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4 “Men fall like boiled eggs. Women fall like raw eggs” Civilised female bodies and gender
5 relations in British National Hunt Racing

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Abstract

This purpose of this paper is to contribute to the research on the gendered nature of equestrian sports and discuss how power relations continue to position females on the margins of National Hunt Racing. In the UK National Hunt Racing is the most male dominated form of racing; at the time of writing, 100 males hold a professional jockey licence, compared to just 4 females (The Professional Jockeys Association, 2015). In this paper we draw on figurational sociology, specifically the concepts of the civilised body, interdependence and habitus to offer a critical analysis of the gendered experiences of 8 amateur and professional female jockeys. The experiences of female jockeys cannot be understood without considering the networks of interdependencies with trainers, owners, male jockeys, breeders, and the wider racing industry. We consider how early involvement in the figuration through family ties supports the development of a gendered racing habitus which influences the social identities of female jockeys who normalise the limitations of female jockeys. Civilised female bodies are positioned in the figuration as weaker than males and needing protection from potentially risky horses. We argue that safe horses are chosen by trainers and owners and this limits the opportunity and number of rides for female jockeys and these (gendered) decisions obscure issues of power that enable male jockeys to dominate in the National Hunt figuration.

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7 **Keywords**

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10 Civilised Bodies · Gendered Bodies· National Hunt Racing· Gender Relations· Jockeys

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1 **Introduction**

2 The old horseman's saying: "Men fall like boiled eggs. Women fall like raw eggs." (Baker,
3 2014) highlights the current and historical concerns about the female body and its ability to
4 endure the demands of National Hunt (NH) racing. National Hunt (also referred to globally as
5 Jump Racing) racing has events from 2 to 4 miles that include a series of either steeplechase
6 fences or hurdles (McManus et al, 2013) and differs from flat racing with jockeys specialising
7 in one form of racing This paper offers a critical analysis of the gendered experiences of female
8 NH Jockeys . In the UK, at the time of writing 100 males hold a professional jockey licence,
9 compared to just 4 females (The Professional Jockeys Association, 2015). The dominance of
10 males in NH jockeys is perceived as naturally occurring as there is an assumption that female
11 bodies are weaker and less biologically suited to the demands of NH racing. The growth in
12 research on gender and equestrian sports is due to three interrelated factors which make the
13 sport an interesting analysis for the study of gender relations (i) the relationship between a
14 human athlete and a horse, and the role of the horse as a significant factor in jockeys' success
15 (Butler, 2014) (ii) it is one of a few sports in which men and women compete together and race
16 against one another, (iii) racing is an industry as well as a sport (Cassidy, 2002). The racing
17 figuration includes a network of interdependent relations including jockeys, breeders, trainers,
18 owners and punters (McManus, et al 2013). Given the relatively unique position of
19 equestrianism for the study of gender relations, research has to date focused on a broad range
20 of issues. These include numerical patterns in male and female participation (Hedenborg and
21 White, 2012), comparative examples from Sweden and UK (Hedenborg, 2015), experiences of
22 female jockeys in Brazil (Adelman and Moraes, 2008), harness racing (Larsen, 2015), the
23 theory of established and outsiders and female experiences of flat racing figuration (Velija and
24 Flynn 2010), the feminisation of equestrianism, exploration of femininity and masculinity in
25 jockey environments (Butler 2012) and the representation of masculinity and femininity in

1 horse journals (Plymouth, 2012). This research provides an understanding of how equestrian
2 sports have historically been and continue to be gendered.

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4 Our paper contributes to this knowledge by considering a form of racing that in the UK is the
5 most male dominated, arguably most resistant to female participation. It continues to be widely
6 perceived as the most demanding form of equestrianism embodying ‘a specific form of
7 masculinity characterised by mental and physical toughness, strength and stigma’ (Butler and
8 Charles, 2012:684). National Hunt Racing is described as an exciting and risky form of racing,
9 ‘jump racing is arguably the most life-encompassing sport there is: it involves man, beast,
10 nature and money - and is a sport of both life and death’ (Brown, 2002). Both risk and strength
11 are characteristics most associated with successful male jockeys (Butler and Charles, 2012).
12 There are higher injury rates amongst NH jockeys; from 1975-2000 the fall rate was higher in
13 NH racing (6.8%) compared to (0.44%) flat racing (McCroory et al, 2016). The focus on
14 strength and risk, alongside the higher injury rate, are all factors which continue to support the
15 dominance of male jockeys in NH racing. In the following section we outline this framework
16 for our analysis of gender relations focusing on the concept of figurations, habitus, shame and
17 civilising processes.

18

19 **Figurational sociology and gender relations**

20 In this section we briefly outline the key elements of figurational sociology that are adopted in
21 the paper; (1) figuration and power relations (2) habitus and shame (3) civilising process and
22 quest for excitement. Although figurational sociology has been mainly associated with research
23 exploring violence and civilising process (Atkinson, 2012), Malcolm and Mansfield (2012)
24 identify a shift in focus in recent studies that adopt a broader range of Eliasian tools to empirical
25 research. Arguably these studies have enabled ‘a more rounded appreciation of his theoretical

1 approach' (Malcolm and Mansfield, 2012:400). It is to this broader application of figurational
2 sociology that we consider this paper contributes to. In the racing figuration female jockeys are
3 part of complex networks of interdependencies with trainers, owners, other jockeys, breeders
4 and punters; therefore our approach considers how women's experiences of being a NH Jockey
5 cannot be understood without considering the networks of interdependencies they are involved
6 in.

7

8 *Figurations, Power and 'The Jockey Figuration'*

9 To understand an individual's activity it is necessary to consider how these are products of
10 mutual relationships (Atkinson, 2012). The figuration emphasises that people are part of
11 complex interdependencies more or less dependent on one another from birth, these networks
12 of interdependence emphasise the connectedness of people (Malcolm, 2013). As a consequence
13 of modern societies there is greater reciprocal dependence between groups and a strong social
14 function between groups which leads to 'diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties'
15 between groups (Mennell, 1992:109). These reflect long term processes in which *functional*
16 *democratization* is evident, a term used to describe a process of social transformation of power
17 relations between groups that typically occurs through the creation of denser webs of
18 interdependence (Dunning and Hughes, 2013). This can be seen in the jockey figuration which
19 involves a number of interdependent people including trainers, owners, jockeys, breeders, and
20 punters to name a few. Power relations between groups in this figuration are in flux and looking
21 at long term social processes there is evidence of a process of functional democratization,
22 especially in relation to gender relations, but also more broadly changes in betting industry,
23 breeding regulations, and better conditions for jockeys. There have also been significant
24 changes to the governance of horse racing in the UK. The Jockey Club emerged in 1750 as a
25 sporting organisation solely for men at this time they were able to monopolise positions,

1 resources, networks as well as shape the development of the sport and decide who was granted
2 license (Velija and Flynn, 2010). Women were not allowed to apply for a licence as a
3 professional jockeys before 1976. Changes to licensing was in part changed due to the
4 introduction of 1975 Sex Discrimination Act and pressure to comply meant women were
5 eligible to apply for professional licences on the flat from 1975 and then in 1976 for NH jockeys
6 (Butler and Charles, 2012). Despite this leading to greater organisational interdependence and
7 equity in being able to apply for a licence, few women have a professional licence (4 at the
8 time of writing). Thus changes in power relations may grant access to a process but since there
9 continues to be a small number of women who become NH jockeys there may be other
10 constraints for women to become a professional NH jockey. Recent changes to the governance
11 of the sport means licensing is now governed by the British Horse Racing Authority. The rules
12 for a license to be granted insists on jockeys meeting several conditions. One of these is that
13 the jockey must be, 'in the full-time, paid employment of a Trainer who holds a licence granted
14 by the Authority to train horses and make the application jointly with the Trainer' (BHA, 2015).
15 These conditions for applying for a licence means jockeys are highly dependent on established
16 groups, i.e. trainers and owners and power imbalances between the two generally favour the
17 trainers/owners.

18

19 *Habitus, Shame and Civilised Bodies*

20 Although habitus is often associated with the sociological tradition of Bourdieu it is found in
21 several of Elias' earlier texts. Elias considered habitus to be a durable 'second nature' (Van
22 Krieken, 1998:47). One of the fundamental differences between Bourdieu's and Elias's
23 concepts of habitus is the fact that Elias considered both psychogenic and sociogenic factors in
24 habitus. This was because in conjunction with the theory of civilising processes Elias argued
25 there is a relationship between long-term structural development of societies and long-term

1 changes in people's character or habitus (Kilminster & Mennell, 2003). Through his study of
2 sociogenesis and psychogenesis, Elias ultimately describes personality structures as socially
3 learned second natures or habituses and suggests that through ongoing socialisation processes
4 individuals learn seemingly taken-for-granted ways (i.e. habits) of experiencing, utilising and
5 interpreting bodies (Atkinson, 2012). A marker of more civilised bodies is greater self-
6 regulation of emotional responses and self-restraint and the presentation of disciplined bodies.
7 For Elias shame is one emotional response to more civilised restraint, Elias considered shame
8 as an emotional response, as fear of social degradation, or more generally 'of other people's
9 gestures of superiority' (Elias, 2000:415). Embarrassment is an associated response that refers
10 to the anxiety when one breaches social norms. Shame is conceptualised as positive and
11 negative an intended and/or unintended consequence of the relations within a figuration. It can
12 for example be used as a motivating way to encourage people to behave in more civilised ways.
13 Shame therefore can be a powerful mechanism of social control. Although this has not be
14 widely used in figural studies of gender thus far, Mierzwinski et al (2014) demonstrate
15 shame can be used as a mechanism for the social control of civilised female bodies as it offers
16 a critical framework for the analysis of responses to the emergence of female MMA and female
17 MMA artists and it related closely to the concepts of civilising processes and quest for
18 excitement.

19

20 *Civilised (female) Bodies and The Quest for Excitement*

21 Elias demonstrated how standards of behaviour and psychological make-up have changed in
22 Europe since the Middle Ages focusing on complex social processes which enabled these
23 standards of behaviour to change. This links long term structural developments in societies
24 with long-term changes in people's habitus (Dunning and Hughes, 2013). Concomitant
25 changes in personality begin with elite groups and then gradually disperse to other groups.

1 These changes can be explained through the increasing social interdependencies between
2 groups. As a consequence people are forced to pay more attention to one another and the
3 balance of control between individuals shifts from external constraint to more internalized self-
4 constraint. As Elias viewed the body as biological and social this has lead others to outline how
5 Elias work provides an understanding of the civilised rationale body (Shilling, 1999). Atkinson
6 (2012:51) expands this by suggesting that Elias offers the potential for the study of the body as
7 a ‘marker of social processes’ specifically social and internal self-regulation that are reflective
8 of shifting social relationships between groups of people.

9

10 In the *Quest for Excitement*, (Elias and Dunning, 1986) the relationship between physical
11 contests in contemporary societies and broader structures of social relations, in relatively
12 pacified (civilised societies) is outlined. In advanced industrial societies leisure activities form
13 an enclave for the socially approved arousal of moderate behaviour in public. Sports are defined
14 by an upper and lower threshold of violence tolerance, too high and people may consider the
15 sports uncivilised and too low may engender boredom (Elias & Dunning, 1986). Although the
16 focus of this work has mainly been on violence in sport it also explores how people seek a
17 range of emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger and sadness. Although little is written
18 specifically about civilised female bodies it is important to stress that women’s bodies have
19 been more constrained in sporting practices by perceptions of the female civilised body as
20 passive and weak (Thing, 2001). Yet women who participate in sport or leisure activities
21 traditionally considered male preserves may seek a quest for exciting significance through
22 pursuing experiences that challenge dominant views of the female civilised body although this
23 remains undertheorized (Mierzwinski et al, 2014). Although Elias is criticised for not fully
24 discussing civilising processes and the embodied performance of gender and sexual identities
25 (Atkinson, 2012, Thing et al, 2016) others have applied the concepts to the gendered body in

1 sport. Maguire and Mansfield (1998) and Mansfield (2002, 2008) for example apply Elias key
2 concepts to understanding gendered bodies and fitness practices that shape perceptions and
3 experiences of female bodies, fatness and fitness. Elsewhere Thing (2001) applies Elias to
4 question assumptions about male and female civilised bodies as biological and fixed. She offers
5 a critical discussion of the social processes involved in socially constructing ideas about the
6 male and female body and aggression in sport (Thing, 2001). For example she notes how
7 civilising processes are gendered and emotions are expressed differently, whilst females are
8 perceived to have 'soft' emotions, lacking in aggression in sport. She draws on empirical
9 research to show how these perceptions are constructed and reinforced by social processes.
10 These studies outline the potential for a figurational analysis of gender relations in sport that
11 focus on power relations and the civilised female body as well as understanding various forms
12 of resistance to female involvement in sport. In the following section we outline the methods
13 adopted in the paper.

14

15 **Methodology**

16 Eight semi-structured interviews with elite (professional and semi-professional) female NH
17 Jockeys were conducted. Interviewees were selected based on a criteria that the female jockeys
18 had to be either a professional jockey or in the process of turning professional / applying for a
19 professional licence (this is a lengthy process and licenses are granted and revoked by the
20 British Horse Racing Authority). Out of the eight female jockeys interviewed, three held
21 professional status as conditional jockeys, the other five were amateurs but were in the process
22 of turning professional (which is dependent on riding a number of winners and making certain
23 weights).

24

1 The second author was a jockey in point to point racing and had competed at an amateur level.
2 For female jockeys point to point racing is often a starting point for careers and therefore her
3 knowledge of the racing industry was critical to gain access to the small number of semi-
4 professional female jockeys, some of whom were known (either personally or through common
5 networks) to the second author. We openly acknowledge that without being part of these social
6 networks we would have been unlikely to get access. At the time of interviewing all the jockeys
7 competed regularly against male jockeys and all were white British and aged between 19 and
8 27. The fact that all those interviewed were white broadly reflects wider issues of race in the
9 jockey figuration, as the majority of male jockeys in the UK are all white, demonstrating the
10 space is equally marked by power relations of race and class. Due to issues of anonymity we
11 cannot say more about the jockeys. This to keep the participant's details anonymous and ensure
12 confidentiality, which due to the very small number of professional NH jockeys in the UK, and
13 the fact this study included interview from a number of these meant was carefully considered.
14 We were concerned that anonymity could not be guaranteed and we took advice from the
15 university ethics committee. Sensitive to this issue, the consent forms clearly indicated that the
16 data would be kept confidential and that the researchers would try at to maintain anonymity,
17 however, it was honestly acknowledge by the researchers this could not be guaranteed. The
18 consent forms, all signed by those interviewed outlined that no identifying information would
19 knowingly be used. Jockeys are identified in the discussion as Jockey 1, 2 etc any particular
20 places mentioned by them, or trainers that could identify individuals were changed or removed
21 from the data.

22
23 Previous literature was used to support the creation of an interview schedule along with the
24 experiences and knowledge of the second author who had experienced the racing figuration.
25 Interviewees were asked about their initial involvement in horse racing and how they started

1 racing and how they progressed from being an amateur jockey to being professional (or for
2 those in the process what level were they at, what issues were there to becoming professional),
3 as well as their relations with others in the figuration. The interviews took place in a variety of
4 settings; for example in trainer spaces, homes of jockeys and in coffee shops. All the interviews
5 were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Once the data had been collected a thematic
6 analysis was conducted by each of the authors. NVivo was utilised by the researchers as a tool
7 to support the coding of themes for analysis. Themes were created independently and were
8 developed for example support from others, family involvement, experience of racing. The
9 authors met to discuss themes to triangulate data analysis and question the coding of the data.
10 The concepts of figural sociology were then used as a sensitising framework to refining,
11 discuss and further refinement or to consider the interconnected nature of the themes, for
12 example, power, risk injury. In the next section we discuss our data focusing on three aspects
13 of the data, racing habitus, civilised female bodies, and risk and horses.

14

15 *A (Gendered) Racing Habitus*

16 Figural sociologists stress the importance of understanding the social figurations (e.g.
17 family, school, peers, leisure and work relations) and the impact of these connections on
18 personality structures and opportunities people are able to access (Atkinson, 2012). The
19 majority of female jockeys interviewed for this study had families involved in the racing
20 industry and therefore they were involved in racing from a young age. The habitus of the
21 jockeys was impacted by early experiences which enabled them access to a largely ‘closed
22 space’. This space is not only gendered, but also structured by class and race, as McManus et
23 al (2013) highlight that in Britain owning a racehorse is related to a particular social class
24 culture.

25

1 The direct family involvement in the racing figuration was part of the females early childhood
2 experiences, ‘my parents have been involved in racing as long as I can remember....my father
3 was a jockey for 30 years’ (Jockey 2), ‘my grandfather is a trainer my mums had a permit and
4 I’ve ridden all my life’ (Jockey 6). Being born into a racing family allowed them an opportunity
5 to become successful riders, ‘My dad trains so I think that way and his father had a permit
6 before him so I think like we’ve always had horses around’ (Jockey 4). The female jockeys
7 were aware of the importance of being part of this network of relations, ‘with the help of my
8 granddad really, so we are kind of bred into it if you like, otherwise I think it would have been
9 a lot harder without the kind of backing experience’ (Jockey 1). Being part of the racing
10 figuration from a young age gives the female jockeys an understanding of what is needed to be
11 successful in this space. The influence of the family in accessing the racing figuration was not
12 dependent solely on male relatives, for some of the jockeys it was their mothers and
13 grandmothers who were involved in the racing industry, ‘me and my sister have all ridden as
14 amateurs, just because grandma trained and now mum trains’ (Jockey 5). Most of the jockeys
15 in this study had grown up developing a specific habitus that enabled them access into the
16 jockey figuration. For women born into families who train or own horses there is a social class
17 element, in which the women have access to networks and these networks seemed critical for
18 the female jockeys in gradually working their way to professionalism. One jockey suggests this
19 is a different path than for male jockeys,

20 the girls who have turned professional over jumps have all come from point to
21 pointing or amateur and they’ve already proven they can ride. Whereas a young lad
22 will just get given chances straight away (Jockey 2).

23 Being a successful jockey is defined by the number of ‘rides’ and ‘winners’ you have so access
24 to people who select you to ride is a necessity. Therefore being part of the racing figuration is
25 critical to female jockeys, it is highly unlikely for a female jockey that you can be successful

1 without this. Being chosen to ride is how a jockey can move from being an amateur to
2 professional. It is only through riding that your name is recognised, which leads to more
3 opportunities to ride. This means that one of the challenges for women jockeys is that, 'it can
4 take years, to get your name established and for people to actually start using you' (Jockey 2).

5 There was also a perception that

6 you need to be better than your rivals, you have to look better be stronger be more
7 effective and you're asking a lot of a woman to be better than a man at the same sport
8 to get the same opportunities (Jockey 3).

9 Early access to the male dominated space of the racing figuration grants access to an otherwise
10 closed opportunity, it gives women the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to ride, gives
11 them access to horses and valuable networks which enable them to be chosen to ride, but there
12 are still challenges in providing their capability and being noticed. Women are also in the
13 figuration and part of the network of relations whereby there is a 'commonly accepted' idea
14 that females are weaker and less successful as NH jockeys. Thus access to the figuration at an
15 early age needs to be understood as enabling and constraining as the development of the social
16 identities of those in the figuration also involve internalising the perception that male and
17 female bodies perform differently as jockeys.

18

19 Being a successful jockey is dependent on a number of factors, but the family ties are critical,
20 yet, being successful is not easy and requires an element of resilience in a tough sport,

21 You've got to be so determined, you've gotta have so much courage, cos it's not you
22 know, it's a tough game out there, you can't be a bloody wimp you've gotta be, you
23 know the slaps that they take, that we take, it's not like, it's not a mugs game you've
24 gotta be so tough, you can't just be some flimsy little girl that goes oh I want to be a
25 jockey, I want to ride horses. (Jockey 6)

1 If you can't accept that the sport is tough and accept this then it is suggested the sport isn't
2 suitable for all,

3 It's a rough sport, you've got to be ok with hitting the floor and breaking bones and
4 riding with men who at times can be rough and rude and you've kinda gotta be able to
5 play with them, so I think that that can put a lot of girls off but if it does then they
6 probably shouldn't be riding in races anyway" (Jockey 7).

7 It is down to female jockeys to cope with the culture of racing rather than radically challenging
8 the culture, thus those most successful are likely to identify with male jockeys and accept any
9 hostility as a part of the sport.

10

11 Despite the challenge, enjoyment is also a critical part of the sport and is why those who do
12 gain access and become jockeys remain in the sport 'it is great fun' (Jockey 8). It's also more
13 than fun, it is an achievement, 'riding around Cheltenham is just amazing, even though I didn't
14 come anywhere, just riding round there, oh god, it's such a buzz" (Jockey 1). There is a clear
15 example here of women and their experience of the quest for excitement, risk is exciting and it
16 is part of the reason why many jockeys continue in the sport. The satisfaction of riding, the
17 thrill of the ride, the jumping and being successful is an emotional response to riding, 'My first
18 ever double and winning on my horses you know like when I'd seen it, bought it, trained it,
19 and then won on it and you know it was a great family day out and just good fun' (Jockey 8).
20 Of course this is expensive fun and highlights the class based element of the sport. This
21 highlights the pleasure of socialisation in the family and shared leisure pursuits.

22

23 *Civilised Female Bodies: The Injured and Weak Female Jockey*

24 Being within the correct weight range is essential for an equitable riding system and is
25 fundamental to a successful racing industry. Jockeys must carry a specific weight and in NH

1 racing the weight range is from 10 stone to 11 stone 12 pounds, if a jockey is too light then
2 they must carry lead in their saddle. If the jockey is too heavy they have to use drastic measures
3 to lose weight by sweating or starving themselves in an attempt to make the 'weight'. This
4 means the body, its appearance and weight are scrutinised and the surveillance of bodies is
5 central, jockeys bodies are physically strong and under the maximum weight.

6

7 The injured body is also something NH jockeys become accustomed to, and one of the jockeys
8 in this study had received a potentially life threatening injury, 'I broke my collar bone and had
9 a bad head injury, I was unconscious for 15 minutes and had to get air lifted' (Jockey 6). Despite
10 NH races being dangerous for men and women, there is a perception that women's bodies are
11 more prone to injury. The idea women are more likely to be injured draws on established beliefs
12 that females have a weaker body than males, 'I think generally, people and trainers see that
13 women aren't as strong as men, I do think women fall heavier, I mean you know, men just kind
14 of roll and get up' (Jockey 1). The idea that women fall heavier, whereas men roll seems to
15 draw on a set of largely unchallenged assumptions about male and female bodies. These
16 discussions also drew on perceptions of acceptable risk for female bodies which position
17 women's bodies as needing protection from injury. Often the protector, a governing body or
18 male doctor decide what levels of physical activity are acceptable for female bodies and these
19 ideologies have a long standing influence on people's attitudes and access to a range of
20 opportunities (Roberts and MacLean, 2012). The perception that women have weaker bodies
21 is often supported by some medical or scientific evidence, or visible difference that seemingly
22 confirms a common sense perception which can be used to justify limiting opportunities in
23 sport (Hargreaves, 1994). This was also noted by one jockey, 'just looking at us we are the
24 weaker ones, you know like we are smaller framed aren't we, we are probably more likely to
25 break a bone or something' (Jockey 1). Looking becomes 'proof', obvious for all to see, they

1 become commonly accepted. These differences become heightened in the jockey figuration
2 where interdependency between groups is dense, and examples to ‘prove’ this can be easy to
3 find, whilst those that challenge this perception are ignored.

4

5 The issue of risk for women bodies is seemingly related to women being or becoming mothers
6 and this risk can be understood as twofold, (i) injury may prevent motherhood or (ii) mothers
7 should not put themselves at risk. As one jockey notes there will be a point in her life where
8 she will need

9 to get a proper job, you can’t keep taking falls after falls. I want to you know settle
10 down, marry, have kids, I wouldn’t expect that guy to be accepting of me going out
11 dicing with death at times (Jockey 3).

12 In this sense women are constrained by ideas of risk and motherhood, which positions male
13 jockeys as more suited to the role. Here the gendered female body is shaped by social processes
14 related to the biological body that assumes female bodies need protection so they can be
15 mothers (regardless of whether they want to or not) (Connell, 2009). The fact that many male
16 jockeys are also fathers is not considered such an issue, demonstrating again how expectations
17 of civilised body are gendered and responses to non-conformity equally gendered. For example
18 Alison Hargreaves’ death during the climb of K2 was discussed more than the male climbers
19 because she was a mother and some media reports considered the act of climbing selfish and
20 too risky for mothers, yet the same criticism was not levelled at the male climbers who were
21 fathers (Gilchrist, 2007). This highlights how the role of the mother is still valued more than
22 the role of infant child rearing and early socialisation (Gabriel, 2017). The value placed on
23 motherhood, both in terms of having a child and then the role in the socialisation process
24 influences the opportunities for female jockeys, ‘it’s just very sexist, I dare say at the time that
25 most females have been getting going they’ve usually packed in and had families and stuff’.

1 Civilised female bodies are expected to become mothers and with this is the assumption that
2 mothers should take fewer risks than fathers. This is associated with assumptions about
3 physicality and strength, traits associated with male embodiment and without these women are
4 not tough enough,

5 I think it is tougher for girls, definitely we don't roll the same and I think it is harder
6 for us we are just not designed the same, I mean look we are women, we are bred to
7 breed, to have babies, you know men are bred to fight for us and bring back food they
8 are made as like a tougher breed (Jockey 6).

9 Such views about gender and bodies are located in historical discourses and long term social
10 processes about the role of male and female bodies and the biological purpose of male and
11 female bodies.

12

13 Whilst increased interdependence has reduced social boundaries that separated male and
14 female jockeys this enables the perceptions about the need for strength (typically associated
15 with males) to be reinforced as essential to the success of NH jockeys. Strength as a
16 determining characteristic of being a NH jockey was largely accepted, but not unquestioned as
17 one female professional jockeys articulates,

18 I mean not all men can be as strong as the strongest man anyway, the girls can be as
19 strong as some male jockeys, there not gonna be the strongest but you don't have to
20 be to ride winners (Jockey 2).

21 Through their own experiences some females begin to identify how bodies exist on a
22 continuum of strength. Another jockey went further to argue that *some* women could be as
23 strong as *some* men. In particular she highlights that one of the most well-known NH female
24 jockeys would not be noticeable in the last sprint of the race, 'some women are strong and
25 good, like you couldn't tell Hayley Turner in a finish from a man, do you know what I mean,

1 just cos she is so strong' (Jockey 1). Not being able to distinguish between a male and female
2 jockeys highlights how the body type of jockeys are similar (again a difference from other
3 sports) therefore with helmets, goggles, jockey attire, the gender of a rider may not be
4 noticeable. Thus during the race, bodies appear 'genderless', because of this it is likely the
5 commentary of the race attempts to emphasise gender difference by stressing how the riding
6 style of female jockeys is different to male jockeys, thus marking out difference in line with
7 acceptable gendered perceptions.

8

9 *Risk, Shame and Opportunities to Ride*

10 Even those women interviewed who were critical of the idea that all women were weak were
11 aware of how others (male and female) within the racing industry perceived the suitability of
12 *their* bodies for racing. One way this was manifest was how certain horses were not considered
13 suitable for female jockeys to ride. As one of the jockeys explained, 'like certain horses, people
14 will be like, I wouldn't want you to ride cos you know it's not a girls ride and they wouldn't
15 want you to hurt yourself'. Here the paternalistic idea that female jockeys need greater
16 protection than male jockeys is evident as some horses are just considered too risky for female
17 jockeys. Finding a trainer who is willing to use a female jockey can be difficult and one of the
18 reasons given for this is concern about female jockeys being injured. This seems especially
19 pronounced in NH racing where injury is more likely than in flat racing,

20 I am sure there's some trainers who won't have booked me and maybe their reason
21 for not having used me is because of like they wouldn't put a girl up over jumps,
22 we've even got an owner at home who's a little bit like that, who just doesn't want,
23 she doesn't know how she'd feel if I'd got hurt and it was off her horse (Jockey 4)

1 This relates to broader notions about civilised female bodies in which female bodies are viewed
2 as weaker than male bodies. The accepted view that female jockeys were more susceptible to
3 injury than males is not new and remains widely held.

4

5 There is greater concern about a female jockey being injured, than a male jockey, and this is
6 seemingly an acceptable reason for preventing women from experiencing (risky) rides. It is
7 more acceptable for trainers, owners or others in the racing figuration to draw on concern for
8 the female jockey as a reason for not selecting a female jockey. The shame associated with a
9 female jockey being injured on a horse that was known to be risky can be avoided by not
10 selecting female jockeys on certain horses or by choosing safer horses. This can be seen as
11 being a responsible trainer or owner, as opposed to being someone who doesn't employ female
12 jockeys. The close interaction in the racing figuration between male and female jockeys as
13 well as legislation expects that female jockeys ride, but in response to this, some trainers and
14 owners limit the opportunity for female jockeys to ride the 'best horses', (Roberts and
15 MacLean, 2012). This represents ongoing power imbalances in the racing figuration, where
16 shifts in power relations must be understood as shifts not processes of equality. Jockeys are
17 highly dependent on trainers and owners and it is rare for the jockey to be able to influence
18 what rides they are given. Decisions made by others in the racing figuration arguably prevent
19 female jockeys from proving their ability to control a difficult or risky horse. Owners and
20 trainers make decisions about who rides on what horse. There is however another way shame
21 may control opportunities as the fear associated with losing and choosing a female jockey
22 becomes risky as such decisions are under scrutiny. Selecting a female rider for a promising
23 horse is a risk, if the jockey is not successful this is scrutinised by the owner(s) and the fact a
24 female jockey was selected could cause embarrassment. As not offering opportunities because
25 someone is female is considered increasingly unacceptable in this figuration, and more broadly

1 in the civilising of gender relations it becomes more accepted to draw on the common sense
2 notion that women need protecting from risky horses which can offer an acceptable justification
3 for such decisions.

4

5 The perception that female jockeys need greater protection and that some horses are considered
6 ‘too risky’ is countered by the fact that other horses are perceived as better suited to female
7 jockeys, ‘I think that there are horses out there that run better for women’ it’s the trainers’ job
8 to put the right jockey on the right horse’ (Jockey 6). As another jockey explained, ‘there are
9 some horses that maybe a women rider would suit more’ (Jockey 7). This suggest that horses
10 respond to different styles of riding, and that male and females ride differently, ‘some horses
11 just go different for girls, you can’t deny that really there’s something different about the way
12 girls ride that can have a positive effect on horses’ (Jockey 2). The extent to which horses are
13 aware of the gender of their rider, or that females ride differently and horses respond to the
14 rider differently (depending on gender) is something that is widely believed to be true,
15 ‘sometimes people say a horse will run better for a girl and I think some horses do’ (Jockey 4).
16 Although it is not clear how widespread the view is from our interviews, a similar finding was
17 found by Velija and Flynn (2010) and it is difficult for a female (or any) jockey to challenge it
18 becomes a commonly accepted idea, i.e. the horse says so. Rather than it appearing sexist it is
19 presented as a ‘fact’ that some horses prefer a female jockey and some need a male jockey.
20 This ‘knowledge’ is supported by those within the racing figuration who have the organisation
21 networks and ‘evidence’ to reinforce these ideas. This is constraining or controlling the
22 opportunities for female jockeys to only ride some horses and not others. Thus ideas about risk,
23 gender and female bodies become an accepted reason for not allowing female jockeys
24 opportunities to ride specific horses, limiting their chances to ride, and in presenting these ideas
25 as natural (female bodies are weaker), and normal (everyone knows that horses respond

1 differently). These ideas are normalised and internalised in the racing figuration yet they are
2 also self-perpetuating as female jockeys have less opportunity to challenge these common
3 sense views.

4

5 **Conclusion**

6 The female jockeys in our study are part of complex interdependent relations involving a
7 number of people. Given the nature of the sport and industry female jockeys are also under
8 public and media scrutiny (Butler, 2012). As a wider consequence of civilising processes
9 between the sexes in jockey figuration, male and female jockeys have far greater organisational
10 interdependence than in some other sports. Like Liston (2014), we suggest this has both
11 enabling and constraining consequences. On the one hand greater interdependence represents
12 a process of functional democratisation, a shift in power relations whereby female jockeys have
13 greater opportunities (for example being allowed to apply for licences). On the other hand this
14 is a process of equalisation and there remain power imbalances that position female jockeys as
15 weaker, more prone to injury and less capable than male jockeys. Thus what appears as an
16 equitable system in which men and women have the same opportunity to succeed is reflective
17 of a continuing imbalance of power within the figuration.

18

19 Despite organisational equity there are far less amateur and professional female jockeys in NH
20 racing and this is often understood by males and females as a process of natural selection as
21 opposed to gendered processes which continue to support the dominance of male jockeys in
22 the NH figuration. Female jockeys work and compete alongside male jockeys, highly
23 dependent on one another as well, with owners and trainers in close proximity and this offers
24 examples where certain knowledge about civilised female bodies can be selectively evidenced.
25 'Knowledge' about female bodies and what they can and cannot do is generally presented as

1 factual within the figuration and the female body is positioned as physically weaker, designed
2 for motherhood and more prone to injury. This is difficult to challenge as female jockeys do
3 not have access to a range of horses that might provide a challenge to this perspective, and
4 whilst so few female jockeys are riding, when serious injuries do occur they may provide
5 evidence for this perception.

6

7 The female jockeys we interviewed were only able to access racing through their families and
8 access to the racing figuration which meant they developed a habitus for racing, but this also
9 related to a class habitus and all the women were able to gain access to horses and the industry
10 because of their privileged class background. The figuration remains closed to female jockeys
11 who do not have these networks. Access from an early age arguably also results in a specific
12 *gendered* habitus, internalising the perception of others that the female body is *weaker* and
13 more susceptible to injury this means it needs to be protected and this can be done by choosing
14 safe horses. This influences the social identities of female riders, who largely accept their
15 difference, or at least are not in a position to challenge it, as they negotiate their continual
16 involvement in this space. Once involved in the figuration, female NH Jockeys have to
17 negotiate their space. Risk is determined by others in the racing figuration who make decisions
18 about which bodies can control risky horses. These decisions are based on ‘knowledge’ drawn
19 from common sense perceptions about civilised male and female bodies and their perceived
20 capabilities, as well as the unquestioning belief that horses know the gender of their rider and
21 will respond differently depending on the rider's gender. These decisions remain gendered.

22

23 This paper contributes to the growing understanding of the gendered nature of equestrian sports
24 and challenges assumptions of what some might assume is an egalitarian sport by considering
25 the social processes and power relations that continue to position females on the margins of the

1 sport. Secondly, we argue that this paper contributes to what Malcolm and Mansfield (2012)
2 identified as a broader application of figurational sociology in the sociology of sport. In this
3 regard, although we accept that not all would agree, we would like to suggest two areas in
4 which figurational sociology could be further developed for the analysis of gender relations in
5 sport. Firstly, focusing on the consequences (intended or unintended) of greater levels of
6 interdependency in understanding the social identities of males and females. Secondly, to
7 develop a greater conceptual understanding of the gendered civilised body and the role of
8 shame as a potentially constraining and enabling mechanism for the control of female and male
9 bodies in sport. This may provide new approaches for understanding gender relations in sport
10 and leisure.

11

1

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