

Chapter 2

From Glamour to Drudgery – Changing Gender Patterns in the Equine Sector: A Comparative Study of Sweden and Great Britain in the Twentieth Century

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Introduction

Although the 1956 Summer Olympic Games were mostly held in Melbourne, the equestrian events took place in Stockholm. Swedish press covered the games, reporting on everything from gold medalist to horse grooming. Special attention was given the fact that women partook in the games both as riders (since 1952, women had been allowed to compete in the dressage event, and in 1956, they were allowed to ride in the show-jumping event for the first time) and stable workers. The British team attracted much notice, partly since Pat Smythe – the first woman to compete in an Olympic show-jumping event – was among its members, and partly because the riders were assisted by female grooms (Hedenborg 2009a).

The Swedish press devoted a high number of articles to female grooms and riders during the Olympic Games. This indicates that it was unusual for women in Sweden to ride and handle horses, or at least that such a concept seemed novel to the Swedish journalists. This is not unexpected as equestrian sports in Europe had long been strongly associated with men and masculinity. Men used horses for agriculture, forestry, the transport sector and the army, and being a ‘horse man’ was considered a staple of masculinity. Today, however, the equine sector is more often associated with women and femininity.¹ How and when did the gender patterns

¹Maybe even more so in Sweden than in Britain. In Sweden, the majority of members in the National Equestrian Federation are women (even at an elite level); a majority in horse racing are women, whereas in harness racing, a majority are men. However, when it comes to stable work, a majority in harness racing are women.

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change? Is it possible that British and Swedish gender patterns began to diverge in the 1950s, and if so, could this divergence explain the focus of the articles in Swedish press?

This chapter will present and analyse the gender division of labour in equestrian sports in Britain and Sweden during the twentieth century, centring on stable work and the diverging ideas about who should handle horses and how this work was coded with regard to gender. Although one might ask whether an analysis of stable work belongs in a book about sports, it is imperative to remember that the work performed in the stables is a condition for equestrian sports. Furthermore, stable work often includes riding and serves as a form of socialisation into equestrianism. In order to analyse gender patterns in equestrianism, one must therefore study stable work and how it relates to both sport and labour market issues.

This chapter begins with a section about theoretical framework. This section is followed by some background information about the equine sectors of Sweden and Britain, respectively, and a section with a comparative perspective that explores contextual similarities and differences as well as the limitations of the source material. To enable an analysis of the gender division of labour, the empirical part of the chapter will start with a quantitative mapping out of supply and demand of grooms in general, which is then discussed in terms of gender. This section is preceded by a survey of how stable work was perceived and the status attributed to it. The final part of the chapter consists of an analysis of how stable work is constructed in relation to gender, followed by a concluding discussion.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of gender can be applied to sports as well as tasks performed within the labour market. In this chapter, the expression gender will be used to denote social gender, signifying that what is perceived as masculine or feminine in a certain context is socially and culturally, rather than biologically, determined. That which is regarded as masculine or feminine is neither fixed nor essential, and thus it can vary from one context to the next (Scott 1999; Wikander and Manns 2001; Greiff 2004; Lorentzen and Ekenstam 2006).

There are many examples of professions that were once associated with men and masculinity that are now linked to women and femininity. The process during which the gender division of labour changes and a profession goes from being viewed as typically masculine to being perceived as feminine is referred to as feminisation. It is important to recognise that the process of changing gender codes is connected to power structures in society. In order to understand gender coding in stable work, it is also necessary to explore gender coding in equestrian sports. Attitudes and ideas about men and women in sports are constructed both in and outside of the arena. Men and women usually compete separately and are often portrayed differently by the media. Also, gender patterns in sport are affected by power relations, as noted by Jennifer Hargreaves (1994).

Power can be defined in a variety of ways. An empirical definition based on sociologist Barrington Moore Jr. (1978; Wikander 1988) will be used when analysing the findings in this chapter. Moore has argued that it is possible to pinpoint power relations in a society by studying the allocation of resources and services. A person with power controls other people's time, is paid a higher wage and has high access to societal resources, while a person in a subordinate position has a low-status job, is paid less and has limited access to societal resources. Usually, a high-status job requires a higher level of education from those who perform it. The opposite is mostly true of low-status jobs, which are often monotonous, physically strenuous and dirty.

The question of why some accept low-status jobs has relevance for the explanation of power structures. Barrington Moore Jr. suggests the term 'social contract' as a way of explaining this situation. The basis of a social contract is very seldom questioned, and people in subordinate positions agree to the social contract because it comes with certain benefits. Often, subordination is rewarded with some level of material security, and a complete breach of the contract may result in unacceptable loss. Nonetheless, the social contract is occasionally breached. According to Barrington Moore Jr., this happens when a society's resources grow or diminish drastically. The social contract may be radically altered when there suddenly is much more, or less, to distribute. However, a renegotiation of the contract also requires a shift in ideas, based on a view of the contract as unjust.

The contract on which Moore bases his analysis governs the relationships between different social classes in a society. In research on women and gender, the expression 'gender contract' has often been used to describe power relations between the sexes. Both Swedish and North American researchers have used this term (Pateman 1988; Åström and Hirdman 1992; Svanström 2000; Hirdman 2001). Wikander, for example, has discussed how the gender contract faced heavy criticism during the decades around 1900 when women's economic rights became topic for discussion because of the inauguration of a ban against women's night work (Wikander 2006; Karlsson 2001a, b).

It is not only within the realm of labour market relations that the gender contract can come to be questioned and changed. According to Hargreaves, sports can create new opportunities and meanings for women and pave the ground for changing gender constructions and gender patterns (Hargreaves 1994). This chapter will analyse the gender contract in stable work, exploring whether this contract has been questioned and changed and if so, how.

Background: The Equine Sector in Sweden and Britain

Today equestrian sport is one of the major sports in both Great Britain (GB) and Sweden. According to the British Horse Society (BHS), 43 % of British households (11 million) have a household member with some form of interest in equestrianism

(including racing). About 7 % of the population, or 4.3 million people, have ridden during the last 12 months. The importance of the sector is further highlighted by the fact that it is the largest sports-related employer in the United Kingdom. Put together, racing and riding employ 70,000 direct full-time workers with indirect employment adding another 220,000–270,000 people. The number of horses amounts to 17 per 1,000 people ('Equestrian Statistics' 2011). Sweden has more horses still – about 33 per 1,000 inhabitants. In terms of economic importance, the equestrian sector is equal to dairy or beef production (for more information on the development of the equestrian sector, see Hedenborg 2011).

As of yet, equestrian sport has not received a great deal of attention from sports historians, despite the importance of the sector today. To a large extent, previous research within the field has focused on horse racing (Huggins 2000, 2003; Vamplew 1976, 1988, 2003; Kay and Vamplew 2003; Kay 2004; Greiff 2006, 2007a, b; Greiff and Hedenborg 2007a, b; Hedenborg 2008; Case 1991; Fox 2002; Cassidy 2002; Moore-Colyer and Simpson 2004; Miller 2002, 2006). It has, however, been noted in research on stable work in the twentieth century that grooms seem to endure poor working conditions. The explanations for this have included the identification grooms feel towards their working environment and The Turf (Moore-Colyer and Simpson 2004) as well as the autonomy and power over the horse they enjoy, which also comes with a certain power over the owner through their close contact with the horse, and it has been reasoned that these factors may outweigh some disadvantages of the job (Cassidy 2002). Grooms also attain a certain status through the 'Paddock Ritual' (when horses are shown off in the paddock before the race) (Case 1991). In a previous study, Hedenborg has presented another explanation, arguing that the organisation of labour in the equine sector is very similar to the organisation of labour within the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century guilds (Hedenborg 2008).

In previous research on horse racing, the division of labour in the equine sector has mostly been analysed in terms of social class rather than gender relations. Yet, some conclusions may be drawn. Even up until the late twentieth century, men have always dominated British horse racing, to the extent that women have been hindered from becoming, for example, jockeys and trainers (Vamplew and Kay 2005). More women are involved in the sport today, especially among grooms (Cassidy 2002). Similar patterns can be found in Sweden (Greiff 2006, 2007a, b; Greiff and Hedenborg 2007a, b; Hedenborg 2007, 2008, 2009a, b, 2011), although there are differences between harness racing and the gallops. In the latter, women have been somewhat more important as both trainers and jockeys (Hedenborg 2008).

One explanation for why an increasing number of women have entered the equine sector has centred on a changing gender code that sets care as a crucial aspect of working with horses. This explanation is disputable, however, as care seems to have been regarded as a central aspect of working with horses even before women entered the sector. Furthermore, this work is connected to other characteristics including strength, toughness and filth, which do not particularly conform to what has traditionally been seen as feminine work (Hedenborg 2009b).

Framework: A Comparative Perspective and the Source Material

For many reasons, a comparison of gender patterns in Sweden and Britain is complicated. Firstly, the historical contexts of the countries differ. Sweden has had (and still has) a smaller population than Britain and was very much a rural country up until the 1930s. Britain has had (and still has) a much larger population and went through the industrialisation phase earlier than Sweden. Due to these differences, it is likely that the two societies differ both in their number of horses and in the importance of their respective horse sectors for the population's financial support. It is also significant that Sweden at the beginning of the twentieth century only had a small group of people who could be categorised as belonging to the upper or middle class, while Britain for a long period of time had had a large aristocracy as well as a bourgeoisie. The size of the middle and upper classes is relevant to the equine sector as the horse has always been an expensive animal. When studying equestrianism in Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, one must bear in mind that very few people used the horse for riding, as horses were mainly used as draught animals. Riding was a privilege of the army and upper class, and because of the strong connection between the military and horse riding, it is possible that Britain's and Sweden's different positions in WW1 and WW2 – Britain participating and Sweden neutral – could have affected equestrian sports within the two countries differently.

With those differences in mind, it is still interesting to compare equestrianism in the two countries as both were known as very proficient in the area. During the nineteenth century, British horse racing and cross-country riding were seen as models for other countries' equestrian development (Chenevix Trench 1970). Sweden was also considered to be a country in which the study of horses, 'hippology', held a high standard. Thus, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) turned to Sweden when equestrian sports were to be included and regulated in the Olympic Games (Hedenborg 2009a).

Another problem with comparative historical studies in general is that it is not always possible to use sources that provide the exact same information. In this study, several different sources will be used in order to reveal gender patterns in the two countries. The main source for the analysis of the situation in Britain is the magazine *Horse & Hound*. *Horse & Hound* is the oldest equestrian magazine in the United Kingdom and has been published weekly since 1884. The magazine has printed editorials on equestrianism and general news, equestrian news, advice on horse care, job adverts, letters to the editor and articles on equestrian sports. *Horse & Hound* has always featured many articles about hunting, and it is in connection to hunting that the magazine also publishes articles on dogs. For the purpose of this chapter, adverts for job vacancies and wanted positions and letters to the editor were studied in issues from all years of the Olympic Games between 1912 and 1972 to enable an analysis of changing gender patterns within stable work. Adverts published in the first issue of every quarter and letters to the editor in each issue of the magazine have been studied.

Horse & Hound covers a wide range of topics, and in order to answer questions about gender patterns in stable work in Sweden, several sources have been studied: *Lantarbetaren* (the Agricultural Workers' Magazine), *Trav- och galoppronden* (the Racing Post), some of the daily papers and source material from the Agricultural Workers' Trade Union.² *Lantarbetaren* was a weekly magazine that was published for the first time in 1920. At the beginning of the century, it did not devote particularly many articles about the grooms' situation, but such articles increased in number over time.³ *Trav- och galoppronden* was also a weekly magazine, published for the first time in 1932. The magazine centred on racing, and racing results for both harness racing and the gallops were analysed and published there. However, *Trav- och galoppronden* also printed some articles on the grooms' situation.

Finally, source material from the Swedish Agricultural Workers' Trade Union will be used, as this was the trade union that organised the grooms. Information on stable work can be found in agreements and letters between employers and employees in the equine sector. However, even though there is some source material from the trade union, this material is very limited, which is probably explained by the fact the grooms were (and are) seldom organised (Hedenborg 2008; Moore-Colyer and Simpson 2004).

Women Wanting to Work as Grooms

Before the Olympic Games had started in Stockholm, the daily papers had drawn attention to the novelty of the British team's female grooms, one of whom was interviewed in one of these papers (*Dagens Nyheter* 6 June 1956). The journalist wanted to highlight the fact that these women performed a man's job. The grooms, most often presented as 'girls' and 'lasses', were described as hardworking, and their work was depicted as physically strenuous and sometimes dirty – characteristics not usually associated with women's work. In addition, there were photographs of the grooms in their working clothes, dressed just like many of the male grooms in pale brown, well-creased trousers, greyish-brown blazers with small checks and blue shirts and black ties with white patterns. One of them was quoted and presented in the following manner:

'I treat it just like the other horses', says groom Shirley Burr, a very pretty lady who wears her black hair in plaits. 'I have looked after horses for five years and will continue to do so for the rest of my life. Of course I ride. Nearly all English women do.' (*Dagens Nyheter*, 6 June 1956)

²There is a similar magazine in Sweden called *Hästen* (The Horse). This magazine has been published since 1920 and has been studied from 1920 up to the 1970s in order to compare the Swedish case with the British when it came to stable work. However, very little is said in this magazine on grooming. Furthermore, it has not been possible to analyse adverts on "position vacant or wanted" or letters to the editor as these are too few.

³The fact that the number of articles increased over time is not easy to explain. It may have to do with how stable work was seen within the trade union. It is pointed out in the early articles that people in general probably did not realise that grooms were organised within the trade union.

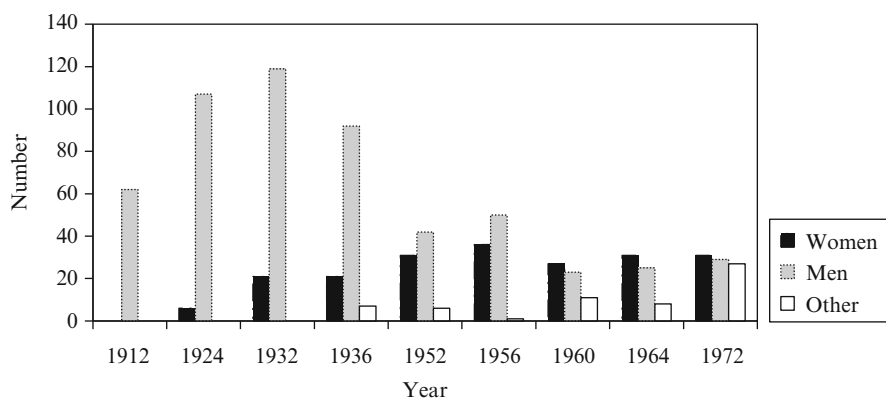


Diagram 2.1 Number of 'position-wanted' adverts according to sex 1912–1972 in *Horse & Hound*. Cross sections (Source: First issue in every quarter of *Horse & Hound* 1912, 1924, 1932, 1936, 1952, 1956, 1960, 1964, 1972. Comment: The category 'other' represents adverts in which men and women apply for jobs together as well as adverts in which the sex of the person seeking employment is not specified)

In this quote, Shirley Burr stresses that she did the work that was expected of her and that she, like many other English women, was qualified for it. She seems to suggest that female grooms were nothing out of the ordinary in Britain. Was this true?

As there are no groom statistics for either Britain or Sweden, it is impossible to know whether Burr presented an accurate picture and how this situation compares to that of Sweden. It is therefore necessary to work with source material that can provide insight into the gender division of labour in order to answer who took care of horses, whether they were men or women, and if and how this changed over time. Thus, the chapter will now turn to a study of the adverts for vacant positions and jobs wanted. A general survey of the supply and demand of grooms will be presented first in order to demonstrate the attractiveness of the sector, after which gender patterns will be pointed out.

Previous research has noted that the labour force very much abandoned the horse racing yards of Newmarket between 1964 and 1975 (Moore-Colyer and Simpson 2004). However, there seems to have been a general decline even before that. A first conclusion that can be drawn from the study of the job adverts is that up until 1932, the job-wanted adverts in *Horse & Hound* increased, from 62 in 1912 to 140 (Diagram 2.1). The number of people seeking employment was at its highest in 1932. This is unsurprising as the 1930s was a decade of mass unemployment and economic depression in Britain, just as in the rest of the world. Already in 1936 the 'job-wanted' adverts had decreased to 120, and from 1952 and onwards, the yearly number stayed below 100.

A second conclusion that can be drawn from Diagram 2.1 is that an increasing number of women sought positions as grooms. In 1912, only men applied for stable

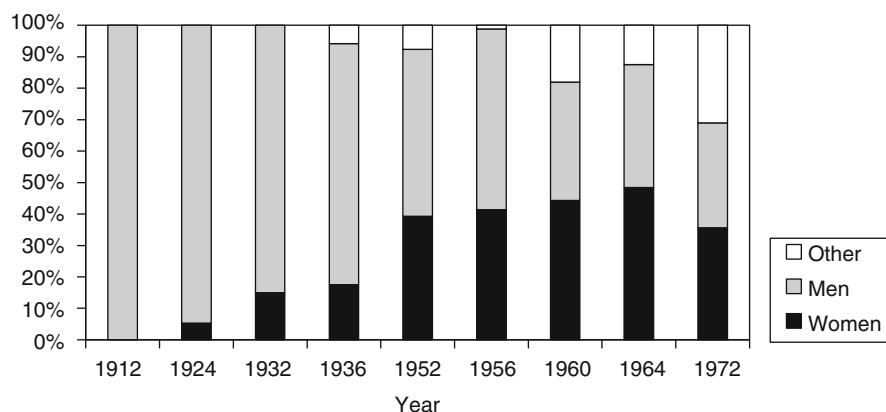


Diagram 2.2 Percentage of 'position-wanted' adverts according to sex 1912–1972 in *Horse & Hound*. Cross sections (Source: See Diagram 2.1. Comment: See Diagram 2.1)

work positions in *Horse & Hound*. One of them, Mr T. Sopp, expressed his preferences as follows:

T Sopp is open for re-engagement as Kennel-Man, single or Kennel-Hunts-man, to Harriers. For references please apply to Mr Arr, Kennels Petworth, Sussex.

Mr Sopp was not alone. Like him, other men sought positions as huntsmen, whipper-ins or kennel men. No women advertised for positions that year, which may indicate that women were not expected to take care of horses at that time. From 1924 up until 1956, however, there were an increasing number of female applicants. In 1924, they were few, only 6 out of 113. In 1932, the year with the highest number of applicants in total, there were still not many women, 21 out of 140 applicants to be exact. Still, the increase in female applicants continued up until 1956 when they amounted to 36 out of 87. The adverts came from women that covered all levels of prior experience. There being representatives from both ends of the scale may be interpreted to imply a situation where women were trying to break into a new sector, while there were also women who already took care of horses. Here are two examples:

Educated girl, nearly 16 seeks work in any type stable, slight riding experience; preferably live in, Miss I Temple, 36 Hillview gardens, Kingsbury, London NW9 (*Horse & Hound* 7 January 1956)

Educated girl, experienced rider, seeks residential post either travelling or riding jumpers/show horses. Available February (South preferred) Box 616. (*Horse & Hound* 7 January 1956)

From 1960 and onwards, the female applicants were in majority (see Diagram 2.2), even though their numbers had decreased somewhat. During the remaining years of the study, the number of female applicants remained around 30 per year. That female applicants increased in relation to the total number of applicants is clearly demonstrated in Diagram 2.2, in which the 'position-wanted'

adverts are displayed as shares of the total number of adverts per year. The percentage of female applicants increased from 5 % in 1924 to 48 % in 1960. At that time, male applicants amounted to 39 % of the 'position-wanted' adverts. During the next decade, the relative amount of women's adverts decreased to 35 %. Yet, despite the decrease in the percentage of women's adverts, fewer women did not apply for grooming jobs. The decrease was due to an increase in the number of adverts in which the sex of the applicant was not specified or the adverts was posted by a couple seeking a position together. Such adverts are represented in the category 'other'.

The picture provided by Shirley Burr, the woman who worked as groom at the 1956 Olympics, seems to be in accordance with a general development in stable work in Britain. It is obvious that an increasing number (and percentage) of women sought positions as grooms. There were women who were experienced in grooming and others that were not. Either way, it is interesting to note that the quantitative survey of the 'position-wanted' adverts indicates that women were interested in taking care of horses. There seems to be a breaking point in the period between 1936 and 1956, and from 1960 onwards, it seems that more women than men sought these positions. It is clear that British women had challenged the gender contract that connected horsemanship exclusively to men and masculinity.

Unfortunately the Swedish source material does not lend itself to conclusions about whether women wanted to take care of horses at this time. It is, however, possible that the British and Swedish developments diverge and that the British involvement in WW1 and WW2 partly explains this. During wartime, women had performed tasks that had previously been done by men, thus being able to prove their capability. Previous research has indicated that when the wars were over, women were reluctant to return to the old gender contracts (Wikander 1999; Rylander 2002). In addition, Britain had lost men in the wars, and in 1933, England and Wales had 8.7 % more women than men. The loss of young men from the elite was seen as extra problematic, illustrated by how these men came to be called the 'lost generation' (McDevitt 2004).

It is possible that the loss of young men from the elite affected equestrian sports as many of these men were likely to have been horse riders. Equestrianism had long been the pastime of the aristocracy, and it is possible that the 'lost generation' caused a gender imbalance, and that this gender imbalance paved the ground for a new gender construction of horsemanship. Naturally, men from the high society would not have applied for stable work, but the idea of who was qualified to take care of horses may have been altered, and as there was a general lack of young men after the war, women may have been given new opportunities.

A study of the supply side, however, is not sufficient basis for a discussion about the gender division of labour. Though it is clear that women wanted to take care of horses, one can only establish a real change in the perception of who was supposed to perform stable work if both the supply and demand changed in favour of women. Therefore, this chapter will now turn to a survey of the demand of grooms as expressed in positions vacant adverts.

Employers Seeking Female Grooms?

In Diagram 2.3, it is demonstrated that the number of ‘position-vacant’ adverts increased from 14 in 1912 to 327 in 1956 and 334 in 1972. As in the case of the ‘position-wanted’ adverts, a study of the ‘position-vacant’ adverts indicates that women were becoming increasingly important to the equine sector. Diagram 2.3 illustrates that a growing number of employers asked for women as grooms. In 1924, 2 out of 52 adverts were directed to women. This number increased until 1956 when 146 out of 327 adverts were aimed towards women. After 1956, the number decreased, and in 1972, these adverts amounted to 130 out of 334.

The numbers of adverts aimed at men decreased simultaneously, implying that there was actually an increase in the portion of ‘position-vacant’ adverts that were aimed towards women or others. This is clearly demonstrated in Diagram 2.4, in which it is shown that the percentage of adverts aimed towards women increased from 0 % in 1912 to 45 % in 1956, while the percentage of adverts directed to men decreased from 100 to 42 % between the same years.

Another observation that can be made regarding the study of the ‘position-vacant’ adverts is that adverts belonging to the category ‘other’ were even more prevalent here than among the ‘position-wanted’ adverts. The following excerpt shows a typical example of an adverts where the employer sought married couples:

Trustworthy married couple with good references, for country post. Experienced groom, good feeder, clipper and trimmer. Good plain cook/general for small easily run house. Aga Cooker etc. Live out in excellent nearby cottage, 5 rooms, bath all main services. Good wages and conditions. Farm produce, etc., for really suitable applicants. Box 2423. (*Horse & Hound* 4 October 1952)

It is quite plausible that this employer sought a couple that was suited for the gender-coded complementarity of the labour tasks expected of men and women. Traditionally, and in general, men and women working in agriculture had different,

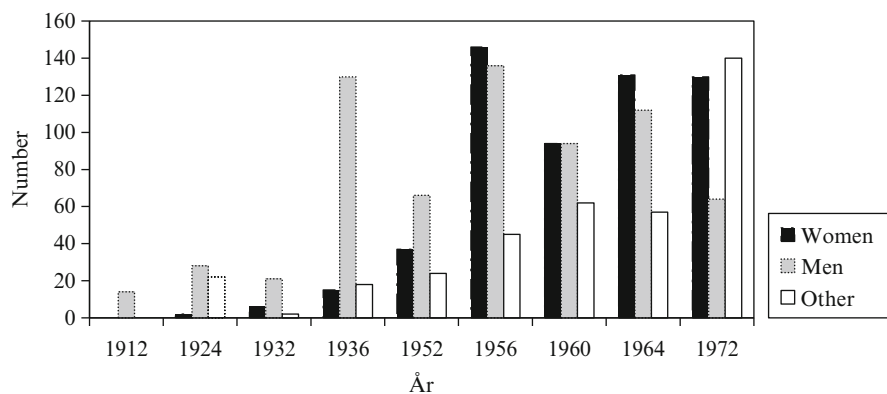


Diagram 2.3 Number of ‘position-vacant’ adverts according to sex 1912–1972 in *Horse & Hound*. Cross sections (Source: See Diagram 2.1. Comment: See Diagram 2.1)

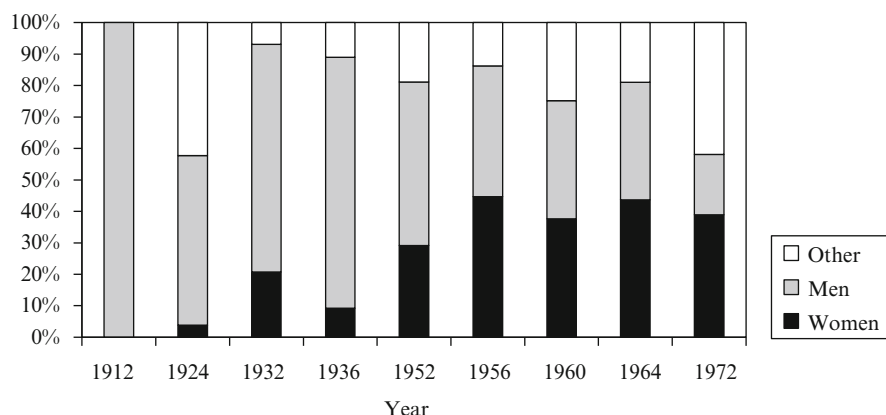


Diagram 2.4 Percentage of 'position-vacant' adverts according to sex 1912–1972 in *Horse & Hound*. Cross sections (Source: See Diagram 2.1. Comment: See Diagram 2.1)

gender-coded occupations. Men were in charge of horse care and tasks located further away from the farm, while women took care of cows, poultry and household duties. It is also worth noting that this advert provides the information that the house had an 'AGA cooker' and was 'easily run'. A possible interpretation of this will be presented below. However, the demand for gender complementarity can only be connected to adverts seeking couples as the other adverts were gender neutral.

The fact that the number of 'other' adverts was higher among the positions vacant than in the positions wanted adverts could imply that the employers were not completely convinced of women's suitability for stable work, though it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions here. Still, previous research indicates that this may be the case. According to Moore-Colyer and Simpson (2004), who studied the bloodstock industry 1945–1975, the male-dominated management did not regard women as sufficiently strong and tough enough to work in a racing yard. In addition, Victorian prudery hindered them from working with breeding.

Over time, a new kind of advert became more common in this category. The sample from 1960 demonstrates a new requirement, illustrated in the 'position-vacant' section, namely, that the groom should be BHS educated (*Horse & Hound* 8 October 1960). BHS stands for the British Horse Society, and the request for a BHS-educated groom implied that the employers wanted someone who had passed equestrian courses and was certified by the British Horse Society. The following excerpt from 1972 shows an advert that even specified the level of education expected from a prospective employee:

Cheerful BHSAI required. Also keen student, train BSHAI, or Horsemaster's certificate. Indoor school, BHS and ABRS approved. Wage while training. Opportunity to compete – Moorfield riding school. (*Horse & Hound* 7 January 1972)

Obviously, sheer experience was no longer seen as sufficient to qualify a person for horse care; an education was now required. At first glance, this change could be interpreted to indicate that there were so many applicants for the vacant positions

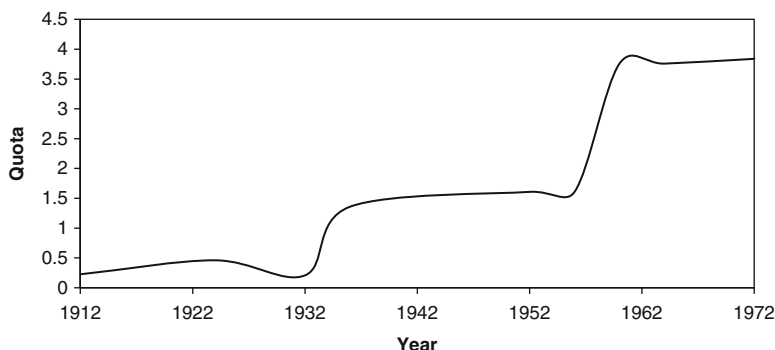


Diagram 2.5 Quota between position-vacant and position-wanted adverts, 1912–1972 in *Horse & Hound*. Cross sections (Source: See Diagram 2.1. Comment: See Diagram 2.1)

that the employers needed special criteria to be able to distinguish between them. This, however, was not the case. There was clearly a decrease in the number of job-seekers in relation to the number of employers advertising for grooms. A more plausible explanation is that the education had been introduced in order to raise the status of stable work. Other indicators point to the fact that the occupation's status had decreased over time. The discrepancy between the people looking for a job and the number of interested employers can be expressed as a quota between positions vacant and wanted (Diagram 2.5). The quota more than doubled in the 1950s, increasing from 1.6 in 1952 to 3.8 in 1960.

The increasing quota can be interpreted as an indication of a decrease in the popularity of stable work.

A similar development with an increasing demand for labour, significantly higher than the supply of prospective employees, can also be seen in Sweden. This development is indicated by the increasing number of adverts for positions vacant in *Lantarbetaren* and *Trav- och galoppronden*, although the available data is not enough to be used as a source for a diagram mapping the Swedish situation. The deficit of grooms was also discussed in the source material from the Trade Union for Agricultural Workers (Hedenborg 2008). That the demand was higher than the supply in Sweden is also illustrated by the fact that grooms were suddenly expected to care for more horses than before. There are also indications that the increasing demand for labour forced the horse industry to use new technology (an example being the 'horse walker') (Hedenborg 2008).

An Occupation with Decreasing Status

In the letters to the editor published in *Horse & Hound*, several readers attested to the difficulty of finding grooms. In 1936, the pseudonym 'Underdog' responded to an earlier letter, in which a horse owner had complained about the decreasing supply of grooms. 'Underdog' protested that there were in fact many grooms, but that working conditions for those employed in the stables were very poor. Wages were poor and the

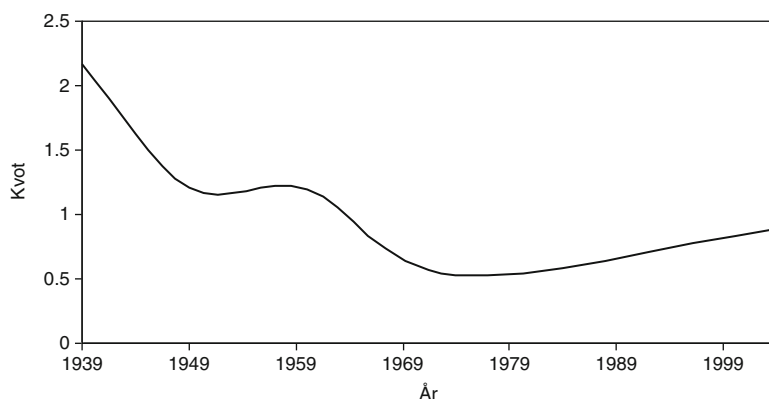


Diagram 2.6 Quota between grooms' wages and comparative farm workers' wages in 1939, 1949, 1960, 1974 and 2004 (Source: Hedenborg 2008. Comment: A calculated average of the highest and lowest wage for men is used as a base for the quota)

grooms' hard word was generally unacknowledged, according to 'Underdog' (*Horse & Hound* 12 December 1936). The same issue featured a letter from another pseudonym, 'Groom's wife', who also argued that the number of grooms was not the problem, but rather the high number of incompetent grooms who had a detrimental effect on the wages for grooms in general. For this reason, 'Groom's wife' insisted on better working conditions for the competent grooms (*Horse & Hound* 12 December 1936).

This focus on overall living conditions is explained by the fact that grooms normally were provided with a cottage, and sometimes even with coal or firewood, in addition to their wage (Moore-Colyer and Simpson 2004). This may be why the advert from 1952 (quoted above) provides information on the cottage's equipment and the easy manageability of the house. While the source material does not lend itself to any definitive conclusions about whether the actual state of the grooms' living conditions had improved or worsened, the complaints about the low wages continued over the next coming decades. Still, previous research has shown that the grooms' wages remained above the minimum agricultural workers' wage, at least for those working in racing stables (Moore-Colyer and Simpson 2004).

This was not the case in Sweden, where the working conditions and low wages were also topic for discussion. A comparison between the wages paid to grooms and other agricultural workers shows, however, that the relative wages for Swedish grooms decreased between 1939 and 2004, which makes it obvious that their situation actually worsened. Diagram 2.6 demonstrates that a groom earned more than twice as much as the average agricultural worker in 1939. Already in 1949, however, the groom only earned 1.2 times as much. The quota continued to decrease, and in 1974, a groom only earned half as much as an agricultural worker.

The decreasing wages seem to go hand in hand with a loss of status, as illustrated by articles in *Lantarbetaren*. An article from the 1930s paints an enviable picture of working at the racing track. Henning Strand, chairman of the trade union department at the racing track, commented that the work featured early mornings, and that

it was unusual in the sense that grooms were required to maintain a low weight. Still, the reporter coated work at the racing track in a romantic shimmer, writing that riders were ‘courted’ by ‘beautiful ladies’ and that bravery was a necessity as grooming was extremely demanding. Horse care was described as different from all other agricultural work, and the report concluded that most of *Lantarbetaren*’s readers were probably unaware that these men were organised by the same trade union (*Lantarbetaren* 1939: 22, 1).

A similar description can be found in a paper from the 1940s. Again, the chairman of this department of the trade union is interviewed, and the work is still depicted as enviable (*Lantarbetaren* 1946: 23, 14). However, a different picture is painted a decade later in the middle of a dispute about working hours between grooms and employers. One article states that a groom was not released from work until he had finished his tasks – regardless of how many hours this took. This article seems to imply that employers and grooms had to overcome their differences, emphasising that everybody in a stable worked for the same goal, and that the well-being of the horse ought to be everyone’s main interest. Grooming was still described as interesting and exciting, and craftsmanship was stressed as essential to the work (*Lantarbetaren* 1955: 22, 12–13 and 19). Still, this article shows a change in the perception of grooming. Even though craftsmanship was said to be of central importance, the work was no longer described as enviable. This attitude seems to have spread over time.

In the 1960s, *Lantarbetaren* published a number of articles commenting on the great turnover of grooms. Some stated low wages as the reason for this development. Furthermore, there were complaints that many young people worked in the stables voluntarily and for free, alongside the employed grooms (*Lantarbetaren* 1965: October, 4–5). The great turnover, and the fact that young people were prepared to work for free in the stables, did not promote increased wages or working conditions. Throughout the rest of the century, grooming was increasingly described as a thankless and poorly paid profession. Employers were accused of using black labour, and there were many who worked without proper insurance.

Together with the study of wage development within the sector, the study of opinions about stable work seems to endorse the findings of the previous survey of the number of people looking for work as grooms: the status of stable work seems to have decreased in both Sweden and Britain. Obviously, the ideas that people had about stable work were challenged and changed. The same goes for the working conditions. In addition, these changes seem to have provoked a destabilising of the gender borders and a dispute about the gender contract.

Women Replace Men

The fact that an increasing number of women worked with horses was commented upon in *Horse & Hound*’s letters to the editor around the mid-twentieth century. In 1952, a Miss Hilary Hetty opened a debate by claiming that women were better than men at taking care of horses. Her statement was contested in ‘Men vs. women’, and

in this letter, the writer underlined that Miss Hetty was welcome to watch the competitions in Badminton, or the Grand National, obviously meaning that this would prove to her that men were better riders than women. The letter presented an analysis of the situation, according to which there were plenty of men who were willing to take care of horses if only women had not taken their jobs. The writer also complained about the low wages, with which it was impossible to provide for a family (*Horse & Hound* 25 October 1952). This was not an unusual line of reasoning when it came to women's participation in the labour market. In the interwar period, women were accused of stealing men's jobs. Men were seen as the providers of the family and therefore in greater need of work (Neunsinger 2001; Wegerman 2004: 189–211; Greiff 1992), and similar arguments were heard in the 1950s (Hirdman 1998). Miss Hetty responded in the next issue of the magazine, agreeing that men were looking elsewhere for jobs and commenting on a previous article in *Horse & Hound* that supported this. However, she rejected the idea that men were better with horses and asked whether the other writer had noticed that a majority of the winners in competitions for young people were women (*Horse & Hound* 1 November 1952).

Miss Hetty's letter provoked many answers. The pseudonym 'Racing lad' wrote that men's increasing reluctance to work in the stables could not be explained by women having taken over their jobs. He admitted that the female grooms were doing a good job, and that they were respected because they did not criticise others. He did, however, point out that female grooms were usually assisted by male colleagues, implying that a male employee could never be completely replaced by a woman (*Horse & Hound* 8 November 1952). 'Girl groom' wrote about her own experiences working in one of the biggest racing stables and agreed with 'Racing lad' that she had always been assisted by the lads. The argument that men needed higher wages was not only heard from men. Among others, 'Girl groom' underlined that men were paid too little. Women could hold out the wages but should not be paid more, due to their lack of experience (*Horse & Hound* 13 December 1952). That both women and men felt that men were the providers and therefore in need of higher wages can be seen in other areas of the labour market too.

The complaints about the male grooms' working conditions continued in the 1950s. In the letter 'Bloodstock and Stud Grooms', the bad conditions and the low wages were once again used to account for the lack of decent male grooms. According to the writer, the standard agreement was 8–10 lb a week and lodging in a cottage, with electricity and milk as possible bonuses. However, grooming meant hard work 7 days a week. During the summer, a working day could be as long as 18 h. Despite their low wages, grooms were supposed to take care of very expensive animals (*Horse & Hound* 7 January 1956). A few months later, the signature 'Grooms for bloodstock' replied, stating that men's reluctance to work in the stables had more to do with the working hours than the wage (*Horse & Hound* 21 April 1956).

The social contract in stable work in Sweden was challenged in the 1930s, although foreign labourers rather than gender were the source of conflict. Sweden, like Britain, had a high unemployment rate during this decade, and Swedish men complained that foreign labour threatened to steal their work. An issue raised in this discussion was the ability to ride the racehorses, as some trainers argued that Swedish

riders were too heavy. Both jockeys and trainers rejected this argument, some instead claiming that a more convincing case against Swedish riders was that foreign jockeys were already trained professionals, whereas the training of young Swedish men required a certain financial investment from the trainers (Hedenborg 2008).

In October 1930, the Swedish grooms tried to prevent trainers from employing foreign labour by sending a letter to Socialstyrelsen (the National Board of Health and Welfare), to which all applications for using foreign labour were addressed. The board referred the letter to the Swedish Jockey Club. The Jockey Club responded that it was impossible to run a racing stable if the usage of foreign labour was illegalised. Many trainers hired foreign jockeys because of their low weight, and it was important for the trainers to be able to use jockeys in stable work as well. The Board followed the recommendations of the Jockey Club and did not grant the trade union's request to ban the use of foreign jockeys (Hedenborg 2008).

Some years later, the Agricultural Workers' Trade Union wanted to force employers to use only Swedish workers as grooms. The conflict generated a strike in 1936. During the strike, the employers were reported to have used foreign labourers in the stables. Foreign jockeys had been seen saddling their horses, and one had even been observed using a rake. The trade union demanded their deportation as the agreement on foreign labour in the stables had been breached, but the employers and the foreign workers complained that they had not broken the rules. The man raking had only done so to keep himself warm, and the men saddling their own horses had done so for security reasons (Hedenborg 2008). In an article in *Trav- och galoppronden*, which supported the employers, a writer claimed that the strike was counter-effective for the Swedish workers. Trainers had to use foreign labour in the stables as the Swedish grooms were out on strike. It was also stated that the conflict ought to have been resolved in private, so as not to deprive the audience of watching the races.

The pressure from the Swedish work force in the stables seems to have lessened during the 1950s. The trade union agreement was altered in 1957 making it easier for trainers to employ foreign jockeys. Still, it was not until the 1960s that these jockeys could be used in the stables as grooms. When stable work opened up for foreign labourers, it seems that it opened up for women as well. Women were allowed to participate in races in the 1940s as amateurs, and in the 1940s and 1950s, it was discussed whether they might take care of the horses as well. However, these disputes were not as articulated as the ones concerning foreign labour (Hedenborg 2008).

In Britain, the 1960s marked the voicing of a new perspective on the grooms' wages and conditions. These were still topic for discussion but were now almost justified in the debate. Joy Annear wrote in a letter to the editor that grooming is hard work and has to be done by a horse lover. The work is poorly paid because it is not profitable to keep horses. She argues that low wages may even be preferable, as excessive wages might attract labourers away from the industry to the point that people who lacked the necessary love for horses might seek work in the stables, solely because of the high wages (*Horse & Hound* 23 January 1960). In the same issue, a JM Montgomery writes that grooming is so unique that it defies comparison

with any other kind of agricultural work and argues that this accounts for the poor wages (*Horse & Hound* 23 January 1960). In other words, the social contract in stable work was based around a love of horses.

In 1964, the discussions about working conditions seem to take a new turn. Complaints from parents of girl grooms about their daughters' working conditions spark a debate in the letters to the editor. In 'Stable work for girls', the writer encourages parents not to worry about their groom daughters, it being completely possible to make a living out of such work. The writer uses herself as an example and states that she was somewhat older when she began doing stable work, deciding to work as a groom when she could not afford to keep her own horses. She stresses the importance of keeping an eye on the grooms' living conditions and the maintenance of the stable. However, she concludes by accusing the horse owners of being ignorant about the hard work involved in grooming and claims this as the reason for the low wages (*Horse & Hound* 13 June). Another writer, calling herself a realist, says that stable work is tough, and that this was something that the girls and their parents alike had to come to terms with. A groom has long days at work, especially when there is travel involved. The woman emphasised that stable work was not as glamorous as many girls liked to imagine. She too finished by saying that grooms ought to receive adequate financial reward for their labour (*Horse & Hound* 22 August 1964). In another letter, Trevor Kempton countered by writing that grooming was more than a job as it meant assuming full responsibility for the horse (even in relation to the owner), and that a groom should not be motivated by money. Finally, he finished by stating that too many grooms requested high wages despite lacking the requisite experience (*Horse & Hound* 5 September).

However, the self-proclaimed realist was not alone in her opinion. Peter Snails wrote that he was convinced that many more young people would be willing to groom with higher wages and better working conditions. Since horses are expensive animals, Peter Snails argued that horse owners by definition are wealthy and should therefore be able to pay reasonable wages. In his opinion, horse owners asked too much, expecting grooms to ride like Pat Smythe and have 50 years of experience (*Horse & Hound* 12 September). 'A Groom's eye' claimed that female stable work was one of the most controversial subjects. There were plenty of letters from mothers of overworked daughters as well as from frustrated employers. However, not much was heard from the girls themselves, which is why this writer wanted to make a statement. Pointing out that the wage she had received as a groom far exceeded what she was now paid as a secretary, 'A Groom's eye' also observed that wages must be in proportion to the groom's experience and that the people who complained the most were likely to be inexperienced girls working for short periods of times at second-rate riding schools. Due to the difficulty of the work, a groom needed training. Also, the writer wished to emphasise that many stables were poorly maintained, and that such stables have trouble attracting workers. In addition, girls faced extra problems as they were supposed to do household chores on top of their grooming, something that was not expected of the lads. She also wrote about how feelings for the horse can complicate the job (*Horse & Hound* 17 October).

In Sweden, it was not until the 1970s and onwards that it is clear that an increasing number of girls had started to work as grooms. However, there are no signs of the gender contract being questioned or debated when it came to the grooms. Instead it was their working conditions that were topic for discussion. However, the articles on grooming shift focus. In the 1970s, articles go from talking about working conditions in general to girls becoming victims of sexual harassment in the stables (Hedenborg 2008).

Concluding Discussion

This chapter started out by posing questions about changes in the gender patterns of stable work in Sweden and Britain, and whether the respective patterns for the two countries diverge. Articles in the daily papers about the Olympics – namely, the Equestrian Games – seemed to suggest differences. Journalists repeatedly pointed out that there were both female riders and grooms working for the British team and did not seem to think that such a gender pattern existed. Whether this was the case is difficult to know for sure.

Traditionally, stable work and the horse were associated with men and masculinity. However, this study seems to suggest that the gender division of labour was changing in the 1950s – at least in Britain, where it is evident that an increasing number of women sought employment as grooms, and that employers thought them suitable for these positions. The Swedish source material from the 1950s shows no indication of an increased demand or supply of female grooms. It seems likely that the change occurred later in Sweden, perhaps as late as the 1970s. Today, the equine sector is in both countries linked to women and femininity. A plausible explanation for the variances is that Sweden remained a rural country longer than Britain. It is also possible that Britain's losses in WW1 and WW2 prompted the change. The time differences might be connected to the development of the equine sector in relation to Britain's and Sweden's different positions in WW1 and WW2.

Still, there were not only differences between the respective developments in Britain and Sweden. An important similarity between the countries was that the demand for grooms outgrew the supply over time. This development may indicate deterioration in the popularity of the horse groom profession. Another sign of this was that the decrease in the relative wage for stable work. Previous research has attempted to explain why grooms seem to have endured the poor working conditions (Moore-Colyer and Simpson 2004; Cassidy 2002; Case 1991; Hedenborg 2008). In this chapter, it is suggested that grooms did not simply comply with these conditions but actually questioned them actively. This questioning opened up for a renegotiation of the gender contract.

Previous research has demonstrated that a gender contract can be challenged when a society's resources grow or diminish drastically. In addition, a renegotiation of the contract requires a shift in ideas, based on the notion that the contract is unjust. During the twentieth century, Britain and Sweden both underwent significant changes

of this kind as the labour market grew along with the expansion of the industrial and service sectors. These developments may have enabled a questioning of the social contract of stable work. Stable work as such did not change during the twentieth century. Instead, this change in status can be explained by overall changes in the labour market. Over time, the industry and service sector could offer better conditions than the agricultural sector. Stable work which at the beginning of the century was considered a high-status agricultural occupation did not fare so well in comparison to other professions towards the later part of the century.

This change, in which society's resources came to be distributed in a new way, enabled a challenging of the gender contract. The questioning of the gender contract opened the door for women who could now begin to work in a sector that until then had been reserved for men. As has been argued by Hargreaves, it is possible that the destabilisation of the gender order actually produced new opportunities for women (Hargreaves 1994). Whether these new opportunities came hand in hand with a new view of the meaning of stable work is more difficult to establish on the basis of this study. Previous research has pointed out that as an increasing number of women came to be stable workers, 'caring' seems to have become a more crucial component in the construction of what is important in stable work. However, the construction seems more complex (Hedenborg 2009b), and the source material used for this chapter suggests that the questioning of the gender contract in this case is more connected to questions about wages, who was expected to provide for a family and working conditions.

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