Horse Girl: Precedents and Problems

What draws humans to horses is well-established; in myth, they're facilitators of transformation; psychically, they speak to our desires and vulnerabilities; and pragmatically, they have been historically kept for war, transportation, and agriculture. The contemporary horse is almost exclusively used for leisure and sporting purposes; with this, women's participation has grown, and the activity has become largely feminized. Within this context, popular culture's 'horse girl' meme is uniquely positioned and elicits strong reactions of both romanticization and attack. Underpinning its infamy are themes of hyper-sexualization, pathologizing girls' obsessions and pleasure, and perceived threat to men/their own ideal femininity. This study explored the following inquiries: What is a 'horse girl'? What does the critique of them actually comment on? This course of study was based in experience, interviews with current and 'grown' horse girls, popular culture primary sources, and readings in the fields of anthropology, history, comparative literature, psychology, sociology, and women's and gender studies. Historically, horses functioned as 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. I found the horse girl's primary offense to be their professed deep emotional connection with the animals, often cited as a threat to their would-be romantic and domestic ties. The discomfort the 'horse girl' evokes is rooted in its alleged transgression against normative gender performance; deriding girls for being one merely reveals how entrenched these constructs still are.