

Horse Girl: Precedents and Problems

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Background

What draws humans to horses is well-established:

- in myth, they're **facilitators of transformation**
- psychically, they speak to our desires and vulnerabilities
- pragmatically, they have been historically kept for **war, transportation, and agriculture.**



Pegasus from: Meisjord, Eric. "The Legend Of Pegasus Explained." *grunge.com*, 5 June 2020.



Secretariat wins Belmont by 31 lengths from: "Secretariat | Titles, Results, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Secretariat-racehorse>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2021.

In contemporary use, the horse is almost exclusively for leisure and sporting purposes; with this, women's participation has grown, and the activity has become largely feminized.

There are caveats to this at the upper levels and in certain sports (e.g., racing).

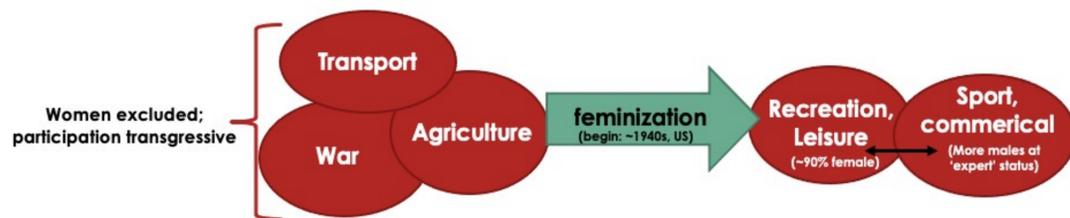


Figure 1: changing modalities of horse-human interaction and effects for women's participation

Problem

Within this context, popular culture's 'horse girl' meme sits on a unique fault line that elicits strong reactions of both **romanticization** and **attack**.



VS.



Shot from: *Black Beauty* | Official Trailer | Disney+, www.youtube.com. Accessed 30 Apr. 2021.

Horse girl as crazy meme from: "Willy Wonka - Oh, You're a Horse Girl? What Size ..." *Memegenerator.Net*, Accessed 30 Apr. 2021.

Questions

This study explored the following inquiries:

- What is a 'horse girl?'
- What does the critique of them actually comment on?



Horse girl collage from: SSENSE. "Why Are Horse Girls Always Trending?" *Ssense*, 4 Sept. 2020, <https://www.ssense.com/en-us/editorial/fashion/why-are-horse-girls-always-trending>.

Findings

In this study, I found the horse girl's primary offense to be the **deep emotional connection** women and girls cite as pulling them to horses.

Often it is discussed as a **threat** to or **replacement** of their would-be romantic and domestic (a.k.a., 'normal') ones.

The discomfort the 'horse girl' evokes is rooted in its **alleged transgression**.

Deriding someone for being one reveals how entrenched constructs of **gender performance** and **normative behavior** for young girls and women are.



Katy disguised as boy from: "36 Flicka Movie Ideas | Horse Movies, Horses, Movies." *Pinterest*, <https://www.pinterest.com/crazyhorse1019/flicka-movie/>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2021.

Methods

This study employed:

- experience,
- interviews with current and 'grown' horse girls,
- popular culture media, and
- readings in the fields of anthropology, history, comparative literature, psychology, sociology, and women's and gender studies.



Scene from *National Velvet* from: Totten, Amilia. "The Leading Lady: Top 10 Elizabeth Taylor Movies." *Top 10 Films*, 9 Aug. 2019, <https://www.top10films.co.uk/54844-the-leading-lady-the-top-10-elizabeth-taylor-movies/>.

Additional Themes

Underpinning the horse girl's infamy are several themes:

- **hyper-sexualization**
- pathologizing girls' obsessions and pleasure, and
- perceived threat to an ideal masculinity/femininity dichotomy.



Gucci's Spring/Summer 2020 Campaign from: Sunnucks, Jack. "See Horses Roam LA for the Gucci SS20 Campaign." *I-D*, 9 Jan. 2020, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/pkebeby/see-horses-roam-la-for-the-gucci-ss20-campaign.

Historically, horses functioned as symbolic and literal vehicles for women outside the sociocultural ideal (e.g., working women) to **gain access to restricted spaces**.

Today, they still enable **vicarious power, autonomy, skill-building, and mobility**.