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.

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).

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.

Questions
This study explored the following inquiries:
• What is a ‘horse girl’?
• What does the critique of them actually comment on?

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.

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.

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.

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.