential negative incidents whilst riding a cross-country course (Thompson and Nesci 2011). The tension between positive thinking and risk awareness amongst horse riders requires further understanding, especially in relation to how it informs decision-making and what it can reveal about the cultural superstitions of horse riders. There is also a need to understand how issues of risk and safety are embodied by riders in their everyday comportment around horses and how such knowledge is transmitted. This includes research into the ways in which safety-related knowledge and practices become tacit, such as a rider's ability to 'read' individual horses beyond more generic knowledge of horse body language (Ainslie and Ledbetter 1980), towards work emphasising the mutual co-construction of corporeal relations (Brandt 2004; Hempfling 2001). Human-equine communication skills take on special importance in areas of equine tourism where providers need to observe and manage interactions between humans and horses with little to no pre-existing relationship, skill or experience. It is also crucial in equine-assisted intervention contexts.

At the same, the very issue of *risk averse culture*, as it has been produced by contemporary society (and has been a part of modern sportisation processes, which from the outset have had – as Norbert Elias eloquently argued – a 'domesticating' or civilising thrust), raises questions about how sporting rules, regulations and concerns lead to forms of bureaucratisation and control that some riders may feel as placing unacceptable limits on their pleasure and freedom. In many Latin American countries, for example, popular equestrian practices lie outside the realm of control of formal sports institutions and thus provide their incumbents – men and women – with the opportunity to re-enact cultural myths of frontier freedom. In fact, Sabine Grataloup has suggested that riding today is characterised by a paradox represented by contrasting needs for safety and for the 'search for freedom, independence and pleasure' (2012: 53). Following her lead, research can be done to look at how 'risk control' may conflict with riders' desires for adventure. Comparative studies might reveal different or similar attitudes regarding the 'costs and benefits' of safety and risk awareness and regulation. As one Catalonian equestrian entrepreneur who runs a small stable grumbled, in reference to increasing regulation of Spanish equestrian practice along Northern European guidelines, 'they won't let you do anything anymore' (Adelman 2011). Alternatively, there may be unintended consequences of 'risk compensation' whereby riders engage in more risky behaviours because of the faith they place in their protective equipment. As women are so frequently considered to be more risk averse than men, research on risk and gender in equestrian contexts will be well situated to comment on some specific ways in which the horse might moderate risk concerns for men and women. For example, do riders displace risk concerns from their person to their horse, do they carry dual concerns for self

and horse, or does the horse provide an additional source of risk? Finally, how might these concerns differ between male and female riders (of different class, age, etc.)?

### *Parity and Equality*

Equestrians are quick to point out that their sport is one of the few arenas where men and women can compete on equal terms. Without trivialising the importance of this in a sporting world where the segregation of males and females has normalised ideas of women's physical inferiority to men, it is important to critically consider the idea of equestrian sports as a level playing field for men and women in relation to ideas about equal opportunity. That is, do male and female riders have equal opportunities to reach the same levels of competition? Authors Coulter (Chap. 10), Dashper (Chap. 3), Butler (Chap. 4), Gilbert and Gillett (Chap. 7) and Adelman and Becker (Chap. 5, this volume) have addressed these issues in relation to specific fields of equestrian practice. Much more research is required into the impact of marriage, children, family and work-life balance on women's participation in equestrian activities and the extent to which these responsibilities impact women's ambitions and opportunities. Within the context of heterosexual marriages with children, for example, a mother may find herself strapping for her children and male partner at competitions instead of competing herself. Alternatively, riders may find themselves with children who are disinterested in horses. Depending on how much support they receive from partners or family members and what other opportunities they have for sharing family interests, this may have repercussions for the ways in which male and female riders see themselves within the family unit and how they figure their equestrian interests amongst their other responsibilities and interests. Having a 'horsey' life that is kept separate from other family members may be a source of refuge for some and isolation for others.

The impacts of variable support for a woman's involvement in horse riding are particularly salient when female equestrians are pregnant. Pregnancy is a time when women find themselves more than ever under the medical gaze and subject to social surveillance from the public as well as moral judgement from family, friends and strangers. They find themselves obliged to take expert advice about what does and does not constitute risky behaviour that might impact their children (Lupton 1999 : 88–90). A woman's decision about whether or not to ride whilst pregnant (and after) – and if so, what kind of riding and for how long – can result in intense judgement from others, including other female riders. Where women do not share equestrian interests with partners, friends or family, they may find themselves isolated, misunderstood or coerced into making decisions they do not agree with or decisions which affect their quality of life. For instance, their decision to continue riding during pregnancy may be construed by others as being selfish or choosing horses over their unborn child. The tensions around the primacy or value that riders attribute to equestrianism – combined with their frustration

about how this is perceived by others – is summarised in the following popular bumper sticker: ‘horses are my life, but my life is about more than horses’.

Research is also needed on the impact of women’s participation in equestrian activities on their marriage, children, family and work-life balance.<sup>2</sup> Much equestrian humour in the public domain speaks to husbands who feel that they take ‘second place’ to their wives’ equestrian interests (‘horse widowers’) and women who denounce housework and traditional roles in order to fully and unashamedly participate in equestrian activities. In the latter, women seem to be deliberately challenging stereotypes of the ‘good housewife’. However, in terms of horse husbandry, their unwavering and selfless service to their horses can be seen to replicate a feminine ethics of care that is aligned with mostly outdated feminine ideals. For all those women who find equestrian sports a means for challenging feminine stereotypes, there are those who find ways to embrace traditional norms of femininity through designer equestrian clothing, diamond embellishments and so forth. One might well ask to what extent the horse is incidental to such expressions of individual femininities, or the extent to which horses facilitate these expressions in ways that other relations and engagements do not. As interactions with horses can require ‘being tough’ or ‘a tomboy’ (such as lifting heavy feed, getting one’s hands dirty, being outdoors), some feminine ‘horse girl’ constructions may be offset by more masculine ones. This may result in female riders feeling more comfortable to express or experiment with gendered stereotypes with which they wouldn’t usually be comfortable (feminine or masculine). Regardless of their self-perceptions of being more or less masculine/feminine, riders have little influence over how their gender is perceived by others. Where there is a risk of being perceived in ways antithetical to their self-perception (e.g. the self-identified tomboy being perceived as a ‘pony mad girl’) does the equine desire and inherent equine reward lead to an acceptance of that risk, a tolerance of the undesirable, or an emancipatory lack of concern for the gendered opinion of others altogether?

Many chapters in this volume have discussed statistics on male and female participation in equestrian sports in general and at specific levels of competition or involvement. There is an implicit assumption that parity would be ideal or that women’s increased involvement in traditionally male-dominated equestrian endeavours would be positive for women and for those disciplines. However, there is a need to consider statistical representations of women in relation to the broader construction of the sport. As more women become involved and an equestrian sport is thus seen as more ‘feminised’, men who are attracted to an equestrian activity specifically because it has a masculine construction or is seen as male dominated may become disinterested in those activities, as Plymoth’s chapter on Sweden suggested (Chap. 9, this volume). In such cases, women’s success in achieving higher representational levels requires very careful interpretation, as that success may have fundamentally changed the nature and gendered meaning of that sport. Whilst higher representation might be celebrated by some, others might interpret it as

---

<sup>2</sup>Extending Price’s (2010) preliminary work.

women ‘muscling in’ or a result of men abandoning the sport. Another concern is that the increased feminisation of an equestrian sport may negatively impact its professional status, as has been identified in relation to the feminisation of teaching. Yet as Francine Deutsch (2007) alerts, an emphasis on the contradictions of feminisation processes has inserted a bias in many attempts to theorise and, more importantly, to analyse current trends, obfuscating real, albeit partial, moments of social and cultural change. The equestrian world, as the chapters of this volume have shown, is a fascinating site for revealing analysis not only of how we *do* but also *undo* gender (Deutsch 2007; Butler 2004)

In this vein, it becomes important to reconsider issues of transgression, gender bending and the challenge to heteronormativity, and their place within equestrian sport. From the contributions to this volume, it is clear that equestrian activities provide an opportunity for many women to free themselves from the restrictions of conventional gender scripts. Moreover, as Knijnik and Dashper (Chaps. 11 and 3, both this volume) have pointed out, certain equestrian activities may be the site of the performance of ‘new’, different or non-hegemonic masculinities. But can the equestrian sphere – sometimes pointed to as ‘inherently [more] democratic’ than other spheres of sporting practices – really be considered more open, democratic or even tolerant than other spheres of sporting and physical activities? Plymoth’s work (Chap. 9, this volume) portrayed gender anxieties that permeate the Swedish equestrian federation which rest on firmly conventional notions of manhood and manliness, whilst Adelman and Becker (Chap. 5, this volume) cited anxieties around ‘real men’ and ‘real women’ within a Brazilian rodeo milieu. There is certainly more research to be done on the riders who fall outside the pale of the heteronormative, and the extent to which forms of gender bending are policed, ignored or even affirmed within particular equestrian circles.

Finally, in a world where riders still debate the merits of male and female horses as competition prospects, are mares and stallions (so often relegated to the role of breeding stock) given equal opportunity to demonstrate their talent? Moreover, are horses being selectively bred to cater for more feminine or masculine markets? For example, are women considered to have the sensitivity required to settle ‘hotter’ horses or are women thought to lack the strength to ‘hold’ them? Gilbert and Gillett (2012) note the increasing importance placed on breeding for temperament in sport ponies intended for children and small adults, of whom many are women. Such gendered perceptions have implications for the ways in which horses are not only promoted, marketed, selected, sold and bred but are gendered by humans.

## *Aesthetics*

The horse might be seen to neutralise differences between women and men, through equal competition. Its body of talent, power, endurance and so forth enable humans to achieve what they cannot themselves. However, this does not mean that human bodies are irrelevant on horseback. Not only are they functional, they are



subject to aesthetic standards and ideals. With particular exclusions, an overweight, uncoordinated and undisciplined rider is still the antithesis of the effective, ideal rider. In some instances, this is the norm, as with *picadors* in the first stage of the Spanish footed bullfight. However, riders who are ‘less athletic’ members of the human species – those who are simply ‘bad at sports’ or those who are older or physically disabled – may find unique freedom and pleasure through their riding, through their re-embodiment as a member of a horse-human pair. Aesthetic considerations therefore emphasise the intercorporeality of an embodied relationship between riders that requires further consideration in relation to male and female human bodies as much as male and female equine bodies.

### ***Sector: Leisure, Amateur and Professional and Public and Private Sphere***

One interesting consequence of the so-called level playing field for women and men in equestrian sports and activities is the fact that men compete against women. In such instances, masculinity is often at stake. This may explain the fact that ‘[m]ost leisure and amateur riders are female, whilst most professional riders are male’ (van Dierendonck and Goodwin 2005: 74). Specifically, it can also account for the high representation, in certain contexts, of women as ‘behind-the-scenes’ stable hands track riders but their low representation as professional jockeys. Whether self-imposed or a result of patriarchy, the low representation of women in some equestrian arenas may result from men’s desire to avoid direct competition with women, to compromise on homosocial behaviours and practices or to put their masculinity publicly ‘on the line’.

The majority of statistics about participation in equestrian sports come from membership and horse registration databases of official bodies. As a result, little is known about the number or gender of ‘leisure’ riders who are disinterested in or who deliberately avoid being affiliated with any formal group or equestrian activity. These riders may represent a significant number – and, as suggested above, are likely to be significantly female. Given the centrality that leisure studies have taken in contemporary social thought and the renewed attention that gender scholars have placed on leisure, exploring women’s and men’s choice of equestrian sport as a leisure activity might bring a new empirical focus to a burgeoning field of scholarship. Leisure activities, after all, are now recognised as a key realm in which people forge their identities – often with greater enthusiasm than within the sphere of work, the privileged focus of much earlier sociological thought. Leisure is also a terrain in which to study family life and conflict, bringing gendered (and generational) issues of ‘sense of entitlement’ and allocation of familial resources into focus (as discussed above in relation to parity and equality). Comparative qualitative studies looking at the meanings and values that women and men give to equestrian leisure (as well as people of different generations, social classes, rural or urban communities, etc.) may provide unique insights into a variety of issues regarding contemporary social life, including

access to and use of a currently very cherished resource, 'free time' and its impact on equality and quality of life.

Furthermore, given that most of the public education strategies around horse health and welfare, as well as rider safety, are delivered through official channels (in countries in which such programmes exist), there is a need to better understand this potentially 'hard to reach' cohort of leisure riders. In particular, there is a need to determine how gender differently or similarly impacts their experience of equestrianism and the ways in which they engage with public education or social marketing strategies. There is an important intersection here with studies on the gendered experiences of risk and safety amongst horse riders, to be able to promote safe riding equally successfully amongst women and men.

Further research is required to more fully understand leisure riders and determine their gendered representations. Whilst leisure riders are more difficult for researchers to access than riders who are affiliated with formal bodies, equine tourism may provide one form for conducting research with leisure riders. Finally, it is important to note that leisure riding is not exclusive from amateur or professional riding. Many amateur and professional riders construct particular rides as a 'break' for themselves and their horses. These are often distinguished by a change of location or environment (such as a trail ride, or 'riding out') and a concomitant reduction in expectations of the horse's performance on those occasions (or an increased expectation in its behaviour!). In fact, horse-mediated engagements with the world create, maintain and affirm cultural identities and nationalities that are embedded within places. The impact of riding places and spaces on the emotional aspects of riding also provides an interesting arena for studying emotional geographies as they occur in human-animal relations, and where gendered elements of culture contribute to and shape those experienced spaces.

## *Identity*

Whilst the role of horses in providing a group identity and a sense of social cohesion has been explored, there has been little research on the exclusionary effects of horse people in the presence of non-horse people. Many 'horsey' readers will have experienced companions rolling their eyes and making comments such as 'here they go again talking about horses'. These reactions can have the effect of making equestrians self-conscious about how they present their equestrian involvement to others. This may be experienced differently according to the equestrian's self-perception as a leisure rider, amateur or professional, and their gender. In Brazil, although the equestrian world is by no means largely female, one might perhaps be able to suggest that it is a sport that provides many girls and women with the opportunity for identity and subculture building similar to that which men have created – somewhat exclusively – around soccer (Adelman 2010; Bellos 2002). Thompson (1999) has written about the impact of the juvenile stereotype of horse-mad girls on the ways in which she disclosed her equestrian involvement when she was in her 20s, as a

'dressage rider'. However, a decade later, she finds herself having to offset the stereotype of 'the dressage queen'. Such concerns of negative connotations of equestrianism (e.g. as 'girly', self-absorbed or 'prissy') may be less salient for men, with some exceptions such as the Swedish case described by Plymoth (Chap. 9, this volume). They may also be discipline specific, whereby dressage is seen as more feminine than eventing, as well as level specific, whereby international level dressage may be seen as more appropriate for a male rider than lower level competition. The creation, experience, acceptance or refusal of positive and negative identities of 'horse rider' in relation to different equestrian sports and disciplines requires further exploration from a gendered perspective.

## *Age*

Research into equestrian sports and gender should also give particular attention to age. Not only do women and men compete against one another in many equestrian sports (especially the 'modern' Olympic events), there is a greater diversity of age amongst equestrian competitors than is frequently found amongst swimmers, track and field athletes and gymnasts for example (at least at elite levels). In fact, there is 'a substantial number [of female riders] competing into advanced age' (Meyers et al. 1999: 399). At the recent London Olympics, Hiroshi Hoketsu represented Japan in dressage at the age of 71. In fact, the skill, timing and feel that equestrians are considered to develop over time are often valued above the physical flexibility and physical resilience that is associated with youth. Moreover, this is interrelated with equestrian discourses about 'lightness', 'ease' and 'submission' as the ideal characteristics of a rider-horse relationship (rather than a relationship based on force). However, the physical risks to riders are considered to increase with age. Amateur show jumpers in Europe, for example, were found to be concerned about increasing recovery time from injury as they aged (Thompson and Birke 2013).

In the same way that Thompson (Chap. 8, this volume) concludes that horse does not replace or erase gender, neither does it replace or erase age. Still, there is a need to understand how age and gender interact and intersect 'on horseback' and what abilities and experiences they generate. As 'cultural meanings of animals and gender are complex and powerful' (Birke 2002: 431), so too are cultural meanings and experiences of age. There is therefore a need to further explore the construction and experience of age and life stages by equestrians. The impact of age on risk perception is particularly interesting, especially where women may delay intense riding or competition until after child-rearing, or where they may reduce or abandon their involvement in more risky equestrian sports altogether after having children, so that their ability to care for others is not jeopardised (see 'parity and equality' above). On the other hand, there is no particular age associated with a performance 'peak' for equestrians that might conflict with a woman's reproductive peak as can be the case with other sports. However, further research is required on female equestrienne's decisions to delay or otherwise alter their child-bearing and child-rearing

activities due to their equestrian concerns, expectations or responsibilities. Overall, the relative irrelevance of age in equestrianism compared with other sports makes it a fascinating case study for further research into age, sport and gender, especially given that the experience of ageing has specific gendered dimensions.

### ***The Environment: Rural and Urban***

At the same time as producing a sense of human identity ('horse people'), human-horse interactions contribute to senses of place and environment. The horse cannot only be considered symbolically as a part of the natural environment but also as a 'vehicle' for its experience. That is, the horse affords the mobility required to experience the environment in ways that cars cannot. However, the ways in which interactions with horses construct experiences of space and the environment can be understood through research into human-automobile relations. For example, Sheller explores the emotional and phenomenological aspects of the driver-car relationship:

[T]he car is deeply entrenched in the ways in which we inhabit the physical world. It not only appeals to an apparently 'instinctual' aesthetic and kinaesthetic sense, but it transforms the way we sense the world and the capacities of human bodies to interact with that world through the visual, aural, olfactory, interoceptive and proprioceptive senses. We not only feel the car; but we feel through the car and with the car (2004: 228).

Likewise, horse people feel place through and with the horse. However, there is a fundamental difference between the mobility afforded by a car and the mobility afforded by a horse:

Horses extend their human riders into the world without enclosing them, something machines seldom do. Through this process people become a part of the equine animal's forward thrust, reconfirming the human status as part of nature (Lawrence 1985: 195).

Further research is required into the ways in which horse riders (and carriage drivers) experience 'nature', the environment and the outdoors (see 'Sector' above). This might be in relation to riding horses through particular natural spaces such as parks or forests, living further from the city than desired so as to be able to keep one's own horses, or to riders who live in urban centres and travel to peri-urban or rural locations to access horses (each with its own impact on the environment through commuting, city planning and land management). Researchers should consider the impact of the horse on different experiences of places, as well as the role played by gender, especially where women have been traditionally associated with nature but where 'rugged' and 'brave' men have been more socially constructed as comfortable being in, traversing and renegotiating nature.

Notions of what constitutes 'natural', rural and urban spaces are neither static nor unchanging. Although historical discussion on the 'changing function of the horse' in Western industrial societies – from rural work animal to the object of affection and attention of urban sports folk – seems to be premised on unambiguous distinctions between rural and urban, contemporary studies emphasise that this very separation of

social life into clear-cut rural–urban dichotomies must be reconsidered. Scholars around the world are increasingly speaking of ‘*nouveaux ruraux*’, new ruralities, or of a ‘rural–urban continuum’ (Siqueira and Osório 2001; Silva 1997) in which agriculturally based life in the countryside increasingly gives way to a new scenario of ‘pluriactivities’. Amongst these new activities, tourism and leisure services that target urban residents stand out. There is much to be researched as to how these changes have impacted the horse industry, creating new demands and new markets, and how gender relations unfold within these contexts. Questions include: How do new urban–rural connections affect the gender balance in terms of work, sport and culture? Is feminisation of the horse world promoted? What kinds of jobs are created, for whom are they suited and who tends to want them or get them? In countries where rural equestrian tradition has been largely male, does new urban–rural interconnectedness promote cultural openings that favour greater female participation in equestrian activities? And how, finally, does global equestrian interconnectedness impact these ‘local’ scenarios – rural, urban or ‘rurban’?

### ***Media Representations/Studies of Horse Sports***

There is scant literature on the representation of equestrian sports in the media and a striking dearth of research specifically on gendered representations of equestrians in media coverage (for an exception, see Haro de San Mateo 2010). This includes the broadcasting of competitions as well as documentaries of diverse sorts and the promotion of the horse industry. As they are both global and local, equestrian media provide opportunities for research that can comment on how different equestrian sports represent their male and female participants: whether sportsmen and women, horse breeders and related businesspeople, veterinarians, amateur riders or simply audiences, consumers and spectators. Throughout our years of research on equestrian sport, we have heard frequent complaints about how (comparatively) little coverage horse sports get from mainstream media. As to the quality of this coverage, for example, research on Brazilian jockeys (Adelman and Moraes 2008) and the rodeo milieu (Chap. 5 by Adelman and Becker, this volume) have shown that both mainstream and horse industry media tend to engage in compensatory or ‘apologetic’ discursive strategies when they represent female riders, using images and language that attempt to construct an aura of conventional femininity around them. We argue that these are in contrast to women’s own narratives, in which most often this concern is absent. There are also segment differences, as we have found for the Brazilian case, in which ‘country’ or rodeo publications reproduce an extremely male-centred iconography whereas horse magazines covering a wider range of equestrian sport often feature women riders, instructors and veterinarians, and may even – as one recent publication shows – seek to depict the equestrian world as not only a site of gender parity but also inherently ‘democratic’ and even ‘ecologically oriented’ (Mastrobuono 2011). As noted in Thompson’s discussion of the female bullfighter’s body being problematic for a male audience because of an inability to identify with that bodily experience

(Chap. 8, this volume, following Pink 1996), there is a critical need to understand the culturally informed gendered ways in which audiences consume, interpret and subvert discipline-specific equestrian imagery. Comparative studies within and between countries may have much to say regarding global tendencies and local contrasts. For example, the French horse magazine *Cavalière*, geared specifically towards a female readership, provides a singular example of contradictory forms of representing women in the equestrian world: a tension between promoting an image of women as competent riders and equine professionals and cultivating a 'horsey pink' subculture meant to attract and engage young girls. The same representations can be seen in advertisements for equestrian clothing and accessories. There is certainly a need for extensive and intensive research into these top-down representations and their bottom-up consumption, in different cultural contexts and media.

### ***Wrap Up: Deepening Existing Research***

The areas for further research proposed in this epilogue chapter are not new. They are the 'usual suspects' amongst the concerns of the social sciences and humanities: class, identity, age, etc. Whilst these academic fields are established in their own terms, they can benefit from research focused on equestrianism. This is because human-horse relations, like other examples of close partnerships, demand that *the relation* be acknowledged and taken into account. For example, trust and risk can be understood as distributed betwixt and between horse and rider (Thompson and Birke 2013). The experience of risk, as well as riders' experience of 'horse', is unavoidably gendered, not to mention relational.

The specific field of sports studies also has much to gain from studies into equestrian sports. As argued by Haraway, 'the relation [is] the smallest unit of being and of analysis' (2007: 165). By default, horse riding is a team sport: a team of human and horse. That this is obvious in equestrian sports where humans simply cannot compete without horses prompts a consideration of ways in which other types of athletes are inseparable from broader networks and relations with other non-humans, including equipment such as ropes, running shoes and balls, as well as other humans such as coaches, team members, competitors and officials (Thompson and Birke 2013). Whilst the chapters in this volume deal more with interpersonal relations between horse riders, the relationship between rider and horse is implicit, presupposed (Thompson 2011). As such, we recommend further research that explicitly compares equestrianism with other sports in order to disaggregate and understand the multiple and overlapping relationships in all sports – even those considered 'individual sports' and especially where relationships involve non-humans. An actor-network or science and technology studies approach would be well suited to such an endeavour.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>See Thompson (2011) for an example of this approach to human-horse-technology-emotion relations in mounted bullfighting.

Methodologically, existing and extended research into gender and equestrian sports could benefit from a range of approaches associated broadly with ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ methods. Riders can be considered from theoretical and empirical perspectives on a spectrum from micro to macro levels of experience which span individual experiences that can be accessed through interviews and phenomenological enquiry, through to broader engagements with social demographics, national sports policies/agendas and flows and processes of globalisation that can be identified through surveys and statistical research (and vice versa). Capturing the lived experience at the meso level could be achieved through ethnographic methodologies. There is also great potential in bringing equine ethnologists and veterinary scientists together in multidisciplinary research teams to produce a comprehensive and revealing analysis of the human-horse relationship within equestrian sports. Studies of the ethical dimensions of equestrian sports would benefit from this approach in particular.

Ample and contradictory processes proceed apace in the twenty-first century. They can be traced globally in economic, social and political transformation.<sup>4</sup> Locally, they also impact expressions of gender and sexuality as well as the role, construction and symbolism of the horse. Socio-economic changes and economic crises continue to impact human-human and human-horse interactions (Thompson 2012), changing notions of what constitutes and what is possible and acceptable for ‘male’, ‘female’ and ‘horse’. As we have begun to elucidate in this volume, these changes can be read in and through equines, equestrians and ‘equiworlds’. It is our conviction that the diverse contributions to this volume ask crucial questions and take foundational steps in the direction of important answers. Our hope is that we have inspired others who are moving – walking, running, galloping or riding – in a similar direction.

## References

- Adelman, M. (2010). Women who ride: Constructing identities and corporealities in equestrian sports in Brazil. In C. Grenier-Torres (Ed.), *L'identité genrée au cœur des transformations: du corps sexué au corps genré* (pp. 105–126). Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Adelman, M. (2011). *Formas (diferentes) de ser mulher: subjetividades corporificadas de participantes femininas de esportes equestres no Brasil e na Espanha* [Different ways of being a woman: Embodied subjectivities of female participants in Brazilian equestrian sport]. Paper presented at the 35th Congress ANPOCS, Caxambu, Minas Gerais, Brazil.
- Adelman, M., & Moraes, F. A. (2008). Breaking their way in: Women jockeys at the racetrack in Brazil. In M. T. Segal & V. Demos (Eds.), *Advancing gender from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries* (pp. 99–124). Bingley: Emerald.
- Ainslie, T., & Ledbetter, B. (1980). *The body language of horses: Revealing the nature of equine needs, wishes and emotions and how horses communicate them – For owners, breeders, trainers, riders and all other horse lovers*. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc.

---

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of this in relation to mounted bullfighting, see Thompson (2010).

- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Belabbas, Y. (2012, May 9–11). *The development of equestrian tourism in Algeria*. Paper presented at Equimeeting Tourisme: Cheval, Tourisme et Loisirs. Seminaire International. Saumur, France.
- Bellos, A. (2002). *Futebol: The Brazilian way of life*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Birke, L. (2002). Intimate familiarities? Feminism and human-animal studies. *Society and Animals*, 10(4), 429–436.
- Bixby-Hammett, D. M. (2007). Horse related deaths: North Carolina medical examiner's reports 1981–2005. *Equestrian Medical Safety Organisation*, XIX(2), 1–4. Source document. [http://emsaoonline.net/pdf/EMSA\\_Spring\\_2007.pdf](http://emsaoonline.net/pdf/EMSA_Spring_2007.pdf)
- Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities (gender, race, ethnicity)*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Brandt, K. (2004). A language of their own: An interactionist approach to human-horse communication. *Society and Animals*, 12(4), 299–316.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Cassidy, R. (2002). *The sport of kings: Kinship, class and thoroughbred breeding in Newmarket*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cripps, R. A. (2000). *Horse-related injury in Australia*. Bedford Park: Flinders University.
- Deutsch, F. (2007, February). Undoing gender. *Gender and Society*, 21(1), 106–127.
- Exadaktylos, A. K., et al. (2002). Hoof kick injuries in unmounted equestrians. Improving accident analysis and prevention by introducing an accident and emergency based relational database. *Emergency Medicine Journal*, 19(6), 573–575. doi:10.1136/emj.19.6.573.
- Finch, C., & Watt, G. (1996). *Locking the stable door: Preventing equestrian injuries*. Melbourne: Monash University Accident Research Centre.
- Garkovich, L. E. (1983). *Horsing around with status symbols: Stratification in the horse industry*. Paper presented at the Rural Sociological Society (RSS), Lexington: Kentucky.
- Gilbert, M., & Gillett, J. (2012). Equine athletes and interspecies sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 47(5), 632–643. doi:10.1177/1012690211416726.
- Grataloup, S. (2012, May 9–11). *An attempt to set up a typology of equestrian tourism trekkers*. Paper presented at Equimeeting Tourisme: Cheval, Tourisme et Loisirs. Seminaire International. Saumur, France.
- Gudda, O. (2006). Moroccan women riders steal men's glory. Resource document. <http://bridlepath.wordpress.com/2006/08/09/moroccan-women-riders-steal-mens-glory/>. Accessed 2 Aug 2012.
- Hall, S. (1996). What is this 'black' in popular culture? In D. Morley & K. H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 465–475). London/New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. (2007). *When species meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haro de San Mateo, M. V. d. (2010). La importancia de los números especiales “fin de Temporada” de la revista 6toros6 como fuente de Información especializada para la práctica Periodística. *Anales de documentación*, 13, 81–102.
- Hedenborg, S. (2007). The popular horse: From army to agriculture and leisure. Resource document. *Idrottsforum*. [www.idrottsforum.org/.../hedenborg/hedenborg](http://www.idrottsforum.org/.../hedenborg/hedenborg). Accessed 16 May 2012.
- Hempfling, K. (2001). *Dancing with horses: The art of body language*. North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Publishing.
- Landry, D. (2001). Horsy and persistently queer: Imperialism, feminism and bestiality. *Textual Practice*, 15(3), 467–485.
- Lawrence, E. A. (1985). *Hoofbeats and society: Studies of human-horse interactions*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lupton, D. (1999). *Risk*. London: Routledge.
- Mason, J. (2000). Animal bodies: Corporeality, class, and subject formation in the wide, wide world. *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 54(4), 503–533.
- Mastrobuono, M. (2011, May). “Praia, não! O programa é cavalgada!” [Not to the beach! Let's go trailriding!]. *Revista Horse*, 28–36.



- Meyers, M. C., et al. (1999). Mood and psychological skills of elite and sub-elite equestrian athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 22(3), 399.
- Murray, J., et al. (2005). Risk factors for cross-country horse falls at one-day events and at two-/three-day events. *Veterinary Journal*, 170(3), 318–324.
- Myers, J. (2005). *Horse safe: A complete guide to equine safety*. Collingwood: Landlinks Press.
- Paix, B. R. (1999). Rider injury rates and emergency medical services at equestrian events. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 33(1), 46–48.
- Pink, S. (1996). Breasts in the bullring: Female physiology, female bullfighters and competing femininities. *Body and Society*, 2(1), 45–64.
- Price, B. (2010, February). Investigating the existence of a reverse spillover hypothesis. Serious leisure and the negotiation of work. ANZALS biennial conference, Brisbane.
- Raber, K., & Tucker, T. J. (Eds.). (2005). *The culture of the horse: Status, discipline, and identity in the early modern world*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sheller, M. (2004). Automotive emotions: Feeling the car. *Theory Culture Society*, 21(4–5), 221–242. doi:10.1177/0263276404046068.
- Silva, J. G. (1997). O Novo Rural Brasileiro [The new Brazilian rural]. *Revista Nova Economia*, Belo Horizonte.
- Singer, E., et al. (2003). A retrospective case-control study of horse falls in the sport of horse trials and three-day eventing. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 35(2), 139–145.
- Siqueira, D., & Osório, R. (2001). *O Conceito do Rural* [The concept of the rural]. Brasília: Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Brasília.
- Thomas, K. E., et al. (2006). Non-fatal horse related injuries treated in emergency departments in the United States, 2001–2003. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 40(7), 619–626. doi:10.1136/bjism.2006.025858.
- Thompson, K. (1999). *A dance of discipline: The disciplinary aesthetic of the kür (freestyle dressage to music)*. Adelaide: University of Adelaide.
- Thompson, K. (2010). Narratives of tradition: The invention of mounted bullfighting (*rejoneo*) as “the newest but also the oldest”. *Social Science History*, 34(4), 523–561.
- Thompson, K. (2011). Theorising rider-horse relations: An ethnographic illustration of the centaur metaphor in the Spanish bullfight. In N. Taylor & T. Signal (Eds.), *Theorising animals* (pp. 221–253). Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Thompson, K. (2012). Classy performances: The performance of class in the Andalusian bullfight from horseback (*rejoneo*). *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 13(2), 167–188.
- Thompson, K., & Birke, L. (2013). The horse has got to want to help: Human-animal habituses and networks in amateur show jumping. In M. Gilbert & J. Gillett (Eds.), *Animals, Sport and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Thompson, K., & Nesci, C. (2011). *Risky relations: The rider-horse relationship and risk perception amongst a group of eventers*. Paper presented at the XXIV European Society for Rural Sociology Congress, Chania, Crete.
- van Dierendonck, M., & Goodwin, D. (2005). Social contact in horses: Implications for human-horse interactions. In F. de Jonge & R. van den Bos (Eds.), *The human-animal relationship: Forever and a day* (pp. 65–81). Assen: Royal Van Gorcum.
- Wofford, J. (2008). Are you qualified—or are you READY? Everyone – Especially the rider – Has a part in making eventing safer. *Practical Horseman*, 20–23.