“Their Bottoms Are the Wrong Shape”

Female Jockeys and the Theory of Established Outsider Relations

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This paper adopts Elias’ theory of established and outsider relations (Elias and Scotson, 1994) to argue that women riders are “outsiders” within the racing figuration. The paper draws on data collected from eight semi-structured interviews with experienced female jockeys. It is suggested by the authors that female jockeys remain outsiders within the racing figuration in the UK. In particular, female jockeys are largely resigned to their inferior position as their views of male jockeys remain deeply ingrained in stereotypes about gender. The increasing organizational changes that have allowed women to be a part of the Jockey Club, be granted licenses, train and compete alongside males do not appear to have changed attitudes toward female jockeys, who are largely perceived as weaker and less capable than male jockeys.

In 2008 Clare Lindop became the first female jockey to ride in the Melbourne Cup. At the event she stated that she did not want to fly the “female flag”:

I really hate being referred to as a female jockey. The fact is all jockeys are pilots and the horses are the athletes. Of course, female riders do have to work harder on their strength and fitness to be on a par with male riders. (Gardini, 2008).
Despite Lindop’s denial of gender relations as a barrier to female jockeys, statistics from the Racing Industry Statistical Bureau (1996 in Cassidy, 2002) denote that the highest concentration of women in racing is a groom, which is classed as the least prestigious role. Grimes and Ray (1995) also found that female jockeys secure significantly fewer mounts than their male counterparts and that historical male domination (i.e., male-only jockeys and trainers) exclude female jockeys. Despite Lindop’s rejection of gender as a barrier to female jockeys, she suggests that “of course” women have to work harder to develop the same level of strength as male jockeys. To understand Lindop’s statement it is necessary to explore the experiences of female jockeys by locating her comments within the context of gendered historical and cultural dominance of masculinity in sport. To understand gender relations in horse racing, we begin by contextualizing our study with Elias and Scotson’s (1994) theory of established and outsider relations. We then outline of the methods and finally, we discuss the experiences of female jockeys to consider the extent to which they remain outsiders in the racing figuration.

The Theory of Established and Outsider Relations

Similar to other Elias key concepts, the established and outsider relations explore the connections between, “changing power relations between groups … (and) the social habitus of group members” (Mennell, 1992). Habitus, while often associated with the sociological tradition of Bourdieu, is found in several of Elias’ earlier texts. He considered habitus to be a durable “second nature” (Van Krieken, 1998, p. 47) which changes over time. Social habitus is defined as “the level of personality characteristics which individuals share in common with fellow members of their group” (Mennell, 1992, p.30). Elias argued that there is a correspondence between long-term structural development of societies and long-term changes in people’s character or habitus (Kilminster & Mennell, 2003). One of the fundamental differences between Bourdieu’s and Elias’s concepts of habitus is the fact that Elias considered both psychogenic and sociogenic factors in habitus. For Elias, habitus was strongly linked to wider civilizing processes and he demonstrated how people’s habitus is connected to factors such as refinement of manners and control of emotions. Elias emphasized that people have an individual and collective habitus.

Elias further suggested that sociology should move toward a more “relational and processual understanding of power” (Hughes, 2008, p.175). Power, according to Elias, is part of all relationships and we always experience power balances (Hughes, 2008). One specific analysis of power between groups is the theory of established and outsider relations which focuses on power relations between two groups of people. Elias and Scotson (1964/1994), based on a community study in Leicester, offer the most in depth discussion of this framework for understanding power. Elias and Scotson (1964) drew on the terms “the established” and “the outsiders” to demonstrate how one group within a small community (the estate)1 were subordinate to another (the villagers). These two groups were similar in terms of occupation and wealth, but one group, the established, were able to monopolize local resources and networks of gossip due to their high levels of cohesion, or patterns of interdependency ties, which had developed during their relatively longer period of association. Gossip was a particularly powerful part of a dual process
whereby the villagers elevated their own social position, but encouraged negative thinking about those living on the estate. Elias and Scotson (1994) defined this as “group disgrace” and “group charisma.” Group charisma refers to the belief in the collective grace which a group attribute to themselves. Those who do not have these “graces” are viewed as different and inferior. Crucially, not only did the villagers think negatively of the estate members but the estate members largely accepted their inferior status and internalized the view that the established have of them. The terms “minority of worst” and “minority of the best” are terms used to describe power relations between the two groups. These terms refer to a collective, largely positive, “we-image” which was incorporated into the self-image of “villagers” and a collective, largely negative, “we-image” internalized by those living on the estate.

Although this study focused on a community, it is evident that Elias also had in mind a wider use of the theory to explore “a more general model… with other established-outsider figurations in different classes and in other eras” (Wouters, 2008, p. xii). The theory has been adapted to several established-outsider figurations that focus on the changing patterns between different kinds of interdependent groups in a figuration (e.g., see Van Stolk & Wouters’ [1987] study on gender relations and power in marriage). In addition, Dunning (1999) emphasized that there are several characteristics of all established outsider relations: divisions exist within outsider groups and the outsiders generally identify more with the established than they do with other outsiders. In sport this work includes studies in drug use (Dunning & Waddington, 2005), race relations in the USA (Dunning, 1999), and gender relations (Liston, 2005; Maguire and Mansfield, 1998).

While figurational approach to gender relations has been critiqued (see Hargreaves, 1992, 1994, 2000), several authors have used Eliasian concepts to understand the complexity of gender relations both within and outside of sport (Brinkgreve, 2003; 2004; Ernst, 2003; Liston, 2005; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Mansfield, 2008; Van Stolk & Wouters, 1987; Velija & Malcolm, 2009). For example, Liston (2005) examined women’s position in Irish sports that have traditionally been associated with masculinity. In Ireland, she argued, females are often “outsiders” in sports because they have lacked the resources and “networks of mutual assistance” which are required to even out the balances of power between the sexes (2005, p. 25). Liston (2005) further noted that recent changes within the social context of Irish sport have resulted in a greater interdependence between the sexes which has enabled women to challenge male dominance in sport. Nevertheless, she concluded that females participating in male sports are outsiders and women athletes generally accepted that they were biologically inferior to male athletes. Ernst (2003) also emphasized that outsiders have lower self-confidence than the established and that when sport women enter the male domain of sport, their behavior is judged differently and more severely.

Velija and Malcolm (2009) focused on the experiences of female cricketers. In cricket, despite organizational structures which allow females to play alongside males, ideologies about the inferiority of female cricketers continue to impact on the experiences of girls and women in cricket. In particular, their identity as cricketers and their participation often relies on males including them (Velija & Malcolm, 2009). The authors also stressed that enforced organizational changes, such as the merger between the Women’s Cricket Association and the England and Wales Cricket board, do not necessarily result in ideological changes that would
equalize the relations between the established and outsiders. Despite such changes, the view of the established—women cricketers are weaker than male cricketers—remain embedded in the personality of the established and outsider group (Velija & Malcolm, 2009).

The relationship between men and women in horse racing is considerably interdependent as men and women often train, ride, and compete together. In the following section, we explore the application of the theory of established and outsider relations to the analysis of gender relations in sport and leisure and draw upon evidence from the history of the sport to explain the extent to which racing has developed as an established outsider figuration.

Established and Outsider Relations in the Jockey Figuration

Equestrian sports, where women riders often compete, work, and train alongside men, appear relatively unique (Adelman and Moraes, 2008). Despite this apparent equity, Hedenborg (2007, p. 502) argued that female jockeys struggle to gain equal opportunities as equestrian sports are “dominated by men.” According to Vamplew (cited in Smith & Porter, 2000), opposition to women riders has come from several quarters: chivalrous traditionalists who feared for the safety of women riders, especially over the jumps; conservative administrators who argued at the costs of providing separate changing facilities, and from male jockeys, who argued that women would be placed in danger as they would not have the strength to control fractious horses in a race situation. Institutional opposition has come from the Jockey Club who believe that “it would not be in the best interest of racing, for women to be granted trainer’s licences” (Polley, 1998, p. 96). Consequently, in Britain the Jockey Club did not allow women to race on the Flat until 1972, compete against male amateurs until 1974, or against male professionals until 1976, and this change to allow female jockeys was only due to pressure put on the Jockey Club after the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act (Vamplew, 2003).

The Jockey Club as the established group emerged as a sporting organization for men. They were able to monopolize positions within an “old boys” network which means that despite organizational changes that allowed Jockey Licenses to be granted to women in the 70’s attitudes toward female jockeys remain largely unchanged and the integration of women into the Jockey Club remains problematic. Such deep seated attitudes, one could say habitus of those involved in horse racing, is strongly related to masculinity. This is expressed by the Director of the British Racing School who observes that “there is no doubt that you will find more male chauvinism in racing than in any other industry, apart from male bastions like coal mining” (MacDonald, in Cassidy, 2002, p. 36). It is evident that the established Jockey Club has prevented opportunities for female jockeys by a variety of means. Recently, however, the established approach has changed illustrating how power relations within figurations and between the established and outsider can change over time (Ernst, 2003). This shift toward equality in power relations is referred to in figurational sociology as “functional democratisation” (Dunning, 1999, p. 46). Treibel (2001) suggested that, although power relations remain imbalanced, equalization of gender relations can be understood as part of wider process of functional democratisation. For example, women’s riding is currently more acceptable but the resistance to female jockeys assumes a different more subtle form of resistance. For
example, all male bodies in riding are judged to be strong and competent whereas all female bodies in riding are judged as being weak and frail. This is evident in the fact that males in the racing industry have often questioned women’s biological ability and labeled those women who have been successful jockeys as “brash” and “unfeminine” (Cassidy, 2002). The problems faced by female jockeys are summarized by Lord Oaksey (1978 in Cassidy, 2002, p.36), a former jockey and Channel Four racing presenter:

To say that the Sex Discrimination Act came as a shock to the British racing world would be an understatement. A large majority of the men who make a living in that world are, to say the least of it, conservative by nature and their reaction to the idea of female jockeys ranged from genuine horror to chauvinistic mockery. Lester Piggot, never a man to use two words when one would do simply said “their bottoms are the wrong shape”.

Polley (1998) argued that although some women have ridden winners in Britain, they have not yet emerged as a major threat to their male counterparts. One of the reasons for this is that owners and trainers are reluctant to employ female jockeys. Female jockeys become caught in a vicious circle of nondevelopment: without rides they cannot demonstrate their ability to win, but without a winning record they cannot get the same opportunities to ride (Holt & Mason, 2000). Additional barriers are related to pay. As jockeys are paid per race, and rely on a share of the prize money, they need to win a substantial number of races to earn a good salary:

In essence the opportunities for any one jockey are dependent upon the number of race days, the number of concurrent race meetings, the number of races on each card, and the number of horses entered in each race. (Vamplew, cited in Smith & Porter, 2000, p. 115)

A similar established outsider racing figuration emerges in other countries. For instance,

In Brazil, as in Europe, the Jockey Club, was hardly an institution geared solely to horse racing or a place to make a fortune through betting: “People did not get together there just for their love of the turf or the beauty of animals, but because these were expensive, aristocratic institutions to which it was desirable to belong.” (Bueno cited in Adeleman & Moraes 2008, p.107)

Adelman and Moraes (2008) observed that the Jockey Club in Brazil is a space where powerful men meet to discuss political and business decisions in a space that mixes work, leisure, and sport. They further suggested that participation of female jockeys in Brazil is relatively new compared with the UK. In their study, the female jockeys all related their passion for horses to rural life where horses are important in work and leisure. Fathers were influential as many of the women had been given opportunities to learn to ride through the family trade (for example on the cattle ranch). For some, however, mothers chaperoned their daughters to protect their “honor.” This was because some women had to deal with sexual advances by some male owners who used their position of power to coerce young jockeys into sexual relations in return for riding opportunities. Such daily struggles meant
the women had to develop strategies to get mounts to ride, contracts, and respect (Adelman & Moraes, 2008).

Parallel to Adelman and Moraes (2008), the purpose of this paper is to explore the experiences of female jockeys and the extent to which they are currently positioned as outsiders in the context of the horse racing figuration.

**Method**

This research aimed to explore the experiences of female jockeys, particularly how they started as a jockey, their experiences of being a competitive female jockey, their experiences of being on a “yard” and perceptions of others about being a female jockey. The information was gathered from eight semistructured interviews with female jockeys. Research exploring the experiences of females in other sports such as football (Scraton et al., 1999), cricket (Velija & Malcolm, 2009) and golf, (McGennis et al. 2005) have used semi-structured interviews to develop an in-depth exploration of the experiences of females within these sports. In this research, semi-structured interviews were adopted to “gain insight into the world of the respondents” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p.118). These interviews covered a range of themes such as women’s initial involvement as a jockey, women’s experiences of competitive racing, and their experiences of being on the yard.

Out of the eight participants two were female trainers. However, all participants, had been jockeys who either currently hold or have held amateur and professional National Hunt and Flat racing licenses. All the females were white, aged between 18–40, from the UK and many of those interviewed competed against male jockeys regularly. The whiteness of the sample reflects the dominance of white jockeys more generally and may point to continual racism in sports such as horse racing as well as suggesting that jockeys’ experiences are also racially and culturally located. The participants were contacted by one of the authors who had been involved as a jockey and knew several female jockeys. The female jockeys were asked if they were willing to take part in the research and were then given a participant information sheet before agreeing to be interviewed for the research project.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data were then analyzed using Patton’s (2002) thematic content analysis. The data analysis began by reducing the data and identifying raw data. Once raw data were identified coding was used to identify meaningful data and set the stage for interpreting and drawing conclusions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). After the data had been coded into themes a process of developing first order themes and general dimensions was adopted. These were cross analyzed by the two authors who completed the process separately and met to discuss and refine general dimensions. At this stage the theoretical concepts of “established” and “outsiders” were used as a sensitizing tool for the analysis. This approach allowed for key themes to be identified and then related to the area of study (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

All the names of the women in this article are pseudonyms. The following section is structured around the main two themes that emerged from the interviews: characteristics of established and outsider relations in the racing figuration and “group disgrace” and “group charisma” in female jockeys.
“Girls Don’t Fall as Well as Lads Do:”
Characteristics of Established and Outsider Relations in the Racing Figuration

Many of the women interviewed considered gender differences between males and females could explain their lack of opportunity within the sport. In particular, women were believed to be prone to injury. For example, Rachael stated: “girls don’t fall as well as lads do” and Faith noted how “on the flat there a lot more girls riding and there you don’t have the issue of them getting hurt, which is something that happens in jumping.” Rachael also added that “if a lass falls off she walks away with an injury. A lad probably won’t.” This view was reinforced by comments made by others. Natalie noted that trainers are more concerned “about the girls in case they got hurt.” The women jockeys drew on historical and scientific ideas about the weakness of the female body that is more susceptible to injury than the male body. Such beliefs are often used in sport to prove that women are more fragile than men and then presented as common sense ideas whereby gender inequalities appear as normal and natural (Dowling, 2000; Roth & Basow, 2004). These ideas are often used by men as a way of ensuring their dominance in sport and to resist female involvement (Castelnuovo & Guthrie, 1998, Roth & Basow, 2004). Appealing to male jockey’s strength appears relatively unfounded given the relatively small stature of male jockeys. It is does, nevertheless, demonstrate the hegemonic position of the established males within the jockey figuration when used as a reason for limiting women’s opportunities within the sport. The positioning of female jockeys as biologically weaker ensures that female jockeys remain outsiders: their biology is considered fixed and therefore, nothing can be done to change this. Consequently, the established view becomes fixed and largely unchallengeable, rather than being interpreted as a form of power relations. Similar beliefs about the female body are reinforced by others within the racing figuration. For instance, Anna noted that her trainer “won’t let me ride anything that’s bad in stalls or if they are bad rides. I’d always have safe horses to ride.” Others discussed the lack of opportunity that women riders can face as a jockey. Dianne said: “You’re never good enough … he’d never put a girl on his horses” and Natalie recalled:

It was a good yard but to be honest they were quite funny about putting girls on the difficult horses sometimes and it took a long time before I was allowed to break in the yearlings which I had done.

The female jockeys in this study generally accepted the view that males are stronger than females. From a figurational perspective this is not surprising because a key characteristic of established and outsider relations is that the outsiders largely accept their “group disgrace.” Furthermore, the women jockeys noted that they themselves were not confident employing other women jockeys. Jessica said that “I am as guilty as anybody else as putting strong blokes up…attitudes are still there, people will think oh no it’s a woman she’s not strong, which is true really.” She largely accepted dominant notions of male strength and female weakness despite her own involvement and capabilities as a jockey. Anna also noted that “you can pick out the older trainers who don’t put girls up but I think its strength. You can understand really when you look at it.” The acceptance of biological difference
demonstrates the extent to which some women internalized female embodiment as deeply embedded in their social *habitus*. Anna noted:

> It is hard when people say it to you, but I think I could understand if someone turned round and said I’d rather have this male jockey over you, I’d understand because they’re stronger.

Anna accepted the established position and sympathized with this viewpoint. This is another characteristic of established and outsider relations as the established view often remains embedded in the outsiders’ personality and is largely accepted (Van Stolk & Wouters, 1987). Furthermore, Faith resigned to the view of female fragility:

> It doesn’t matter what you say at the end of the day lads are usually stronger than girls and you do get girls who are exceptionally strong and all the rest of it, but you need a certain amount of physical strength you know when you get to the end of a 3-mile chase and you’ve got a tired horse that needs holding together and you need to push it out up to the line erm a lads likely to be stronger than a girl.

Elias and Scotson’s (1994) concepts of “group charisma” and “group disgrace” are useful when we try to explain possible reasons for female jockeys’ internalization of the established groups’ perceptions of their *lesser* abilities. The established groups have higher levels of cohesion and integration (Dunning, 1999): male jockeys and men within the racing figuration have historically dominated the development of the sport and continue to reinforce ideas of male dominance by choosing male jockeys over female jockeys. Due to high levels of cohesion among the established it is difficult for the outsider group, who generally lacks cohesion, to resist the internalization of negative characteristics attributed to the group (Van Krieken, 2004). The established groups are able to stigmatize the outsiders as different based on naturally occurring, biological, and fixed characteristics. Thus, the internalization of the negative self image becomes part of the outsiders’ personality structure and moreover, the dominant stereotypical views of women remain embedded in both male and female jockeys’ views. Our results support Velija and Malcolm (2009) who argued that sport women’s inferiority becomes generally accepted as fixed, normal, and natural when they internalize a negative self image. Kilminster and Mennell (2003) noted that within established and outsider relations, especially when the balance of power remains largely uneven, the behavior of the outsiders are often explained by the established as fixed and biological. Gender is also used to explain the behavior of horses. For example, there was a belief that horses could sense and respond differently to riders based on gender:

> A lot of trainers I’ve worked for will say things like I want a lad on it, or it might go better for a girl. People say it, oh we’ll try a lass on it see if it goes better or that’s a girl’s ride that is. (Rachael)

Similarly, Katie noted that one of the trainers she worked with

tended to put me on a lot of the fillies but that’s because maybe girls do tend to sit a bit quieter on some of them. I think a lot of trainers tend to put the
lads on the big strong colts and put the girls on the fillies that need a quieter ride and settling.

Rebecca also claimed that, “some horses will go better for a girl apprentice than for a lad.” Obviously gender relations were deeply embedded in jockeys’ social habitus. Katie, for example, explained:

I had done a lot of work with a really difficult filly and I was in the office when the trainer rang and asked the owner if I could ride it and he said no, he wanted a lad apprentice on it who had not even ridden it out on the yard.

The decision on who rides the horse, despite Katie’s skill as a rider, is made on sex, not ability. Rachael also accepted that some horses need a man “to sort that horse out. He rode it, strong bloke, positive ride and didn’t have any of the previous downfalls of it putting him through the wing.” Gender differences are, obviously, so deeply embedded in jockeys’ habitus that even horses’ behavior is explained through gender stereotypes.

Men’s and women’s participation as jockeys alongside one another does not result in the de-gendering of equestrianism. Ultimately male strength and dominance is reinforced which marginalizes female jockeys by restricting their opportunities. The established group resists providing opportunities for women based on their perceived biological inferiority as jockeys. As Elias and Scotson (1994) stipulated, women riders largely accept their inferior position within the figuration—a key characteristic of established and outsider figurations where the established maintain their position of dominance.

“Group Disgrace” and “Group Charisma” and Female Jockeys

Like Lindop, many of the women in this study rejected gender as a barrier for female jockeys. For instance, Rachael thought “it would be better if girls didn’t make it such an issue and just got on with it.” Such rhetoric implies that women should not complain about their position within the racing figuration. Rebecca strongly rejected the idea of offering an incentive to trainers to support female jockeys:

Giving a trainer or owner an incentive to use female jockeys would be either a lesser riding fee which would not go down too well, or letting them have a allowance like they do in some of races. I think they have to be careful that they don’t get done for equal opportunities and women are not seen as being given an advantage.

Such support is viewed as an unfair advantage for female jockeys rather than as an advantage that male jockeys have benefited from throughout the history of the sport. Faith, agreeing with Rebecca, suggested that female jockeys are always going to struggle in a male dominated sport:

It’s always going to be difficult for women. I don’t think there’s a lot you could do to change that really or if you did you’d have to be giving women much more of an advantage.
Jessica suggested that she did not mind “people putting me down because of my gender, but I don’t like being put down because of my ability.” The gendering of roles within yards provided further evidence of continuing gender inequalities within the racing figuration. Faith reflected on her experiences on a yard: “it would be a girl’s job to stay and do the plaiting, but the lads probably got more schooling and work riding opportunities.” Similarly, Jessica recalled:

I noticed in the yard that of the lot that weren’t very good rides in the girls, err the girls are more conscientious about the way the horse looks, how clean it is, how well turned out it is, the boys don’t tend to give a shit so the lads who weren’t as good riders would end up shit shovelling all day and not doing that particularly well. The lasses would probably win the turn out prizes not to say one would go racing more often than another but the girls, Sue always gave them the nice horses to look after because she knew they’d look after them properly.

The assumption that women are more caring and focus on the appearance of the horse can be seen as an extension of the belief that women are biologically more nurturing than males. This perception was supported by two of the jockeys, Dianne and Rachael. Dianne believed that “girls would have a more responsible role than the guys but the guys they would get more of the limelight sort of jobs on the yard,” and Rachael stated that “he [a male trainer] was another one who thought girls should be in the yard cleaning around.” The gendered division of roles on the yard appears to be based on historical and biological stereotypes about women as more domestic, nurturing, and caring than males. Nevertheless, some of the female jockeys recognized that the sport was male dominated:

It is like a lot of things, men don’t like involving women, I don’t know what it is, like football and working men’s pubs, it is just like oh well we don’t want to change our tradition (Dianne).

Dianne identified the difficulties women had when they entered a male space and offered a more critical view of gender relations. She seemed “poised between resignation and resistance, between submission and emancipation” (Van Stolk & Wouters, 1987, p. 479). Van Stolk and Wouters (1987) argue that that as outsider groups become emancipated their resistance is likely to intensify and the views of the established are more likely to be challenged. They identify the formation of three groups within this process. First, the “radicals” develop their own “we identity” (Van Stolk & Wouters, 1987, p. 486) and are proud of this. Second, the “moderates” want the old stigma to be challenged. Third, the “stragglers” identify more the old patterns of oppression. In the racing figuration, it is difficult for the outsiders to resist the established group as “group disgrace” is often reinforced by the established group through everyday contact and comments that belittle women’s efforts. For instance, Rebecca recalled the first time she rode a winner:

It was a selling race and I did the job nicely and you know how they sell the horse afterwards, the seller made a very negative comment in front of the crowd. It was something like; this horse has won despite the efforts of the jockey, or something like that.
Such a reinforcement of group disgrace ensures that the established maintain their position by humiliating the rider in front of a crowd and thus, strengthening traditional gender relations. Dianne testified: “I think a lot of girls let themselves be pushed around, and you’ll see almost every week one of them in tears because the lads have bullied them.” Rachael also recalled an experience with a male jockey who after the race

went mad with me once for riding over hurdles and he went mad with me for not staying straight and we were pulling up together and he was going mad yelling, “you should have stayed straight, fucking girls, fucking girl riders, fucking amateurs.”

The male jockey attributed Rachael’s biological sex as the reason for her perceived poor riding ability. Other men also made similar comments. For example, Faith recalled how one trainer commented: “Oh you are a girl, girls shouldn’t be doing this sort of thing.” Jessica noted how one trainer was “chauvinistic, so he thought a women’s role was in the kitchen or in the office.” In equestrianism, as in other sports which have been historically male dominated, resistance to women’s involvement is evident (Liston, 2005a, Velija & Malcolm, 2009). Women, nevertheless, continue to race. However, they generally have little access to useful resources and/or networks and they are, thus, unable to successfully challenge the dominance of the established group by critiquing the existing power structures within the racing figuration. On the contrary, they often sympathized with the established views. Many women might have rejected gender as a barrier to success to ensure that they are not seen as a problem or trouble maker. Following Van Stolk and Wouters (1987), they might not want risk their position within the racing figuration where the established group could further constrain their opportunities. These strategies demonstrate the difficulties the outsiders, such as women jockeys, face when they rely on the established group for riding opportunities. The women jockeys, thus, avoid direct confrontation, but neither do they simply accept their outsider position as they continue to challenge the male dominance of the racing figuration through riding.

The interviewees also recalled male jockeys and trainers who had been extremely supportive. Rebecca, for instance, explained:

He’s always been quite happy to, even when a long long time ago when ladies could first ride in races, and they just had the really quite elite races, the rich trainer’s wives or daughters rode in them. Erm one of the lasses that ended up being the head lass rode as an amateur in those big races so he’s obviously been quite forward thinking and modern really for his sort of age I would have thought.

According to her, this is a quite an unusual example of a modern forward thinking male. Anna, however, recalled several supportive males:

Jockeys have given me advice. Like our stable jockeys have given me advice and if you’re in the weighing room and you’re going to ride a horse for somebody they will help you and in the yard the head lad has helped me quite a lot.
Similarly Nicola noted that

Yeah the last couple of years I have ridden for trainers and owners who have been very supportive, male owners have been really, really good but if you don’t bump into those good owners you struggle.

These experiences demonstrate the complexity of gender relations in the racing figuration where some men are fully supportive of girls and women, yet women jockeys’ success appears to depend on meeting the “good” males.

**Conclusion**

Although female jockeys work, train, and compete closely with male jockeys in equestrian sports, they remain outsiders in the racing figuration. Gender integration does not appear to have enhanced their identity as a group nor has it provided female jockeys with more opportunities to develop organizational resources, access economic resources, or question uneven balances of power. In this sense, our findings are similar to Velija and Malcolm’s (2009) study on female cricketers and Liston’s (2005) study on women athletes in Ireland.

However, equestrian sports appear to have assumed a unique position compared with other sports as female jockeys have been integrated with male jockeys at the Jockey Club and therefore, should be able to offer a greater challenge to male dominance within sport. Female jockeys, nevertheless, appear to accept an inferior position and reject gender as barrier to their success. From our theoretical perspective, this demonstrates that the women have internalized the established view of gender relations. At the same time, adopting this position can be seen as a vital strategy to ensure future opportunities within the racing figuration. It is clear, however, that horse riding figuration has the characteristics of established outsider relations which tend to exclude women. To change this situation a “phase of emancipation and resistance” is needed to attack ideas that subordinate women riders (Van Stolk & Wouters, 1987). Van Stolk and Wouters (1987) argue that if outsiders have a “social function” for an established group, they can obtain greater power in their figuration. Although women jockeys have an established function that has enabled women to be formally accepted into the Jockey Club, it has not transformed into greater opportunities for females within the racing figuration. It certainly has not always resulted in attitude changes among either the established or the outsiders. The group charisma of the established and the group disgrace of the outsiders remain largely accepted by the established and outsiders as part of their social habitus. These are further reinforced by stigmatization and comments by the established group of male jockeys and trainers. Thus, this research highlights that gender integration within a sporting structure does not necessarily constitute greater conditions of equality.

Similar to Liston (2005) we argue that female jockeys become “outsiders within” a sporting organization where they merge with their male counterparts. Thus, instead of “de-gendering” the racing figuration, gender is reinforced by a number of strategies that are consistent with the characteristics of established—outsider relations. Consequently, the female jockeys as a group remain fragmented without a cohesive strategy or organization to challenge the position of male jockeys and
the male dominance of the Jockey Club. The current organizational strategies have resulted in female jockeys accepting that they are biologically inferior to male jockeys which continues to positions them as outsiders.

Notes

1. In Elias and Scotson’s study the authors identified two groups of people within the community. The villagers (Zone 2) were those who had established ties within the community and had strong family ties in the area. The estate members (Zone 3) were relatively new to the area and did have the same sense of community or family ties as the villagers had. The villagers considered the estate members to be unclean, promiscuous, and unable to control their children, when in reality there was no difference between these groups in relation to children’s behavior or cleanliness of houses.

2. Hargreaves criticism of figurational sociology is well documented. In particular, she argued that the figurational approach of Norbert Elias is masculinist and that Elias makes little reference within civilizing process to women and women’s position within nation state formation. Second, she contended that figurational studies have largely ignored the experiences of women within sport which due to the use of involvement and detachment in figurational research (Hargreaves, 1992). Dunning (1992, 1999) responded to Hargreaves’ criticism by outlining what he believes are her misinterpretations of the theory. The debate was extended by these two authors when Maguire and Mansfield (1998) presented a feminist figurational synthesis to understanding women’s experiences of aerobics. This was not without controversy as Colwell (1999) argues that such a synthesis is not possible due to the differing approach of both theories to the question of values in sociological research. Despite these ongoing debates, there are a growing number of sociologists adopting Elias concepts to the study of gender relations.

3. The Jockey Club founded in 1750 by a group of gentleman and has in recent years taken on the role of being the official governing body for racing in Britain (www.thejockeyclub.co.uk).

4. Of the many different forms of horse racing taking place today, flat racing is probably the most popular and the most well known. In this form of racing, a horse has to race competitors over a certain set distance. The track is usually oval in shape and the surface can be dirt, turf (grass), or all-weather which is usually synthetic. There are no obstacles on the track and the race is primarily about speed and stamina. Flat racing is the term used to refer to this sort of racing in the United Kingdom as it helps to distinguish it from other forms of racing (i.e., racing over jumps or harness racing; http://www.horseracing.com/types-of-horse-racing/thoroughbred/).

5. Van Stolk and Wouters (1987) argue that if a group has a social function for the established they are able to negotiate better power relations. For instance, the authors argue that women have a social function because men are dependent on them for reproductive purposes. This means that as men and women are interdependent women can argue for greater equality.

References


