

Louvain School of Management

The gender subtext in showjumping

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Table of content:

ABSTRACT	3
1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION	3
2. STATE OF THE ART	4
2.1 THE GENDER SUBTEXT IN TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS	4
2.1.1 <i>Definition of the gender subtext</i>	4
2.1.2 <i>The ideal worker</i>	5
2.1.3 <i>The different gender subtexts</i>	6
2.1.4 <i>Arrangements and the power-based process</i>	7
2.1.5 <i>The gendering process</i>	8
2.2 THE HORSE-RIDING INDUSTRY AND THE ECONOMY	9
2.2.1 <i>Description of the Equine Business</i>	9
2.2.2 <i>Horse-riding disciplines at the Olympic Games</i>	10
2.2.3 <i>Jobs in the horse-riding industry</i>	11
2.3 HORSE BUSINESS: A GENDER-NEUTRAL BUSINESS?	14
2.3.1 <i>Feminization of the sport</i>	14
2.3.2 <i>Participation at amateur levels</i>	15
2.3.3 <i>Equal competition rules</i>	16
2.4 MECHANISMS OF EXCLUSION OF WOMEN IN HORSE BUSINESS	17
2.4.1 <i>Vertical segregation along gendered lines</i>	17
2.4.2 <i>Horizontal segregation along gendered lines</i>	19
2.4.3 <i>Gender roles and stereotypes</i>	20
2.4.4 <i>Other barriers</i>	27
2.5 THE HORSE/HUMAN RELATIONSHIP	28
2.5.1 <i>Building the relationship</i>	28
2.5.2 <i>Gender stereotypes about horses</i>	31
2.5.3 <i>A business relationship</i>	31
3. METHODOLOGY	32
3.1 AIM AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	33
3.2 DATA SAMPLING	34
3.3 DATA COLLECTION	34
3.4 DATA ANALYSIS	37
3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD AND SELF-REFLEXIVITY	38
4. RESULTS	39
4.1 A LABOUR OF PASSION CHARACTERIZED BY HARSH WORKING CONDITIONS	39
4.2 THE PERCEPTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN SHOWJUMPING	49
4.3 CONCLUSION	58
5. DISCUSSION	60
5.1 CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH	60
5.2 SOLUTIONS	61
5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	62
5.4 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	63
6. GENERAL CONCLUSION	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY	65

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the presence of a gender subtext in dressage and showjumping competition at international elite level. I will describe the results of a qualitative study based on interviews with 12 participants, men and women competing or working in high level of dressage and showjumping, to analyze the similarities and the differences between men and women riders in these different disciplines of horse-riding. I will make a gender subtext analysis by re-reading, deconstructing, and reconstructing these interviews on a gender analysis base. While there has been qualitative research on equestrian sports and gender, and empirical study of the gender subtext in organizations, there is still a lack of analysis of the presence of a gender subtext in equestrian sports and in sports, overall. As a sex-integrated sport, horse-riding is a perfect case study to analyze the presence of a gender subtext in high level competitions.

1. General introduction

It has been 68 years since women have had the right to compete in Olympic dressage and 64 years in showjumping. The mass entrance of women in the horse industry in the second half of the twentieth century imposed the big challenge of changing gender interactions. Since that moment, men and women have competed against each other as equals. However, it is still overwhelmingly men who are at the top level of horse competition. Gender equality is put forward in this sport while the results indicate the persistence of some hidden inequalities. At an amateur level, about 80% of riders are women, while almost 80% of professional riders are men. We can hear that kind of prejudice in the world of horses: “women love horses while men love riding.” (Adelman & Knijnik, 2013b), which undermines credibility in women who want to ride at a high level. The increased participation of women in equestrian sport these last years, has been seen more as an undesirable feminization of the sport, rather than an opportunity for gender equality (Thompson, 2016). The persistence of these inequalities may be explained by the presence of a *gender subtext*. The gender subtext is a set of organizational and individual arrangements that systematically reproduces gender distinctions (Benschop &

Doorewaard, 1998a). Are these differences in the numbers of men and women participating due to a gender subtext? This paper aims to understand this gap by analyzing the gender subtext in the horse-riding industry. Some studies indicate that the persistence of gender inequalities in organizations can be explained by a gender subtext (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998a). Yet, this is an unexplored track in the world of sports while this is a very gendered domain. In this paper, I analyze the gender subtext in showjumping and in dressage, and I put forward the perception of gender equality in horse-riding and the working conditions of people in the horse-riding industry. Before presenting the results of my qualitative research, I first highlight research into the gender subtext in traditional organizations, then I explain how the horse-riding industry can be linked with economy. I will continue with some explanations about the horse business and how it is gendered. Then, I explain more deeply the different mechanisms of exclusion of women in horse business and I will close the state of the art by explaining the horse/human relationship. Following the state of the art, I will deeply explain the methodology that I followed for this paper with an explanation of my research question and some sub-research questions. Another goal of this study is to help riders and organizations become aware of gendered practices and to develop more gender inclusiveness by offering concrete solutions.

2. State of the art

2.1 The gender subtext in traditional organizations

In this section, I will start by a clear explanation of the gender subtext in traditional organizations. Then, I will explain the concept of the ideal worker as it is a term that is frequently used in the literature on the gender subtext. I will also detail the more relevant kind of gender subtext. After that, I will describe two central concepts of gender subtext: the arrangements and the power-based process. Finally, I will close this chapter with the gendering process.

2.1.1 Definition of the gender subtext

By referring to the definition of Benschop and Doorewaard (1998b, p5) the gender subtext is:

The set of often concealed, power-based gendering processes, i.e., organizational, and individual arrangements (objectives, measures, habits), systematically (re)producing gender distinctions in social practices through organizational and individual arrangements.

The subtext is the role of language, symbols, and the interpretation of social practices (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998a). Thus, the gender subtext is the role that language, symbols and social practices play in the construction of gender practices. This concept implies a distinction between an organizational discourse, which seems to be gender neutral, and certain processes and arrangements (the subtexts) that sometimes remain implicit, so that organizational practices appear to be neutral (Martínez, 2011).

2.1.2 The ideal worker

It is important to start with the explanation of the concept of ‘the ideal worker’ as I will use it afterwards and it is a widely used term in literature on the gender subtext. The ideal worker is considered as a disembodied worker. As Acker (cited in Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998b) explains, it means that the worker does not have a body with masculine or feminine traits and no specific gender. However, we can see in many studies that the characteristics of ‘the ideal worker’ are traits that are more often observed in the male character. These traits are for example: full time availability, work-oriented, highly qualified. All these traits are linked to masculine authoritarianism, paternalism, and careerism (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998b). I will return to the characteristic of full-time availability and thus the need not to have social or care obligations outside work in order to be the ideal worker. It is a fact that it is women who have the burden of care most of the time. Therefore, they need time for unpaid work which is not compatible with the need for organization to have full-time availability for paid work. Consequently, women who are potential mothers can be seen as disruptive and costly by the employers (Clayton-Hathway & Stumbitz, 2020). Accordingly, the concept of ‘the ideal worker’ is not really gender-neutral as it is said in a lot of organizations.

2.1.3 The different gender subtexts

In fact, different kinds of gender subtext exist. Bendl (2008) presents eight forms of gender subtext, I will put forward five of them that are the most relevant for this research. The first one is the *gender subtext of unconscious exclusion and neglect*; it creates an absence of women within companies but also within studies. Women are less considered by researchers, they are unconsciously excluded and neglected thus gender could be a bias in organizational research. The second is the *subtext of attributed masculinity and males as the norm*. It means that males are considered as the norm while women are considered as “the other”. Thus, women are compared to their male counterparts on the basis of male-oriented values. Moreover, the ideal worker is built on these male-oriented values, which must be embodied by women if they want to be considered as the ideal worker. The third subtext is linked to the second as it is the *subtext of women as “the other”*. It means among other things that feminine notions are constructed with less value than the male ones. In most organizations, the symbols, the values, the norms are based on hegemonic masculinity that support the construction of male as the norm and women as “the other”. The next subtext is about the *subtext of feminization*, which means that some organizations recognize some feminine values in some women, but they do not explicitly recognize that these are not male-oriented. This is done to preserve management as a masculine dominated domain. The last subtext that I will put forward is the *subtext of pretended equality between males and females*. Today, equality between men and women is highlighted more and more even in organizations’ texts. They recognize feminine traits for what they are, and they are even considered as advantages for organizations. As Kelan (cited in Bendl, 2008) shows, women are more included, and are also considered as “the managers of the future”. These texts allow women to be considered for their own feminine values and skills and to achieve better positions as managers. However, for Kelan (cited in Bendl, 2008), to consider women as the “new ideal workers” does not make equality between males and females, it just reverses the current hierarchy and puts men in the subordinate position. The issue is moved but not resolved, thus there is no real solution.

2.1.4 Arrangements and the power-based process

As Benshop (cited in Benshop & Doorewaard, 1998a) said, the gender subtext in organization is something that can be seen as an opaque and power-based process that systematically reproduces gender differences. Arrangements and power processes are two central concepts of the gender subtext. On the one hand, there are structural arrangements in organizations which can create gender inequalities. These arrangements are for example: hierarchical positions, rules, values, processes, culture, and so on.

On the other hand, there is the power, the most relevant is the hegemonic form. Hegemonic power is the way in which people use power or are subjected to power in their daily life (Doorewaard cited in Benshop & Doorewaard, 1998a). Power is often used in organizations, and it can produce gender inequalities. Organizations that are hierarchically segmented, give more place to the use of power and the opportunity to create different jobs for men and women. Taking this into consideration, it is easier to determine if a man or a woman is better suited for a job when there is a hierarchical segmentation and thus, to separate the allocation of certain jobs to women and others to men, which still further increase gender distinctions.

Moreover, women working in a hierarchically segmented domain have more difficulty reaching high positions. Indeed, they have to fight harder than men, and to meet the masculine norms such as full-time availability. It is also more difficult for them to be integrated, and they often face a lot of disadvantages. Even if they encounter some pleasant aspects such as receiving extra attention from their colleagues, it seems that women are more vulnerable than men in high positions and that their expertise is always called into question. On the contrary, men working in a female dominated domain can often make the most of this distinction whilst at the same time face few drawbacks. (Benshop & Doorewaard, 1998a).

2.1.5 The gendering process

Gender is something that is socially constructed. It means that it varies according to the context, the culture, and the time period (Coulter, 2013). Gender constructions are dynamic, fluid, and challenging (Thorell & Hedenborg, 2015). Regarding the gendering process, people's identity is very important. Indeed, people are identified as men or women in society, and they also identify themselves as men or women or ungendered. This implies some physical and biological distinctions between gender. Some people like these differences and emphasize them; it is something natural for most people. But it can reinforce gender distinctions and thus the gender subtext. On the other hand, some people prefer to hide or not to accentuate their femininity or masculinity. In general, it happens more with women who want to have a highly qualified career in a male-dominated domain. They will accentuate other characteristics such as experience, skills, and knowledge to prove their ability to manage a highly qualified career. By doing that, implicitly, women validate the depreciation of femininity, because in a certain way they validate the association of femininity and incapacity. Unfortunately, the identification with femininity is not really valuable as it is often associated with care responsibilities, lower qualifications, and part-time jobs.

Indeed, the ideal profile for low-qualified work seems to have more feminine characteristics while the ideal worker profile for high-qualified work seems to have more masculine connotations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998b). Moreover, highly-qualified jobs are frequently full-time jobs while low-qualified jobs are more usually part-time jobs. These affirmations may have an impact on women who aspire to elite careers. Therefore, some women will be discouraged, and others will hide their real feminine identity to highlight their skills.

As Benschop and Doorewaard (1998a) said, the simultaneous existence of gender inequality and the impression of equality is reinforced by the culture of the company, the habits of interactions and the identities of the employees. The distinctions that are made between gender have a certain bearing on the creation of gender inequalities. It is important to highlight these distinctions to know where these inequalities come from. Regarding the

sports industry, all sports have always been gendered. Sex segregation is imbued in the culture, organization, and practice of sports in general (Anderson, 2008). Thus, the gendering process is mainly affected by the historical and cultural context. It means that gender is always built on the basis of a given context (Martínez, 2011). It is therefore interesting to explore how masculinity and femininity are constructed in sports, and more precisely in equestrian sports where men and women compete together as equals.

2.2 The horse-riding industry and the economy

The aim of this section is to link the horse-riding industry to the economy and to show that the horse sector is a big business. Thus, I will start by describing the horse-riding sector and highlight certain figures. Next, I will explain the different disciplines of horse-riding which are represented at the Olympic Games. To conclude, I will detail most of the jobs that people can undertake in this sector.

2.2.1 Description of the Equine Business

Most people have little idea of the global scale and significance of the horse-riding industry, while it is something of real importance to our economy mainly in Europe. Since the end of the twentieth century, sports and thus horse-riding became more and more commercialized. It means that large amounts of money are involved in different forms like media deals, individual rich owners, sponsorships, cities, and national government (Dashper, 2014). Therefore, equestrian sports can be seen as a real economic sector. The economic impact of the horse industry is huge in Europe. It is estimated at more than \$133 billion per year which is almost half of its global value which is estimated at \$300 billion. It is more than in other countries where horse-riding is also very popular such as the United States and Canada, with \$102 billion and \$16 billion respectively (Equine Business Association, n.d). The horse-riding industry also provides 400 000 full time jobs in Europe alone (European Horse Network, 2010). These figures indicate that the equine industry is a real business which is worth analyzing considering the numbers of people and the amount of money involved.

It is also important to know that professional sports are partly made for the production of media content, which is sold at profit (Dart, 2014). Thus, the media are important in the sport industry because if people are interested in a particular sport, the media will play a big role in offering this sport to spectators. Regarding this and the horse industry, race courses are highly mediatized in some countries, such as the UK for example where this is the second sport (just after football) that counts the largest number of spectators (Clayton-Hathway & Manfredi, 2017). Some disciplines are more mediatized than others, for example showjumping when compared to the other disciplines at the Olympic Games: dressage and eventing. Consequently, larger amounts of money are at stake in the discipline of showjumping and the prices in a showjumping competition will be much higher than the ones in dressage or eventing.

2.2.2 Horse-riding disciplines at the Olympic Games

Since the Olympics Games of Stockholm in 1912, horse-riding has been a sport that is part of the Olympics games and more particularly the disciplines of dressage, showjumping and eventing. The three disciplines are very different and demand a lot of specific skills. A few years after horse-riding became a part of the Olympics games, the Federation Equestre International (FEI) was created, in 1921 to be exact. It is the governing body for all international events in dressage, para-equestrian dressage, showjumping, eventing, driving, para-equestrian driving, endurance, reining and vaulting (FEI, 2010). The Belgian, Ingmar de Vos (FEI, n.d), has held the post of President of the FEI since 2014.

Showjumping is one of the most financially affluent, popular, and sponsored elite equestrian sporting disciplines (Hogg, 2015). First, there are the showjumping competitions which consist of a course of 10 to 13 jumps of obstacles which must be passed in a certain order. The goal is to make the course in a set time with no penalties. Penalties are added if the horse refuses to jump, if there is an error in the course, or if part of an obstacle is knocked down. The goal is to evaluate the speed, the courage, the agility, and the strength of the horse. The winner is the one with the least penalties and the fastest time (Whitaker, Hargreaves, & Wolframm, 2012).

Then, the discipline of dressage, which is considered as the art of equestrian sport, can be even compared to dance movements. It was created to train horses to have complete coordination and cooperation between the horse and rider (Olympic, s.d.). An Olympic dressage competition consists of a succession of movements and gymnastic exercises. This discipline is more subjective than the others. The couple is evaluated on its harmony and the precision of specific movements (Knijnik, 2013). Judges give marks in terms of technique, precision and other specific criteria like the freedom and regularity of the horse's pace, the impulsion or elasticity and engagement of the horse's movements, evidence of submission, and the correctness of the rider's position and aids (Hogg, 2015). The final mark summarizes the performance of the rider and the horse during the test (Hawson, McLean, & McGreevy, 2010). The winner is the competitor with the highest score.

Finally, eventing which is the most demanding discipline because it combines three different disciplines: dressage, showjumping and cross-country riding; it is often described as the equestrian equivalent of the triathlon (Hogg, 2015). Initially, this discipline was created to test officers in very different challenges (Olympic, s.d). The cross-country competition consists of an endurance race with fixed natural obstacles on mixed grounds. There are penalties in case of exceeding allocated time or if the rider does not pass an obstacle (Wood, 2018). The competitor who achieves the shortest time wins. It is considered as the most dangerous discipline. Indeed, the cross-country part is the one where the majority of injuries and deaths of horses and riders have occurred (Thompson & Nesci, 2016).

2.2.3 Jobs in the horse-riding industry

The horse-riding industry provides a lot of jobs which can be very different from each other and require different skills. In fact, at the beginning of sport as a social institution, men practiced horse-riding to learn the values that were necessary to succeed in the new economy (Anderson, 2009). These young men could develop skills like competitiveness, leadership, surpassing themselves, and so on, skills that were seen as a real advantage to develop in the economic world or in the horse-riding industry. This was said at a time when only men could do horse-riding but today, women can also develop these skills, thanks to this sport. The economy and the equine industry are interlinked because you cannot do horse-riding at a

professional level without developing some business skills. Indeed, the horse-riding industry is a real business where there are a lot of different career opportunities.

People can manage their own stables, they can rent the boxes to horse owners and these owners can benefit from the infrastructure, in this case we call it private stables. But the owners of the stables can decide to have their own horses and to rent the horses for lessons, for walks, for internships and so on. In this case we call it Pony Club and it is intended more for children. People who own these stables often need to have employees for different kinds of tasks. I will explain the different jobs. First the home-groom, this is the person who takes care of the horses. His/her job is to give them food, to put them to grass, to clean out the boxes and other tasks which vary from one stable to another. Then there is the competition-groom for people who compete at high-level, in this case the groom does the same job but follows the rider in each competition. Secondly, some stables need another coach, but it will depend if the owner gives lessons himself/herself and whether he or she is able to give all the lessons. Moreover, stables sometimes need to use the services of a veterinarian for healthcare, a blacksmith for horseshoes, a dental technician, or an osteopath, but these are rather one-off jobs.

Whether it is a private stable or a pony Club there is an employer/employee relationship although it is in different ways. However, the size and the style of management of the workplace can vary a lot. We have on the one hand the smaller yards that are considered more loyal and having closer relationships with their employees, but which often have lower financial resources and are therefore less flexible because they have few employees that cannot be easily replaced. On the other hand, there are the larger ones, which have more financial means and can offer more flexibility in job roles, but which are sometimes impersonal and more hierarchical (Clayton-Hathway & Stumbitz, 2020).

Another kind of work is the breeding of horses. The breeders have mares and stallions, and they sell the semen of the stallion and/or foals. In this case, it is really a business of horses where everyone tries to find the best horse for the smallest amount of money. Then, there are also other kinds of jobs which are also a part of the horse-riding industry, such as people who sell food for horses or equipment for horses and for their riders. Finally, there are

additional jobs which are linked to the 'elite' horse riders. These are all the people who are in the organizational body of competitions and the judges who give an appreciation of the performance of the rider. They are also owners of well-known horses. These people invest a lot of money in promising horses, and they choose the riders they want to ride their horses. They are called investors. Thus, the rider will train the horse and then go to competitions with him.

The last job is the one on which I will mostly focus my research: the professional rider. As I said before, the professional rider has two options: to ride owners' horses or to train their own horses. At professional level, horse-riding is no longer a hobby as it is at amateur level, but it is a job that requires a lot of time and money. Working in the world of horses is often seen as a vocation or a lifestyle decision because of the need of full-time availability and not counting the number of hours you work. In fact, jobs in the horse industry are mostly a 24/7 commitment. Achievement becomes essential to earn money and to be successful in this career (Coulter, 2013). At this level, large amounts of money are at stake, and just the horses already have a very high monetary value (Dashper, 2012a). A lot of people who ride at international level run their own stables. They do not just compete, they give lessons, they train horses and all this in addition to their personal training. This can be seen as the management of a real company. They have to create a client base, they buy and sell horses, they sign contracts, so we can easily make a connection between all these aspects and those we find in the economic industry. We can see this kind of comparison in the literature:

The social, physical, emotional, psychological, and personal demands placed on top riders in the horse industry – long hours, various kinds of competition, many types of pressure, etc. – are akin to the demands in high levels of economic or political organizations (Coulter, 2013, p178).

Therefore, when we take into account all these different jobs, we see that the horse-riding industry is a large sector which involves a lot of workers with very varied profiles and large amounts of money. I would like to close this section by remembering two important figures: the equine industry has an economic impact of \$133 billion per year and 400 000 full time jobs and that only in Europe.

2.3 Horse business: a gender-neutral business?

Equestrian sports are very relevant when analyzing gender neutrality in business because of the sex-integration in competitions. To analyze that, I will first talk about why the horse business could be expected to be gender neutral by explaining the feminization of the sport, participation at the amateur level and the fact that men and women compete together in equestrian sports and why it is like that.

2.3.1 Feminization of the sport

A century ago, a man was a 'real' man only if he was a horseman. Horses were used in the army, for agricultural work, for transport, and other activities that are male activities. Thus, equestrian sports were strongly linked to discipline, order, and a class-based form of masculinity (Reidi cited in Dashper, 2014). Nevertheless, women had some contacts with horses, but it was only women of the bourgeoisie, and only for leisure (Hedenborg & Hedenborg White, 2012). It is important to notice that equestrian Olympics events started when horses still had a military utility. At that time, horses were used in society with a real utility function, and for competitions at the same time. It means that equestrian competition was only for the military officers because it was used as a way to train horses and officers in the trials they might encounter during the war. Thus, originally, horses and horse-riding are associated with masculinity, but over the years we have witnessed feminization as a world tendency. Indeed, the feminization of this sport is due to the decrease in the military and utilitarian functions of horses (Adelman & Knijnik, 2013).

Women were more and more accepted in the horse industry because they were considered as suitable for horse-riding because of their 'natural love of horses' and their 'natural sense of caring'. It is because of this natural love of horses that women were first accepted in the stable to take care of the horses. Thus, at the beginning, women were more in the stables to help the male riders and, as things progressed, they started to ride more and more and finally to access competitions. If we can talk about a 'feminization process', it means

that girls can develop an alternative femininity in the stable, which is characterized by leadership and decisiveness, while care for horses stays central (Thorell & Hedenborg, 2015). Taking that into account, the world of horses can somehow help women to prove they are physically strong, capable, and qualified to assume masculine work.

Regarding the different disciplines, dressage is considered as the most feminized discipline of horse-riding (Game, 2001). The high number of women in dressage can be explained by the compatibility between dressage and femininity (De Haan, Sotiriadou, & Henry, 2016). As Dashper (2012b) said, this arena of the equestrian world is more inclusive of any type of masculinity, providing gay or 'effeminate' men the opportunity to participate and take part in high-level competition without discrimination. Therefore, this discipline is not only feminized, but also open to different kinds of masculinities. This acceptance comes from the sex integration in equestrian sports. It allows men to be as they are; they do not have to prove their heterosexuality (Dashper, 2012b). Moreover, this discipline allows men and women to express their artistic talent through sport (Thompson, 2016). As Dashper (2012a) argues, sex integration in equestrian sports may also have positive outcomes for men. Indeed, gay men feel in their place and heterosexual men have less pressure to prove their heterosexuality. So, there is a wider acceptance of different kinds of masculinity even in a very heteromasculine domain such as sports (Dashper, 2012b). However, even if there is a wider acceptance of different kinds of masculinities, a majority of men still desire to be associated with the hegemonic form (Anderson, 2009).

As Alvesson and Billing (cited in Martínez, 2011) said, the feminization and the masculinization of activities like horse-riding competitions, are at the heart of the social construction of gender. Therefore, it is very important to take a look at these constructions and representations of femininities and masculinities within sports.

2.3.2 Participation at amateur levels

At the beginning, the feminization of the sport was mainly observed in amateur levels because it was more accessible. However, over the years, the feminization of amateur levels also showed a decrease in the participation of men. This is called the 'male flight', which means

that when a domain (professional or athletic) is associated with femininity, men tend to avoid this domain (Allen, 2018). However, it was not the case at the professional level where male participation still dominates female participation in competitions. As Adelman & Knijnik (2013) said, 90% of amateur riders are women. Thus, only 10% of amateur riders are men while the tendency is reversing at the highest level where almost 80% of the competitors are men. Therefore, at the amateur level women are the majority whatever the discipline but it is also the case at the junior level even in international competitions (Thompson, 2016).

2.3.3 Equal competition rules

In 1952 in Helsinki, 40 years after the first edition of the Olympics games including equestrian sport, women were permitted to compete for the first time but only in the discipline of dressage. In 1956, showjumping competitions were open to women. It was not until the years of 1964 that women were allowed to compete in eventing (Hedenborg & Hedenborg White, 2012). Thus, from that moment, there was no segregation between male and female in these three disciplines. Equestrian sport is one of the few Olympic sport which is sex integrated. This means that men and women compete against each other as equals in the different Olympic equestrian events. They are judged together, they face the same rules, and they wear more or less the same equipment. Because of the lack of sex segregation in equestrian disciplines, this sport is less characterized by misogyny, homophobia and hypermasculinity. Thus, this is a sport with a bigger inclusiveness of different kinds of femininities and masculinities.

Indeed, riders have to embody feminine characteristics like compassion, communication, empathy and self-sacrifice and at the same time masculine ones like physical strength, bravery, confidence and spatial reasoning to stay in the competition (Allen, 2018). But why is this sport organized like that? When we look at other sports, biological and physical factors are the reasons why women and men do not compete against each other (Plymoth, 2012). In horse-riding, the differences in physiology, morphology and psychology would not impact the performance of riders (Whitaker *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, it is the horse that is the stronger partner and the most important part in the couple regardless of the sex of the rider (Dashper, 2012a). In horse-riding, success is a question of confidence, training, precision and

balance between the horse and the rider, and these characteristics do not have gender connotations (Adelman & Knijnik, 2013).

2.4 Mechanisms of exclusion of women in horse business

In horse-riding, all the rules are presented as gender neutral but there are still gender asymmetries as we can see in the number of women who participate in horse-riding competitions and the number of them who are on the podium. These asymmetries indicate the persistence of some gender inequalities in horse-riding competitions. Therefore, sex integration is not a guarantee for gender equality in equestrian sport (Dashper, 2012a). In this section, I will talk about the different barriers that women encounter and that make the horse business not so neutral. First, I will speak about the vertical segregation followed by the horizontal segregation in the horse industry. Then, I will detail the different gender roles that are constructed by society. Finally, I will close this section with the other remaining barriers.

2.4.1 Vertical segregation along gendered lines

We can find a certain type of vertical segregation in the horse business industry which is comparable to what we can find in traditional organizations. I will start with the vertical segregation regarding the level of riding. We know that the participation of women in amateur competitions is considerable. However, when we look at the professional level, the number of female competitors falls drastically. As I said before, 90% of riders at amateur level are women while 80% of riders at professional level are men (Adelman & Knijnik, 2013).

Another form of vertical segregation can also be observed in the most important stakeholders of the horse-riding industry like the owners or the organizational bodies which are mostly made up of men. It is true that in general, professional sports remain a hierarchically driven enterprise where members are mostly men. There is a certain form of institutionalized masculinity which is most of the time 'culturally exalted'. The issue is that despite the acceptance of female riders and gay men, there has been little change regarding the gatekeeping of the sport (Anderson, 2009). As Anderson (2009) said, gender-equality in sport is not enough. We need to create a gender-integration of both sporting programs and

their management before women are given equal chances of success in a professional athletic career. Regarding horse-riding, the gender-integration of the sporting programs is well done as there is no difference in the competition for men and women, however what may be missing is the sex-integration in the management of equestrian sport.

Indeed, there are some discriminations and some barriers that make access to the top position more difficult for women. We can compare that to the glass ceiling in organizations, implying that gender disadvantages are greater at top level positions than in lower ones (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). It is true that assumptions are made about women's ambitions, such as they do not want to handle a lot of stress and to have a lot of responsibility in their career, even if it is not true for all women (Clayton-Hathway & Manfredi, 2017). Moreover, women also struggle to find lucrative sponsorship. Indeed, riding at an international level is very expensive, thus it happens frequently for riders to be dependent on wealthy owners who buy the horses. In general, the riders have two options: either they come from a wealthy family, or they have their own resources, or they need to attract investors.

In the second case, it is the owner who chooses someone to ride his horses. The issue is that we can observe a tendency in the owners to prefer to select men (Dashper, 2012a). Therefore, owners have an important role to play in the equality and diversity of rider selection in the industry because of their role in the decision-making processes (Clayton-Hathway & Manfredi, 2017). In the same way, the team selector seems to favor male riders (Thompson, 2016). In fact, teams of riders are selected to compete at international level, and there are some people who choose these riders, and these selection committees are mainly made up of men (Eder, 2017).

As Anderson (2009) said, those who organize and run the institutions remain over-represented by heterosexual men. It is true that the global participation of women in sport has never been so substantial. However, women continue to be underrepresented in sports management and leadership positions (Clayton-Hathway & Fasbender, 2019). For example, there have been FEI presidents since 1921, and the first woman president was in 1986. And of the 14 presidents of FEI there were only three women (FEI, n.d). Once again, it does not seem to be really equal for women who have to fight extra hard to hope to get an investor because

of the over-representation of men in high positions. Hopefully, there are a lot of new concerns about gender parity in businesses. Therefore, a lot of businesses want to have a better female representation in their companies, thus we can expect to observe a better representation of women in high positions in the sport domain in the coming years (Clayton-Hathway & Fasbender, 2019).

2.4.2 Horizontal segregation along gendered lines

The horizontal segregation in the horse-riding industry is done in the representation of men and women between the different disciplines. In fact, most of the women riders choose the discipline of dressage while we see more men in showjumping, eventing, racing, and polo. Considering that, dressage is the discipline where there are the most women who compete but also who win the competitions.

For example, in the last FEI dressage world ranking, in the top ten positions, there is only one man (Daniel Bachmann Andersen), and he is in last position. In comparison to those figures, if we look at the jumping ranking it is totally the opposite. In the top ten positions there is only one woman (Elizabeth Madden), and she is in last position. In the eventing ranking, it is less obvious. The first two are men, followed by a woman in third position. There is another woman in ninth position, but the others are men (FEI, 2020). But, overall, the ranking is dominated by men. As the figures show that, showjumping is the Olympic discipline with the lowest rate of female participation. In fact, racing and showjumping are disciplines where a bigger amount of money is at stake because of the mediatization of these disciplines. Thus, men still dominate the profitable equestrian disciplines. (Hedenborg & Hedenborg White, 2012).

That is also true for sports in general, where women play a bigger part than before, but these female sports are less mediatized because they are considered to be less entertaining and less interesting for audiences (Dashper, 2012a). Because of the lack of mediatization of women's sports, less money can be made which impacts the salaries of

female athletes that are significantly lower than these of male counterparts (Coulter, 2013). Indeed, the media are very important, and they have a big impact on gender constructions in sports (Hellborg & Hedenborg, 2015).

2.4.3 Gender roles and stereotypes

Society-made constructions of how men and women have to be and, even if today society has changed and is more open, there are still certain tasks or roles and certain qualities that remain sex-typed, and this also has some repercussions on the horse business. The FEI admit that despite the fact that they have achieved unrivalled standards in terms of gender equality in sport, they know that it is not yet perfect and that there is still work to be done to achieve perfect gender equality. Equestrian sports remain a gender revolution in the athletic world (FEI, 2018). They use various strategies and rules to be more gender inclusive. However, there are still some prejudices in the equestrian world that say that men use horses to exhibit their personal power while women have personal pleasure in their intimate relationship with horses (Thompson & Adelman, 2013).

It is also said that femininity is constructed on the basis of community, while masculinity is constructed on the basis of performance (Plymoth, 2012). And in some way, this is true as these traits can be found in women and men character respectively, but we saw with Allen (2018) that today men and women embody both masculine and feminine traits. There are also a lot of stereotypes that exist about the ability of women to work in leadership positions in the horse-riding industry (Clayton-Hathway & Manfredi, 2017). It is partly because of these kinds of prejudices, which can in a certain way create barriers to women who want to climb the career ladder, that we can see there is still a long way to go before reaching total sex-integration. The FEI (2018) also admit that sexism and gender discrimination remains a problem today. However, they say that changing gender relations is not just an issue which appears in sport, it is a societal issue. Here are the different barriers that can partly exclude women in the horse-riding industry:

First, women who want to compete at a high level or to run their own business have to meet the masculine norms of full-time availability (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998a) which is not compatible with the willingness to become a mother. Indeed, there are a lot of female riders who give-up their career to help their partner to achieve their own rider career and/or to take care of their children (Thompson, 2016). Sometimes the reverse happens but it is less common. In general, feminine riders have a heavy mental load because we expect them to be at the top position in competitions while being the perfect housewife who can take care of the house and the children. It seems that they are under a lot of pressure from family demands and their workplace, and that they feel guilty about asking for support (Clayton-Hathway & Stumbitz, 2020). However, women seem to want to challenge stereotypes of the 'good housewife'. It is true that horse-riding can be considered as a sport that allows many women to free themselves from conventional gender scripts (Thompson & Adelman, 2013). But the main issue remains that female riders literally have to choose between a top-level career or becoming a mother (Eder, 2017). Some women combine both, but women have to make tough choices and it requires a real strength of character, in many cases it is something that remains very difficult for women.

Some studies say that elite sport mothers have to be recognized as a social phenomenon mostly in individual sports such as horse-riding. When riders become mothers, they have to manage multiple identities and roles (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). To be a high-level athlete is very time-consuming because of the amount of training and the number of competitions, and mothers sometimes feel guilty because they are not present for their children enough. This is a feeling that is really specific to women because of the social pressure they have to be a good housewife and mother. These aspects reinforce the ideas about the feminine character to feel guilty, to take care of others, and the aspect of self-sacrifice.

Moreover, in most cases, when a woman announces her pregnancy, there is a lack of organizational support and the assumption that she is stopping her career is made immediately (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). The competition continues for other riders, mostly for men, and it is hard to regain a place in the ranking after pregnancy. Regarding financial and childcare support, it seems to have a lack of structure because available funds are for sport-related costs and not for child-care, but there is a gap in the literature concerning monetary

help during pregnancy. It clearly seems to be a real challenge, if not something impossible, to combine a family life as a mother and a professional sports career.

However, it will depend on the size and the type of the working environment. Indeed, some of the bigger employers have facilities to help riders to have a better family-life balance but most of the yards do not have enough resources to offer these kinds of support (Clayton-Hathway & Stumbitz, 2020). When female riders show the reality of their lives and just how difficult it can be by asking for the institution's help, they actually reinforce gender stereotypes. It is a real fact that mothers have to be helped by a support system, both on a personal and organizational level, if they want to continue their elite sport career. Unfortunately, there is a real lack of support and flexibility in the world of professional sport and women's claims about their difficulties can be seen as they are not able to manage a career and a family at the same time, while this is something they absolutely want to avoid.

To do horse-riding at a high level is seen as 'a way of life', thus riders who have other priorities like childcare and who work part-time are not seen as serious riders and it can have an impact on the career opportunities that they will have (Clayton-Hathway & Fasbender, 2019). Therefore, female riders have to work extra hard to prove their potential and they have to be available all the time for training and competitions if they want to bring their career to the top level. Thus, there is a clear divergence between the rules of the competitions, which are equal for men and women, and the way to reach the high-level competitions, which seems to be harder for women than men.

Secondly, there are a lot of stereotypes that are made in society about female and male characters. Society puts them in some fixed position without considering that everyone has his own individual personality regardless of gender. Studies show that men are psychologically better suited to take part in competitions and to win. Generally, they show more self-confidence than women, and they also have better control of their anxiety which are two strengths that are considered to be the most important to win a competition (Whitaker *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, when we speak about risk, women are always considered to be weaker than men. People do not see women's bodies to be as strong as men's in terms of the risk of injury. Society puts women into the category of people who need to be protected

because they can give life. Whether they want to become a mother or not is not taken into account (Velija & Hughes, 2019). The consequences of this overprotection are that it is harder for a woman to find a place in riskier disciplines such as eventing and showjumping, and in some situations, they may not be chosen because the horse to ride is considered to be too risky. We clearly see here that men and women do not have the same opportunities because all these aspects stated above are taken into account by the people who have influence in the sport when they have to choose between a woman and a man to compete (Velija & Hughes, 2019).

We can also see this in the discipline of showjumping. In fact, it is the Olympic discipline with the lowest rate of female participation and the explanation for this is gendered. This discipline is seen as a sport in which you need to have a lot of self-control and to manage your emotions, to hide them or to have no emotions. However, women are considered to be more emotional than men (Coulter, 2013). It is always a female character trait that is pointed out to their disadvantage. Indeed, women who compete in international competitions say that they have developed an ability to suppress or/and hide their emotions like men. They also admit that women in showjumping are sometimes described as 'bitchy' because they seem closed or unpleasant, while it is often because they are trying to manage their emotions and feelings before a competition. When a man is in the same state of mind, preparing himself for a competition, he is not seen as bitchy but as someone who is concentrating, which is very positive for his competition (Coulter, 2013). Thus, we ask women to have more masculine traits to compete as well as men, but when they do that, they are stigmatized.

Showjumping is also considered as a discipline in which riders need a wide range of skills and abilities but also real business skills. This is due to the high mediatization of this discipline and thus the higher amount of money that are at stake in comparison with other disciplines. The culture that showjumping has developed is more compatible with men's way of thinking according to current society. Therefore, women who want to compete in this discipline have more to prove than their male counterparts even though the performances of women and men are comparable and do not show significant differences in the final rank (Dumbell, Rowe & Douglas, 2018).

In the discipline of polo, we can also find assumptions that are made about the character of men and women such as men are more aggressive while women are too nice. As in the other disciplines, the discipline of polo was primarily dominated by men. Polo is unique in the sense that it is a team sport where men and women compete together and against each other. Women were allowed to compete in polo in the late 1880s. In polo, the questions about the skills of women were more about their ability to be aggressive in the game, as they are considered to be too nice and emotional. Despite the fact that the number of female participants has increased, male dominance persists. Polo is considered to be a fast, competitive and aggressive sport and these are features that are also associated with masculinity (Gilbert & Gillett, 2013). Once again, this equestrian discipline is very masculine, and women are considered to be too weak to be a real opponent. Furthermore, it is a fact that today, men and boys are much less involved than women in carrying out the daily tasks of caring for horses in the stable because this is something which is more associated with femininity (Knijnik, 2013). This creates a narrow definition of femininity in the equestrian world: girls do horse-riding to care and nurture horses and for social activities (Plymoth, 2013). While men, in general, do not horse-riding because of their love for horses but because of their passion for riding and because they want to excel in the sport. This image of 'the horse girl' should change. Equestrian sports should be seen as a place where girls and boys can acquire many different skills such as courage, strong mindedness, freedom, competitive instincts, and the ability to make fast but smart decisions (Plymoth, 2012).

Thirdly, society also has a harsh view of women's bodies. There is a self-imposed glass ceiling for women, which does not concern access to the top position as previously mentioned, but which concerns how far women are willing to develop their sporting bodies (Butler & Charles, 2012). On the one hand, the media set up some 'social rules' about how women's bodies have to be today, and they are very strict. They must be in harmony with the idealized feminine forms if they want to be mediatized. The boundary between acceptable femininity and unacceptable feminine muscularity and strength is very small. Unfortunately, those women who cross the boundary of acceptable femininity by being too muscular or strong often suffer from social censure, mockery and sometimes a lack of support which can have serious repercussions on their career. Women must follow conventional femininity in order to be accepted in the masculine sports industry.

On the other hand, some disciplines like racing, use strength to put women in a subordinate position. It is important to notice that the racing field remains the most patriarchal and sexist institution between the different disciplines where male domination still persists (Butler, 2013b). Indeed, in the horse-racing industry, women really find difficult to have a place and, in this discipline, it is not only because of women's lack of strength but also because the racing field is considered to be a masculine world which includes a lot of power. Women are more and more involved as a workforce, working in the stable to help the jockeys who are men in the majority.

Despite that, there is a trend for women who work in a male sector like the racing industry to adopt a male working style (Butler, 2013a). Effectively, in horse-racing, women emphasize their masculinity, mainly to appear stronger and to be closer to their masculine counterparts and to be accepted in this male-dominated discipline. As Butler (2013a) said, women must embody 'masculine' attributes in order to be taken seriously. To counteract that, a large majority of women are extremely feminine in their personal life, the goal is to prove that despite their more masculine features they are indeed heterosexual (for those who are), that is why they also magnify their heterosexual relationships. If they do not do that, they are frequently accused of being lesbian or not in the feminine norm (Daspher, 2016).

In summary, women have to adopt some male traits and embody masculine characteristics in order to give the impression of being a serious competitor but if they do that, their sexuality may be called into question, that is why they mostly prefer to embody both masculine and feminine traits (Butler, 2013b). Regarding that, women can have a coexistence between a feminine and a masculine identity and it can bring some psychological tensions and contradictions in their lives and/or careers (Butler & Charles, 2012). As Butler (2013b) said, these ideologies and norms are institutionalized through the dominant ruling sporting organizations of racing which define and reinforce a masculinist ideology, with toughness, competition, and aggression. These norms make the integration of women quite tough in the male-dominated disciplines.

Since 1975, women were allowed to apply for a racing license in the same way as young men. Accordingly, it is one of the last disciplines that accepted women as equal to their male counterparts. Today, women are employed under the same terms and conditions as men in the racing industry (Butler, 2013b). However, there are still a lot of gender inequalities in this discipline and as we said before, women struggle to find a place in the professional field (Butler, 2013a). Women must always prove that they are good in their work if not better than men and they have to accept their subordinate positions or they must leave the racing field. But even if they prove their skills, they are in most cases, treated as inferior and limited in their opportunities of social mobility, which can discourage them (Butler, 2013b).

Regarding the men's side, they also have a little part of femininity which can be seen as a feminine masculinity. Indeed, to be a good jockey, it is essential to be light and not too big, and these are more often associated with female traits. These requirements in terms of weight and size are contradictory with the need to be very strong that this sport demands. To counterbalance the need to be very strong, women focus more on technique than on strength when they train. They can be better than men in other skills, unfortunately, these skills are less recognized than strength and aggressiveness (Butler & Charles, 2012). In the racing field, they often refer to the differences between the bodies of men and women and they use that to legitimize the under-representation of women in this sport even if women are able to meet the same capacity (Brown, 2006). There is also an issue for women jockeys who want to become a mother as combining a racing job and motherhood is something that is almost impossible. There is a big lack of support and acceptance of mothers in the racing field which makes the combination of both difficult (Clayton-Hathway & Stumbitz, 2020). This is also reinforced with the weight constraints that are imposed in this discipline as it is more difficult for women to manage their weight after a pregnancy. Therefore, even if women have the economic, social and cultural capital needed to compete, they are considered as physically unsuitable for this sport (Butler, 2013b). Women have to challenge normative expectations that are made about them to make them a valuable place in equestrian sport (Dashper, 2016).

2.4.4 Other barriers

Class is another barrier that can impact the career of a rider even if it is something that is generally 'imposed'. Indeed, because of the social class they come from, there is a need to have access to capital or not. And because of their gender they have easier access to capital or not. A rider can fail his career because of the lack of economics and/or social capital (Butler, 2013). Indeed, riders with a lot of monetary means can hire the best trainers, grooms, and buy the best horses. That gives them more chances of success in the equestrian sports (Gilbert & Gillett, 2013), while others have to fight extra hard to find an investor. In some disciplines that are male dominated like polo or horse-racing, it is sometimes totally impossible for some riders (most of the time these riders are women) to take part in competitions, just because they lack financial means and regardless of their skills.

Social capital is also very important, and it can play a big role in the career of a rider. Formal and informal networks are considered to be key developing a career. Riders who come from a family that is also in the horse-riding industry have a big advantage because they have easier access to a network. However, some networks decided to only include male riders in their events. Moreover, women who need time out for care responsibilities have fewer opportunities to build up a network of contacts and this can be a disadvantage because they can miss out on career opportunities (Clayton-Hathway & Fasbender, 2019). But in this case, a man can also be disadvantaged facing a woman who has access to a larger network thanks to family or financial means. The general issue is that the inexistence of gender barriers to participation is highlighted while the need for a lot of financial means and time are normalized and not described as gendered (Coulter, 2013).

Another issue that needs to be resolved today is the loss of talent. Indeed, a lot of women are very talented at horse-riding, but they leave the professional competition because of the incompatibility between this career and the willingness to become a mother. This is a real loss for the sport in general which becomes less competitive than before. Diversity is key

for the performance of the business as there is a positive correlation between diversity in organizations and their positive results. Consequently, the increase of women in top leadership positions may help to retain more talent. In order to solve this problem, it is important to understand the current role of women in the equine industry and to develop their involvement in leadership roles. It is also important to develop different career options for women who want to combine a horse-riding career and building a family (Clayton-Hathway & Manfredi, 2017).

The issue is that gender distinctions are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical context of horse-riding practices and that all these inequalities are hidden by the fact that men and women compete together on 'equal' terms. These are things that we cannot know without a real understanding of the world of horses. It is important for people to be aware of these inequalities to change things. Therefore, the aim of this study is to go beyond the identification of the differences by questioning the real meaning of those differences.

2.5 The horse/human relationship

Horses and humans have been linked for centuries, and humans have been horse-riding for centuries. Before, horses were used for transport, war, and agriculture, they were useful. Today, horses are used as an animal of leisure, or even as a real partner in life. At the same time, horse sports have also been commercialized, and they have acquired a real financial value which has made the horse industry grow and along with some changes in the relationship between horses and humans (Dashper, 2014). This section is relevant as it will help to understand and explain some behaviors. Firstly, I will talk about the building of the relationship and how strong it can be. Then, I will explain that there are gender stereotypes which are also made about horses. Finally, I will explain how this relationship has evolved in a more business-like relationship.

2.5.1 Building the relationship

Building a real relationship between horses and humans can bring a lot of psychological and physical benefits. This relationship is often presented as a therapeutic relationship. All these

psychological positive aspects are certainly a reason why people love horses so much, and they create powerful relationships. The development of a real relationship based on mutual respect and trust is really important in elite equestrian sport. Horses and riders need to have a special connection to take on challenges (Dashper, 2014). Some riders are so involved in the relationship that they feel more concerned about a horse's injury than their own (Thompson & Nesci, 2016). This is to show just how strong the relationship can be.

Indeed, the relationship may be so strong that the pairing of horse and human can create an 'embodied language system', where they share feelings and a language specific to themselves (Hogg, 2015). Birke and Brandt (2009) argue that this embodied language system offers 'several ways in which gender can be produced'. Humans are gendered but horses also become gendered through the interaction between them. Birke and Brandt's (2009) define gender in the horse/human relationship as 'ultimately a conjoint production, an accomplishment of both horse and human'. The feelings of the rider are transmitted to the horse and vice versa. Considering this, the nervousness, or the lack of confidence of the rider can have an impact on the horse, mostly in high level competitions where horses are, in general, more sensitive (Thompson & Nesci, 2016). Indeed, at an elite level, this relationship is very important because it can help the rider to win competitions. It is real teamwork which requires efforts on the part of the rider and the horse (Wipper, 2000). The partnership, when it is 'good' also allows riders to have more self-confidence. There are some characteristics that make the relationship 'good' like the compatibility between the horse and the human, trust, mutual respect, communication, and mutual confidence. Obviously, these aspects may change a little bit from one pairing to another (Hogg, 2015). The relationship is built up through patience, kindness, sensitivity, respect, and trust, but never through force and fear (Wipper, 2000). In the most dangerous discipline as eventing, it also helps to develop a certain familiarity in the partnership. This familiarity almost eliminates the unpredictability of the horse (Thompson & Nesci, 2016). Therefore, a bad relationship may increase the risk of injury and thus, the risk of defeat.

However, in general, elite riders have a lot of work and they often ride six to seven horses per day. Thus, some of the riders characterize the relationship as something fast while

they know that these relationships take time to develop. They do not have the time to take care of their horses because they have to ride. It often happens that these elite riders delegate some tasks to the groom like brushing the horse, preparing it, and taking it out to save some time. It is seen as more important to ride more horses than to have more time for fewer horses, and this is mostly due to the need for profitability. Indeed, we have observed a growing commercialization of equestrian sports since the end of the twentieth century, which is now a real business with a lot of money at stake (Dashper, 2014). For some elite riders, it is difficult to find the right balance between competition and sensitivity. Some just think about the competition and financial aspects, eroding the horse-human relationship. This may make it harder to build trust and confidence.

Moreover, due to the high commercial value of horses, some riders are dependent on owners to ride top-quality horses. Therefore, it is the choice of the owner to decide which riders will have the chance to ride his horses (Dashper, 2014). In these conditions most riders are afraid of building a real relationship because they do not take the decision for these horses, as a result, riders may be discouraged to create close bonds because the relationship may not last. Thus, at any time, the horse can be sold or ridden by another person. This kind of situation can bring a lot of stress for the riders who cannot really project himself (Hogg, 2015). The issue is that there is more and more pressure on riders for quick results because of the economic aspect of the sport. In fact, horses' owners and sponsors place great importance on returns of investments because this is a real business for them, and they want to make a profit. This important financial aspect has a negative influence on the horse-human relationship (Dashper, 2014). It has an impact on how professional riders see their horses; they are more a commodity which could be sold if they are not able to get quick results in elite competitions. This growing pressure on riders may have an impact on horses' and human's welfare (Dashper, 2014).

Nevertheless, some riders continue to do this work because of their love for horses or because they are convinced that a good horse-rider relationship is the primary means to win a competition. This relationship is made of a horse male or female and a man or a woman. Thus, the constructions of masculinity and femininity are interesting in the horse-human relationship. Indeed, riders who are more competition oriented are seen as more masculine

and stronger. Whereas riders who take the time to build a real relationship with the horse can be seen as more emotional, and less strong (Hogg, 2015). It is said that women have more empathy than men with the horses and that they are better suited to handle the nurturing and caring responsibilities (Clayton-Hathway & Fasbender, 2019).

2.5.2 Gender stereotypes about horses

Gender stereotypes are also applied to horses and it seems that they disadvantage females more than males because it makes them less valuable in the eyes of humans. The sex of the horse may also have an impact on the relationship. Riders have different expectations of the performance and the behavior of the horse in accordance with its sex. In general, they have bad perceptions of mares that are considered as moody, 'bitchy', and difficult. They are more temperamental, thus one day they can give a lot and be very efficient and the following day they can be in a bad mood and give nothing. It is really all or nothing with mares. Geldings (males that are castrated) are considered to be calmer, more trainable, more consistent, more reliable and easier going. And finally, stallions are more in-tune present, move better, look better, and are powerful but can be quickly distracted. In general, geldings are riders' first choice, followed by stallions and then mares. This ranking is made by the riders who use stereotypes and sex to justify their choices. Riders also associate traits with male and female horses, and they are quite close to the ones associated with male and female riders. On the one hand, mares are considered to be amazing caregivers, maternal and protective. On the other hand, stallions and geldings are considered to be strong, aggressive and competitive. These stereotypes place mares in the last position which make them less desirable partners in sport and leisure while there are no demonstrated sex-based advantages (Dashper *et al.*, 2018).

2.5.3 A business relationship

Regarding the relationship between the owners and the horses, it can be seen as a business relationship. The role of the owners has become increasingly important even if in most cases owners are not horses' riders. Actually, they are involved in the equestrian industry to get results and thus make a profit. From this point of view, horses are treated like commodities

and if they are not good enough, they will be sold, but on the other hand, if they are very talented, everybody will want to ride or to buy the horse. That does not mean that they are not well-treated. On the contrary, horses are investments, but they are also live animals and owners invest a lot of money to look after their horses well. However, the fact that most of the owners are not riders may have a big impact on the partnership because they do not always understand the needs of the horses and/or of the riders. Thus, it is a real challenge for the riders to find the right balance between the needs of the horses and the demands of the owners. It can happen that the commercialization of the sport and the financial impact that it can have are not in line with the values of some riders who really see the sport as a passion. Thus, it can push riders to stop contracts with the owners even if it has a big impact on their career and income (Dashper, 2014).

To summarize, the recent commercialization of sports seems to have an impact on riders who become less caring, less involved, and less willing to put time and effort into building strong relationships with their horses. This is due to the increasing financial value of the horses, which allows fewer riders to own their own horses for competing at international levels. Moreover, the partnership is made of one human and one animal and gender seems to be relevant in the relationship since we saw that stereotypes may also be applied to the animals.

3. Methodology

This chapter will first explain the aim and the context of the study with the general research question followed by the different sub-research questions. This part will be ensued by the data sampling, meaning the kind of the recruitment process I used in this thesis. Then, I will detail the interview conditions, the demographic characteristics of the participants and the data collection process. I will also explain by which means I analyzed my data and finally, I will conclude with the limitation of the method and a brief reflection on why I chose to work on this topic.

3.1 Aim and context of the study

The current study explored the gender subtext in two high level disciplines of horse-riding which are dressage and showjumping using a qualitative research methodology. The horse-riding industry was chosen as it is one of the only sports where men and women are judged together at the Olympics Games, therefore it is a highly relevant organization to analyze the gender subtext. At the same time, the qualitative research with the semi-direct interviews allows me to go more deeply into the gender constructions and to analyze the gender subtext in order to have a better understanding of the differences and the equalities between men and women and to try to find adequate solutions. Given the limited application of gender subtext in other kinds of organization such as sport, this research provided a way to understand why there are so few women who reach or continue to ride at a professional level and how gender inequalities can impact the careers of men and women. In order to understand the real feelings of the interviewees and to draw correct conclusions, it was important to have long interviews to give them the time to feel comfortable so that they could share their personal feelings.

The aim of this study is to confirm, or not, the presence of a gender subtext in the discipline of showjumping. The existing literature on gender subtext shows that some inequalities can be hidden by a pretended equality between gender. Therefore, the presence of a gender subtext in equestrian organizations can partly explain gender inequality and have an impact on the careers of riders in a certain way. The thesis will try to answer this question to understand in which ways it can impact the rider's careers in dressage and in showjumping. To answer this question, two sub-research questions will be addressed in order to have a better understanding of interesting aspects of this research and to move step by step to the final conclusion.

The sub-research questions are the following:

Q1: What do the workplace experiences of equestrian professionals reveal about working conditions in the sector?

Q2: How do equestrian professionals perceive gender equality in the sector?

This paper tries to answer these two sub-research questions through analysis of the personal interviews I carried out with people working at a high professional level in the horse-riding industry.

3.2 Data sampling

For this thesis, the sampling criteria of respondents were the following: respondents had to be (1) active in either dressage or showjumping; (2) experienced at an international level; (3) fluent in French. The first step of the data sampling method consisted of approaching riders that I already knew with the question whether they were willing to participate in a research project on 'gender equality in the equestrian sector'. This resulted in the participation of two respondents. Indeed, as the horse-riding industry is a small relatively closed 'world' where people are very busy and do not have a lot of free time, to do horse-riding as a passion helped me to get access to contacts in the field. A second technique for finding more respondents consisted of asking interviewees whether they knew anyone else who would be willing to participate, which is also known as 'snowball-sampling' and resulted in two additional respondents. Finally, a last technique, which was very successful and resulted in the participation of eight additional respondents, was contacting people unknown to me through social networks like Instagram and Facebook. As such, a total of 12 interviews were conducted with equestrian professionals.

3.3 Data collection

The interviewees were selected for different objectives. Firstly, the study would include riders of two disciplines: dressage and showjumping, in order to have complete analysis of the sector and to be able to compare both. Secondly, selection of the interviewees wanted to be gender-balanced, however it was very difficult to find available men. Thirdly, interviewees also included job profiles other than professional riders, such as international grooms in order to have different points of view of the professional horse-riding industry.

The following table offers an overview of the respondents' characteristics, with their names being changed to ensure anonymity. All respondents were white, with eight being

female and four being male, while age ranged from 19 to 53 with an average age of 29. Although this sample is not representative for the wider population of equestrian professionals – it over-represents young people and women within the showjumping sub-sector – it did serve the purpose of this study as woman riders are more likely to have insights into the experience of gender inequality in the showjumping sector. Although I planned to include female showjumpers with children in the study, I did not manage to obtain their participation. Nevertheless, a satisfactory variation in equestrian occupations (ranging from equine business manager, horse rider, to groom) was accomplished, while a large majority of riders had competed at the international level.

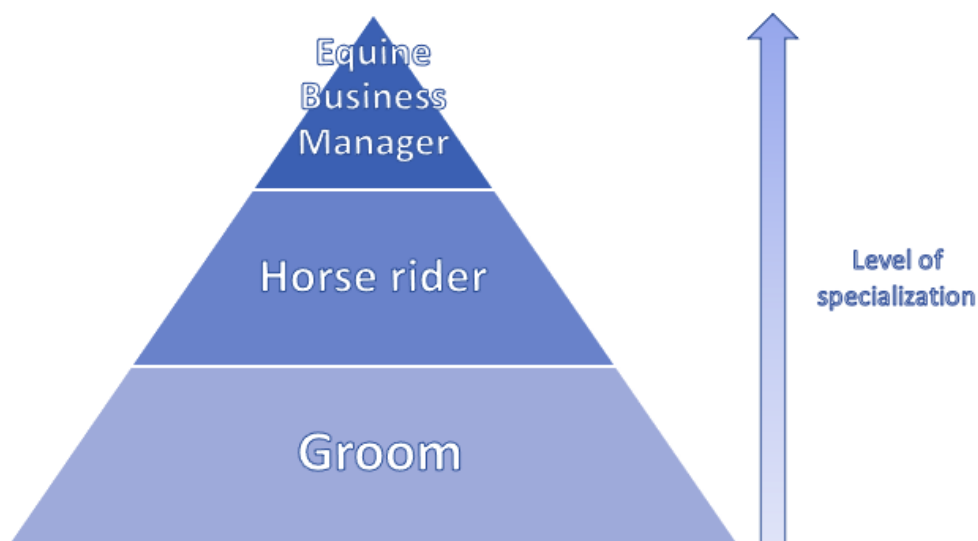
Table 1: Overview of respondents' characteristics

<i>Demographic characteristics and respondents' background</i>										
Respondent	Gender	Age	Discipline	Country	Starting age	Family in horse-riding	Other degree	Family situation	Current career	
Fanny	F	53	Dressage	Belgium	17	No	Yes	Children & Partner	Equine business manager	
Valentin	M	40	Showjumping	Belgium	3	Yes	No	Children & Partner	Equine business manager	
Gilles	M	33	Showjumping	France	3	Yes	Yes	Children & Partner	Equine business manager	
Louise	F	28	Showjumping	France	5	No	Yes	Partner	Equine business manager	
Lucas	M	28	Showjumping	France	3	No	No	Single	Groom	
Valentine	F	27	Showjumping	France	3	Yes	No	Partner	Horse rider	
Marie	F	27	Showjumping	France	9	No	No	Single	Groom	
Eva	F	25	Showjumping	Belgium	3	No	Yes	Partner	Horse rider	
Julie	F	23	Dressage	Switzerland	3	Yes	Yes	Single	Horse rider	
Basile	M	22	Showjumping	Belgium	5	No	No	Single	Horse rider	
Lisa	F	21	Dressage	Netherlands	12	No	No	Single	Horse rider	
Camille	F	19	Dressage	Belgium	3	No	Yes	Single	Student	

Concerning the different occupations the respondents held, two were professional grooms. Grooms are people working in a waged labour agreement and accompanying professional riders to the competitions. Their tasks mainly consist of taking care of the horses, namely: giving them food, putting them to grass, clean out the boxes and other tasks which vary from one stable to another. Within the sample, five more respondents were professional riders, employed through a waged contract and competing at a high level – high level in showjumping has obstacles at a minimum height of 1.40 meters while in dressage, it is more about the kind of competition, meaning that the rider is to have represented his country nationally and/or internationally in the case of this thesis – but without having their own stable. Their tasks were mainly to ride horses and to participate in competitions. However, they still have to carry out some other tasks like cleaning the boxes, the stables, feeding the horses, and so on. In this

section I can add one respondent who represents his country in the young rider team in dressage. The only difference is that she is still a student, therefore she is not active in horse-riding full time. Finally, four respondents in the sample were equine business managers who compete or have competed at a high level and had their own stable.

Table 2: Hierarchization of occupations held by equestrian professionals in the sample



Although the number of respondents in this thesis is rather small, the sample size becomes acceptable given the high quality of the information presented in the 12 interviews. Moreover, as most of the answers of the respondents were going in a similar direction, it was concluded that enough information was gathered to answer the research questions. Interviews were conducted individually and using a semi-structured interview guide. This guide was subdivided into five parts: (1) about the nature of the job, (2) about the passion for horses, (3) about the combination of work with life, (4) about the nature of the horse/human relationship and (5) about gender differences in equestrian sports. Following this interview guide allowed me to follow a logical order: first ‘warm-up’ questions that are easier to answer, and then the deeper questions covering the topic of gender differences in equestrian sports (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Interviews lasted on average 43 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 30 minutes and the longest interview lasting 62 minutes. All interviews were conducted in French using video conference given the Covid19 sanitary situation at the time

of collecting data (January-February, 2021), with one exception of an interview that took place face-to-face. All interviews were transcribed ad-verbatim. This was good for 81.326 words of interview transcripts. Despite the multitude of benefits, face-to-face interviews also bring some disadvantages such as the geographical limitations but also the fact that the respondents can feel uneasy about the anonymity of their answers when they are directly facing the interviewer. The 'distanced' interviewing provided the opportunity to 'cross borders' whilst keeping costs low and expanding the scope of the sample beyond Belgium to include respondents living and working in France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands and all of this in a relatively short period of time. It also enables participants to feel more comfortable and therefore could help them disclose more personal information (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

3.4 Data analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis is not a step-by-step, linear process. It is a more continuous and repeated process. In fact, I started the analysis of my data before having collected all of it. As a large amount of data was produced through my interviews, it was important to start by the reduction of these data. In order to achieve that, I used a coding method. This also allowed me to rearrange all the data. This coding method consisted of grouping the data into different thematic groups. This allowed me to organize the data into different coherent categories and subcategories. As the qualitative data analysis is not a linear process, these categories have undergone some changes along the process. The main objective of this coding method was to notice if some particular event occurs a lot of times, if some answers of the respondents went in the same direction or in a totally opposite one. Regarding the categories, the data were grouped according to: (1) hierarchization of job; (2) treatment of women in the horse-riding industry; (3) the full time availability and working conditions; (4) differences between dressage and showjumping; and (5) other where I collected the other data that could be relevant for later. When all the data were collected and the coding method was finished, the next step was the data display. The aim of this step was to organize and condense certain data. In this analysis, I decided to create tables 1 and 2. Firstly, to have a better overview of the first part of the interviews, which consisted of 'warm-up' questions. Secondly, to have a direct understanding of the relationships between certain

concepts. Finally, after having finished the data display, I started to draw conclusions. This part is the 'final' analytical part in the process of qualitative data analysis (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The conclusions are really the aim of the research analysis in order to answer the different research questions.

3.5 Limitations of the method and self-reflexivity

There are several sources of bias that can emerge in qualitative research. Regarding this thesis, I noticed the following: (1) the lack of clarity in some sentences; (2) the transcriptions of the extracts; (3) subjectivity of stories. Considering these possible biases, it is important to keep in mind that as some sentences were sometimes unclear, they have been adjusted to be understandable. Moreover, as the interviews were conducted in French, the extracts are transcribed, thus it can be a little bit different from what interviewees said but I did my best to keep the respondent's ideas. It is also important to keep in mind that interviewees' stories are subjective interpretations of events. It is possible that some of them exclude some information that they did not want to share. Moreover, the memories of people may no longer fully reflect the reality of the event. Therefore, it is important to conduct different interviews, to cross check and to compare them to each other in order to validate the sources. Another important point to keep in mind is that 12 interviews cannot reflect the entire horse-riding industry. However, it allows me to have a starting point to have a better understanding of the gender subtext in the professional horse-riding industry.

The choice of the topic does not come from nowhere. Actually, horse-riding has been one of my passions for over ten years now. It was very important for me to work on a topic that links my passion and my studies at the same time. Already having a first approach to the horse-riding industry, even if it was not at a high level, allowed me to not only find some first respondents quite quickly but also to feel really at ease with them. I was interested in what they explained to me and I am convinced that it helped them to open up to me and to share personal events of their life. It was also simple for me to come back to certain comments and to ask some additional questions according to the direction the interview took. Moreover, it was a big advantage to acquire a better understanding of the interviews and of the horse-riding industry in general. Indeed, when you speak to someone who works as a CEO for

instance, if you ask him/her questions, he/she will answer with precise answers and you need a certain background to make links and well understand what he/she is saying. It is the same in this case; the respondents explained a lot of things about precise events in high level of competition and, thanks to my background, I was able to understand everything easily. It also had a positive impact regarding the analysis of my data. Being knowledgeable about the topic helped me to make links, to go into the analysis of the interviews and my research more deeply. Finally, it allowed me to go one step further and try to find some starting points for possible solutions for the horse-riding industry, as I was very affected by some of my respondents' comments.

4. Results

In order to investigate the existence of a gendered subtext in the equestrian business, two research questions are analyzed separately. The first section of the results focuses on question one: *"What do the workplace experiences of equestrian professionals reveal about working conditions in the sector?"*. The second section of the results focuses on question two: *"How do equestrian professionals perceive gender equality in the sector?"*. For each question, a comparison between male and female respondents is made.

4.1 A labour of passion characterized by harsh working conditions

The interviews revealed how equestrian professionals at all levels (from grooms to equestrian business managers) experienced their job as a 'labour of passion'. Such passion began at a very young age for nine out of twelve of the respondents. Consider the excerpts from Valentine and Gilles:

Oh well it is like Obelix, I fell into the pot when I was little. I did not have to look very far, I was, I did not know how to walk that my mom was already putting me on the horse. I was immediately very demanding, I went for a walk in the stables, I spent all my day at the stables, I had a pony that I carried around everywhere when I was young even when my father went to a competition, I took my pony with me. It has always been an integral part of my life; I was just born in a stable in fact. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

Well, it comes [the passion] to me from my daddy actually, he had a club and I fell into it. So, from a young age I was already on a horse and I did my first competition when I was five years old. So yes, it comes to me like that. (Gilles, 33 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

Despite the fact that all respondents spoke of passion for the job, the interviews at the same time revealed a gender difference in the nature of the passion discussed. Indeed, what drives passion seems different for men and women. For most of the women, the passion is more something that is also a lot about the animal, to spend a lot of time with horses. Consider the following examples from Julie and Camille:

My favorite part in my job? Riding the horses and yes, the contact with the horses, taking care of them when I am not riding. I would rather take care of the horses than do the papers of employee schedules or that sort of thing. (Julie, 23 years old, horse rider, other degree)

I prefer to ride and spend time with them, being in the boxes. When we are in competition, we have a lot of time to do it so yes, I like spending time with them it is always nice. (Camille, 19 years old, student)

On the other hand, for men, the passion seems to be more about the competition and the sensations of the sport. Indeed, they do not mention the pleasure of spending time taking care of the horses. Look at the following excerpts from Basile and Lucas:

I prefer the competition! Even if it is a little stressful at the same time, the best feeling is that stress when you come to the competition and want to do it well. And the best of all is at the end when you have finished your course and you have made good results, you are happy, and you feel a real satisfaction. (Basile, 22 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

The aspect I prefer, is the adrenaline rush! What I like is everything like French team, all that Nations cup, championships all that, it is really a very special competition. I love going to competitions every weekend but if I really have to choose what I prefer is going

to competitions like Aachen, all the Rollex competitions. It is really a cut above in terms of organization, logistics for grooms, for riders, for horses. It is a real pleasure to work there. (Lucas, 28 years old, groom, no other degree)

It should be pointed out that there is an important difference between dressage and showjumping, as the sensations in jumping are more heightened, this discipline is riskier and can be considered as an extreme sport. Dressage is more about precision and gracefulness. This could be one of the factors that explain why there are more women who compete at a high level in dressage than in showjumping.

The passion for competition and a love of horses made it easier to understand why the equestrian professionals in this study were willing and able to keep up with the poor working conditions in the sector. These conditions were characterized by *low pay, dirty work, time-consuming work, flexible mobility demands, physically exhausting work* and some indications of *work stress*. These conditions demanded a *network of support* and made it almost impossible to separate work from life. In what follows, the different aspects of poor working conditions will be discussed and illustrated through quotes. Attention is paid to gendered differences and type of occupations in the equestrian business.

A first characteristic the analysis showed is the low salaries. Even after being in the same job after long years, most of the respondents still agree to work for low pay. When people work as a groom or as a rider employed through a waged contract, they are paid more or less the minimum wage. If they work as a business equine manager who has his own stables, they can expect a higher wage but in comparison to the hours they do, it is still not well paid. However, it seems that there are no real differences between the wages of women and men doing the same kind of job. It is something that Julie and Marie illustrated well in these quotes:

Whether it is a man or a woman the earnings are the same. And as an employee I do not know ... I do not think so. Well, in France, when you are an employee rider, they are often paid so much at the lowest level that you cannot really go lower, although whether it is a man or a woman, it stays on the same level. (Julie, 23 years old, horse rider, other degree)

I think it is not a profession that is recognized enough in terms of our salary. Currently, I cannot really complain because when I started in these stables, I set my salary and my working conditions. But we talk about that between grooms and clearly there are some who are paid the minimum wage and for the hours they work, and they also manage the sponsors, the horses, the communication so yes, I think that for all the things we do we are not fairly recognized at this level. (Marie, 27 years old, groom, no other degree)

The interviews illustrated that the situation is similar for the male respondents. Consider the following excerpts from Basile and Gilles:

For the hours I was working as a rider employee, I was not paid enough at all. So, I told myself that it was more interesting for me to leave the 'professional' equestrian world. I found it better to have more time to ride my horse, to participate in competitions and to make it easier to finish my month [in terms of money]. Because now I have more income than when I worked as an employee with horses [he is now a taxi driver]. (Basile, 22 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

No, I am not satisfied with my salary. Not at all, not at all, not at all. Because today, I can give you the figures for my pension and work, the time it takes and how I do things, but it is a choice to do it in this way, I always say with my wife that we would do things in this way and not in another one, because the well-being of the horses is our priority. If we could not do our work with the well-being of the horse it would not be a job for us. (Gilles, 33 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

Secondly, the analysis showed that people working in the horse-riding industry have to do some 'dirty' work like sweeping, cleaning the boxes, feeding the horses ... These are very low-specialized tasks and even if they achieve the goal of most of the riders, namely, to be an equine business manager, they will probably still continue to do these tasks in part. Ten out of the twelve respondents admitted in the interviews that they sometimes had to put up with some 'dirty' work to greater or lesser extents. As we can see in these quotes from Valentine and Fanny:

In my stables we have to do a little more than a normal rider because it is a family stable and therefore, I am not just a rider. I pick up the pitchfork in the morning, I do

the hay, I sweep ... So, we do not get bored, there are plenty of tasks to do. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

For example, my job is also to feed the horses at noon, to give them the midday meal because we do not have anyone to do it, so I do. (Fanny, 53 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

The quotes express clearly that even some of the equine business managers still have to carry out these 'dirty' tasks or more unskilled tasks like feeding the horses. It is something quite different from what we can find in traditional organizations. In general, when people start a first job in an organization, he/she will start with low-specialized tasks but over the years he/she will learn a lot and mostly work on highly-specialized tasks. It is something that really differs in the horse-riding industry.

Thirdly, workers in the horse-riding industry must be available full time. In general, they do not have weekends or days-off or real holidays. There are two main causes that explain this. On the one hand, horses require humans 24/24 hours to be fed, to go out, but also in the case of health emergencies and so on. On the other hand, riders have to be very competitive. Therefore, this necessitates long hours of training to stay in the top position. Consider the following excerpts from Valentine and Gilles:

Last year, if we take away lockdown, I was competing every weekend with generally one week out of two also the young horses from Tuesday to Thursday so basically, I was competing from Tuesday to Sunday almost every week from mid-February to mid-December. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

It is a full-time job, yes, full-time and it is only during winter when there is not too much competition, or at least I personally do few competitions at that time, so sometimes we have a Sunday off from time to time if I do not have coaching or something. But yes, when you work with animals, it is non-stop, non-stop. (Gilles, 33 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

Fourthly, all employees who are still competing or helping during competition, this is to say grooms, horse riders, and business equine managers, must meet the flexible mobility demand. Indeed, professional riders who compete at a high level have to be very competitive. In order to stay competitive, they compete in other countries almost every week for three or four days or sometimes longer. Consider the following examples from Gilles and Louise:

I compete every week. Meaning I compete from Thursday to Sunday because I only do old horses and for example my husband who also has young horses he competes on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and then he leaves on Thursday with the old ones. And it is every week and often in December, early January I do not have competitions but now for example [mid-February] I went to Portugal for three weeks and I competed for three weeks. (Louise, 28 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

It is a kind of profession that the more we practice the better we are and when we are at a high level, we cannot practice at home, and or within a restricted perimeter. We cannot say I will try to do it only around my home in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany for example. So, yes it requires us to be abroad a lot. (Gilles, 33 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

Fifthly, most of the jobs in the horse-riding industry are very demanding physically. Riders have to ride a lot of horses in a day to be effective. Regarding grooms they also have physical kind of works, as we can see here with Marie, Valentine, and Lisa:

I love my job as a groom, but clearly it is a job that kills us. There are some people who still do that at 40-45 years old or 50 years old, but I do not know how they do it. I am not yet 30 years old, and I am sure I will not do that all my life because physically it kills us. (Marie, 27 years old, groom, no other degree)

For a woman physically it is still I think harder than for a man. Because we are on the road a lot, we handle quite heavy loads, it is a job that is still physical. When you ride ten horses a day, in the evening you know why you are going to bed. The body still takes a blow, and we are also always outside. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

No because for sure it is a lot of work [working in the horse industry] and it is very physical. It is very difficult to work in the world of horses because it is not so easy mentally. In fact, it is a lot of work, it is very hard, it is really not easy. Moreover, it is hard to earn money. (Lisa, 21 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

Regarding the point of view of men, the following quotes show that men admit that jobs in the horse riding-industry are physically difficult. However, it seems that it is still less hard for them than for women. They mention it more as a fact rather than something they feel. Consider the following excerpts from Lucas and Gilles that illustrates this point nicely:

A typical day is ... yes, I ride between eight and ten horses a day. [...] It is a difficult job, it is a physically difficult job. (Gilles, 33 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

It is a job that is very physical and that is a job whether you are a man or a woman you have to be brave no matter what happens, but did it benefit me physically? Yes, maybe a little bit but I do not think so much and for me the few best grooms in the world that I have in mind are women. It is just a question of courage and determination I would say and of character, you need character yes. (Lucas, 28 years old, groom, no other degree)

Sixthly, this study illustrated that nine out of the twelve respondents admitted facing stress at work in all the different kinds of jobs included. Consider the following excerpts from Eva and Marie:

We have a stressful job but also in the sense that we want to do it well. So, the stress is present, we want to do well, that everything goes well with the horses, that the owners are happy. At the same time, we have financial stress because we have to pay bills and that increases more and more, and we are not really helped. But I think that working with animals allows us to get rid of this stress a little. (Eva, 25 years old, horse rider, other degree)

When we are in competition we can clearly be stressed because our rider is also stressed, and he makes us feel the pressure. We have the horse that also feels our

stress, so the horse is also not as usual. We have that a lot when we have big deadlines. For my part, I only had a final of the Nations Cup and riding for my own country is a lot of stress. We still have all the stress of the team, only the team leader is generally quite zen, but my rider was very stressed and me I was 'horrible', I was in another world. (Marie, 27 years old, groom, no other degree)

The following quotes from Lucas and Basile show that men can also feel stress and pressure in their work:

The hardest part for me is to manage my stress in competition and pressure. But also, the pressure to see some people. [...] It is the most stressful when it is my turn in competition. But now it is better because I am more used to it. (Basile, 22 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

At first, I am not naturally very stressed, so it is okay. But what can be stressful is transport. We transport horses of quite inestimable value and we go very far, we are alone, if there is a problem or whatever ... we have to be autonomous but yes transport that can be quite complicated especially since it is often quite borderline regarding the timing. [...] After that what is stressful is the adrenaline of the track. The 5-stars Grand Prix we do one almost every Sunday so that is fine but competitions like Nations Cup or championships are still a cut above. (Lucas, 28 years old, groom, no other degree)

Seventhly, people who want to do horse-riding at a high level need to decide to devote almost all their life to their work. The thesis shows that combining this kind of work with a private life is difficult and requires real organization. Respondents continue to do this job because they love their job, they have incredible experiences, it is exciting, and they enjoy spending most of their time with horses. However, spending most of their time in competition and working so many hours asks for more than just the dedication of the rider/employee. If these people want a private life, they need a real network of support. Therefore, the person who works in the horse-riding industry is not the only one who needs to share a passion for horses, it is really something that applies to the whole family and/or the entourage. Consider these quotes from Fanny and Louise:

No, it was not easy to combine work with my private life because when I went to these competitions, when it is an international one you usually go for a week. So, leaving your young children it is not easy. So, you need a certain amount of organization, and I was lucky my husband was okay with it. Because if I had a husband who would not agree to babysit when I was away, it would not be possible. And it is true that it is hard to leave the children, but it is a personal choice. (Fanny, 53 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

For me it is a special case because I am married to someone who does the same job as me. So automatically yes, it is quite easy because when I go to competitions on Thursday, he goes with me. But what is more complicated is if you have friends or other people who do not know anything about horses, they do not really understand our life. [...] To have children I think you need to be really organized. Because as I tell you I am often abroad, I do not want to have children to not take care of them, so I think I would have to find an 'au pair'. I would like to have an English woman or someone like that, who wants to find out about horses a little but at the same time can take care of the children because otherwise it is true that it is impossible, I could no longer do horse-riding as I ride now. (Louise, 28 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

For men, I took the excerpt of Valentin and Gilles who are parents. The interviews here illustrate very well the need for a network of support, organization and sometimes the need to make difficult choices.

For me it is not difficult because I have a really great wife and since my parents are in the equestrian industry and her parents are also a bit in it, there was always someone there to babysit. Children are also really used to it, they were quickly with us at the competition, staying with my parents or especially my parents' in-law. Yes, they were born into the world of horses, they are used to it. At the beginning it was a bit complicated but then after a few months we quickly found our way of organizing ourselves in it. (Valentin, 40 years old, equine business manager, no other degree)

It is easy because I made a real choice. I tried to reach the highest level, but it was very complicated for me at several points including my family in fact. I tell you that the very high level [5-stars], the elite, is not at all my priority in the sense that it requires a lot of sacrifices. There are few elite riders in showjumping because to be in the top you must compete 50 weeks out of 52. That means that it is necessary to be gone from Wednesday to Sunday or Monday, so personally it is not my concept of life, so yes it was not easy but now I know where I want to be. (Gilles, 33 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

Finally, all the previous working conditions of the sector also caused an almost impossible separation of work from life. Consider the following examples from Lisa and Lucas that illustrate this point very well:

To be honest when we are in the horse industry, I do not know what we can do to have privacy. I do not have time, I admit that the hardest part is that every day you have to devote yourself 100% to horses, you do not have time for yourself. When you finish at eight pm you come back home you are exhausted, you just go to sleep and you have no social life. The only social life I have is when I am competing, I see a few more people and we are all from the same world in a way, so we speak about horses and that is it but otherwise it is difficult. (Lisa, 21 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

I have always said I wanted to quit this job before being 30 years old. Because it is really, we put our life on hold for someone else and it is not very easy to build ourselves with that. So, I said to myself that after 30 years of age it might be the time to close this page and start something new. I think Pierre [the rider for who he works] will be the last because I do not want to work for someone else now and I do not know how long it will last but I would like to be able to get out of this world completely and do something else. (Lucas, 28 years old, groom, no other degree)

As the analysis showed here, all the different types of job in the horse-riding industry require people to construct their whole lives around their job, to be 100% committed to their job. It goes from their friends to their family and even sometimes makes it difficult to develop

themselves in different ways around their work as we saw with Lucas. It is clearly impossible to separate work from life.

4.2 The perception of gender equality in showjumping

When interviewing the respondents, it became apparent that most of the respondents had never really thought about gender differences in their sector, and this was true for both male and female equestrian professionals. Rather they had ‘taken-for-granted’ the idea that there was gender equality. Consider the quotes from the following respondents, Fanny, Lisa, Gilles, and Valentin that reflect this general first impression:

Yes, no, really there is no reason that it [mixed competition] should not be like that. Well, I have never really thought about it but why should we separate men from women? (Fanny, 53 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

I do not think there are a lot more men than women at a high level. And at the amateur level it is true that there are more women. But at the professional level there might be a few more men but I say that in dressage the difference is not crazy. [...] For me there is no difference because when you go to a competition, you are evaluated by your results. And when we go to the competition we are judged, man or woman, in the same way. The judges look at what the horse is doing and not at our faces. (Lisa, 21 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

Honestly, I think that we are part of one of the professions where we have exactly the same ... I mean it is equal. I really think it is equal, except the fact that it is a physical job, not always simple so that can have an impact. But someone who is passionate and who wants to achieve it will succeed, whether it is a man or a woman. [...] No clearly no, I think we really are on at least 99% of the points, we are similar and equal (Gilles, 33 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

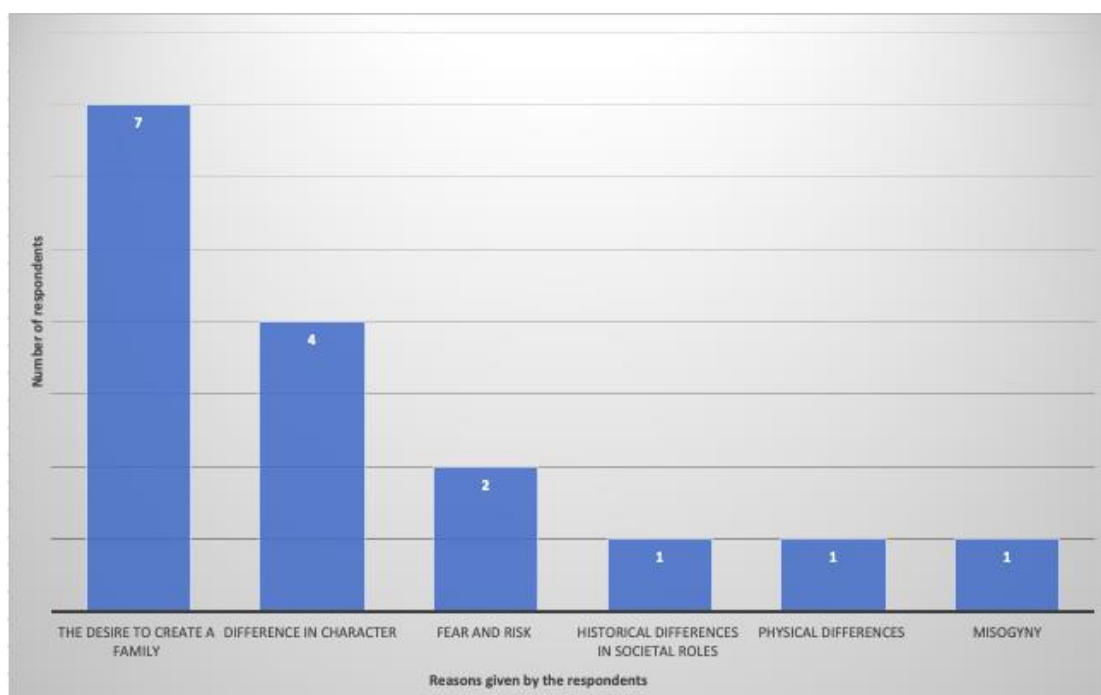
There is no difference between men and women in horse-riding sports. I think we are I mean we are equal; we are at the same level. And when you want to work and you

want to achieve your goal, you will not achieve it faster if you are a man or a woman.
(Valentin, 40 years old, equine business manager, no other degree)

It is clear from these excerpts that gender inequality is something that they had never really thought about before the interview. In fact, this was true for most of the interviews.

Despite these first impressions, when respondents were explicitly asked about the number of men and women competing at the higher levels, they acknowledged that there were indeed remarkably few women competing at the top in the discipline of showjumping. This acknowledgement forced them to come up with reasons for this. Most (seven out of twelve) respondents came up with the following reason: *the desire to create a family and women's biological role* in this. The second reason the respondents gave (four out of twelve) was about the difference in *character* between men and women. Some (two out of twelve) respondents mentioned the *fear linked to risk* felt by women in the discipline of showjumping. One other referred to *historical differences* between men and women's *societal roles*, one referred to women's *physiological different nature* and lastly one mentioned the *role of misogyny*. In what follows, these different explanations are examined in more depth, paying attention to gendered differences and generational differences. This latter was important as it struck me that younger respondents were more critical of gender inequalities while older generations drew on their experience with 'worse times' for women, making them more satisfied with the advancements made in the sector.

Table 3: Reasons given by the respondents to explain the low rate participation of women in showjumping



In general, many respondents mention how, at some point, people want to *have a family*. For men, such desire does not change much as they can stay in the competition. Yet for women, the respondents explained how a withdrawal for a minimum time of one year was necessary. Consider the excerpts from Marie, Fanny, Valentin and Lucas:

So simply because professional women after a while want a family life. It is quite simple. And in my opinion, and that is clearly my biggest argument because we see a lot of women performing very well until the age of 25-30, and then they disappear. (Marie, 27 years old, groom, no other degree)

I can understand that at an international level, when we become an international rider, we go abroad much more often, much longer so it is true that having a family life, babies, or small children at that time is almost impossible. It is very difficult, it is complicated. This is probably why we see fewer women at this level than at the amateur level. (Fanny, 53 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

I think, often, they [women] get pregnant, so they already lose more or less one year, from getting back on a horse. Then the horses, you need to put them aside for a year, but they are also athletes so often they go to left or right or to the husband who rides her horses. And then, the horse makes a good combination with the husband, so the horse stays with the husband or the horse is sold in the meantime. I think it is also a small but important factor. Yes, it is not the man who is pregnant unfortunately, it is the woman. (Valentin, 40 years old, equine business manager, no other degree)

It is also about starting a family, having children, I think it is more difficult to be a mother and a high level rider than to be a father and a high level rider. We saw for example Claire [international rider in showjumping] or others, when they had their children, they either stopped their careers at a high level, or they reduced it and yes it [the career] is not the priority in fact. (Lucas, 28 years old, groom, no other degree)

The second most frequently given answer in the interviews was about the *difference in character* between men and women. Consider the following excerpts from Valentine, Eva and Basile that illustrate this point nicely:

At first, women are more apt at having a hobby with animals, they are more sensitive than men. Afterwards the problem is that at a high level, it is not at all the same. That is to say, we have to find sponsors, investors, we have to be committed 100%, we are obliged to sacrifice a part of our private life to succeed, to perform at a high level. But yes, a lot of people can reach a high level but to stay there and to maintain themselves at a high level is more and more difficult today because the sport is more and more expensive, so you have to be 'awe-inspiring'. There is no tenderness, there is no real friendship or anything, so it is a sport which requires a lot of sacrifices and that is certainly why I think there are more men than women because it is quite hard, it is hard psychologically to find a place. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

I also think a woman has a greater struggle breaking through because we see women a bit as someone less competitive and a little bit too 'blue flower'. (Eva, 25 years old, horse rider, other degree)

I think, I do not want to generalize because there are still girls in the professional world, but I think that guys, we like to go as far as possible and that women are more classic like with their studies for example. [...] While I think that men dare more to launch themselves in the sense that they are not afraid of the unknown, we just go, and we will see. And women at a certain point do not have the time or the same passion because of their duty to go to university for example. Boys, we will be more inclined to put everything aside to prioritize horses. (Basile, 22 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

The following reason on which two women agree was about the *fear linked to risk* felt by women in the discipline of showjumping. Consider these excerpts from Lisa and Julie:

I think that dressage is a little more, it is a sport that is very different from showjumping or cross for example or from eventing because it is less ... it is very difficult, it is very technical but on the other hand, it is much less ... we will have a lot fewer thrills in dressage than in showjumping or in a cross for example where we just wonder 'ok if my horse stops am I going to die?'. (Lisa, 21 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

In dressage there are more women I think because there is not the share of fear that there may be in showjumping, or when we are going to really jump 'big bars' we should not doubt ourselves and I think there are more men who are maybe a little more 'go in the fire' than women. (Julie, 23 years old, horse rider, other degree)

In fact, this reason could partly explain the difference in figures among the participation of women in the discipline of showjumping and dressage. As dressage is a less risky discipline, women could (1) directly move more towards dressage than showjumping or (2) be more inclined to stop competing at high level after having children in showjumping than in dressage because it is a fact, most women are more sensitive to risk after having had children.

Women's *physiologically different nature* and lower level of musculature was also pointed out as a reason for their lower participation:

I think in the profession there are less women because it is a physical profession. It is

..., it is a job that is hard physically, so it stops people. (Louise, 28 years old, equine business manager, other degree)

Another explanation given by one respondent was the *historical division* of women's and men's roles in our society. Consider the following excerpt from the interview of Valentin:

Before, it was more men because everything was a little more like that. 50 years ago, men could drive, women not. It is kind of the same idea. But I think in horse-riding, in 10, 20 years it may even be the opposite with more women than men. I think it is evolving in this way. (Valentin, 40 years old, equine business manager, no other degree)

This quote reflects the idea that the horse-riding industry is still evolving. However, the actual figures show such progress is very slow, with 80% of showjumping riders at high competition level being male and only 20% being female. It seemed that the younger generation have representations of the industry which are more accurate, as we can see here in the excerpt by Julie:

But yes, in dressage in the lower level there are almost only women whereas at the high level I would say maybe 50-50 or so. But in showjumping it must be at least 80% male, I think. (Julie, 23 years old, horse rider, other degree)

Another explanation provided by respondents for the absence of women in top levels of showjumping had to do with the *role of misogyny* and the *false perceptions and stereotypes* about men and women:

And then, it is still a job that remains a bit macho. People are a bit misogynistic, and we do not change habits, ideas like that in a few years, so for sure there are a lot more men at high level than girls. (Louise, 28 years old, business equine manager, other degree)

This was especially noticeable among investors. An investor is the person who will hire a rider to ride her/his horses and invest in this rider hoping to have good results. Consider the following excerpts:

Automatically, when a woman tries to be a professional rider for a boss, not necessarily a rider but for someone who has his own stable and who hires riders for his horses, that sure that if she has no experience, people can be a little colder in hiring a woman who is going to start rather than a man who is going to start. Because they are going to think that a man is going to be more of a 'kamikaze' for example. (Louise, 28 years old, business equine manager, other degree)

Well, I think that today it is still more difficult for a woman to find investors, there is still this misogynistic, macho side that stands out. People think 'what could she have done to have such investors or such owners' when for a man it goes without saying. He has this owner because he is good. It is true that today it is more difficult for a woman to find an investor by telling them ok I need that amount of money per month to be able to set up a project, to have this or that horse ... I think it is more delicate for a woman. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

The analysis showed that men seem to be favored over women in the eyes of the investors. Unfortunately, investors are very important in the career of riders as it is an elite sport that requires a lot of financial means. Therefore, the inequality between men and women can have a real impact on women's careers.

Although Valentine was convinced women could potentially be treated unfairly by investors, she believed no such different treatment occurred among sponsors. Sponsors are brands who give free equestrian equipment or a car for example to riders in exchange for advertising. Consider her following explanation:

There is not really an established sponsor for men or for women, today everyone needs a saddle so whether it is a man or a woman they will have their sponsors. Perhaps at the level of financial investors, this is perhaps where the difference is. But I think that for sponsorship in terms of the equipment of the rider and the horse, men and women are still fairly equal at this level. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

There are also some stereotypes made about men. That analysis showed that most of the female respondents think that male riders are tougher with horses. Consider the following quotes:

We were thinking with my dad and when we want to choose a good stallion for one of our mares or whatever, we do not really like it when the stallion is ridden by a man. Because a man is harder, and it can hide a lot of things. (Eva, 25 years old, horse rider, other degree)

For most of the male riders, I do not want to put everyone in the same basket, but I would say that for the majority of men, they do horse riding much more in strength than women and ... yes there is also a weight/height ratio but ... maybe they have a little less feeling or sensitivity, or they are more impatient in the work and if it does not go well and fast enough, they may use strength. (Julies, 23 years old, horse rider, other degree)

Another one is that women are more 'in love', and crazy about their horses while men care less. The interviews with Marie, Lisa and Lucas showed that:

The female riders are really more 'gaga' about their horses than the male riders. Unfortunately, I think it is something that will always remain but yes men will be less cuddly with their horses. But sometimes they are but really less than women. A woman will stay for one hour a day giving them kisses, giving them carrots, a man if he does it once a week that is fine. [...] Men with animals are more down to earth. (Marie, 27 years old, groom, no other degree)

I think that men, it is still complicated, but I work with men and a professional rider, and it is true that he tends to be much less attached to horses than me and he has much less tendency to bond than a woman, I think. A man is less in a relationship with horses than a woman and maybe that is why he is so good. (Lisa, 21 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

Stephanie [a female rider for whom he worked] she was really in love with her horses, a little 'gaga' and she was never in the sporting performance if she thought that it could

'damage' her horses. She tended to give up excessively if there was anything that was not going well. So, she was necessarily less competitive from that point of view. And really completely gaga about her horses. (Lucas, 28 years old, groom, no other degree)

However, regarding this specific point, the analysis showed that minds are changing. Men seem to be more and more in a relationship with horses which is more sensitive and more similar to that of women. Consider the excerpt from Valentine that illustrate this idea very well:

There are more and more men who speak out about animal welfare, yes on the welfare of their horses. And when we see who world number one is, the Olympic champion, he has a vision of the sport and horses which for me is one of the most beautiful visions in the world. He has total respect for his horses, when he talks about his horses, he has stars in his eyes. There are more and more men like that, and I think it has evolved a lot and men are more and more attentive and sensitive towards their horses. (Valentine, 27 years old, horse rider, no other degree)

To summarize, people seemed on first reflection to deny gender inequality in the sector. Differences between generations were also noticeable. Older respondents in the sample seemed to perceive showjumping and horse-riding sport in general as gender equal. They do not have the impression that some inequalities are still present. They are more focused on the evolution of equalities they knew as the opportunity for women to compete on equal terms with men. Younger respondents in the sample on the other hand seemed to feel more concerned about gender inequalities that still persist in their sport even if they compete together as 'equals'. When asked about the specific reasons for the lower numbers of women at the top of competition, respondents did manage to give some explanations such as: (1) the desire to create a family and women's biological role in this; (2) the possible difference of character between men and women; (3) the fear linked to risk perceived more by women in the discipline of showjumping; (4) women's physiological different nature and lower level of muscles; (5) some historical differences between women and men's societal roles; and finally (6) the role of misogyny and false perceptions and stereotypes about men and women.

4.3 Conclusion

In order to find out whether the equestrian business had a gendered subtext, I analyzed the interviews regarding two research questions: (1) *“What do the workplace experiences of equestrian professionals reveal about working conditions in the sector?”*; and (2) *“How do equestrian professionals perceive gender equality in the sector?”*. Before the following explanations it is important to keep in mind that these findings should not be generalized to the entire community of equine sports, but they serve to have a better understanding of certain processes within some specific context.

Firstly, the thesis showed that equestrian professionals experienced their job as a ‘labour of passion’. At the same time, the analysis showed that this passion was the reason why equestrian professionals were willing to put up with hard working conditions. These conditions were characterized by *low pay, dirty work, time consuming work, flexible mobility demands, physically exhausting work*, and some indications of *work stress*. These conditions demanded a *network of support* and made it almost impossible to separate work from life. These conditions are applicable to all professionals in the equestrian industry, regardless of the kinds of job they have or their gender. The only exception made is regarding the *physically exhausting aspect of the work*, which seems more supported by women.

Secondly, the perception of gender inequality was something that respondents had never really thought about before the interview. Therefore, they first had a perception of gender equality in the horse-riding industry. However, when respondents were asked about the number of men and women competing at higher levels, they acknowledged that there were indeed remarkably few women competing at the top in the discipline of showjumping. They came up with specific reasons to explain this such as (1) the desire to create a family and women’s biological role in this; (2) the possible difference of character between men and women; (3) the fear linked to risk perceived more by women in the discipline of showjumping; (4) women’s physiological different nature and lower level of musculature; (5) some historical differences between women and men’s societal roles; and finally (6) the role of misogyny and false perceptions and stereotypes about men and women. If we look at these reasons, we can

conclude that finally, a certain perception of gender inequality emerged from the interviews at certain points.

Finally, the analysis of the interviews regarding the poor working conditions of the sector and the reasons for the low participation of women in showjumping allowed them to define the characteristics of the ideal worker in the horse-riding industry. As we saw in the theory, the ideal worker is seen as a disembodied worker. This means that the worker does not have a body with masculine or feminine traits and has no specific gender (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998b). Therefore, the ideal worker must meet some characteristics that vary from a sector to another. The thesis shows that the ideal worker in the equestrian industry must fit the following traits: (1) passion for the work; (2) full time availability; (3) flexible mobility; (4) good physical condition; (5) stress resistant; (6) a full commitment to the job; and (7) a strong and competitive character. These conditions are applicable to the equine business manager, the horse riders, and the grooms.

Regarding all these conditions, it is quite hard to find workers who meet all these traits. Therefore, the number of riders who are able to reach a very high level is not very great whether for men or women. However, for certain aspects such as full time availability, flexible mobility, physical condition, full commitment to the job and finally a strong and competitive character, the analysis showed that it can be more difficult for women to fit these traits. Consequently, the ideal worker in the horse-riding industry seems to have a tendency to be the male gender.

Concerning the differences between the disciplines of dressage and showjumping in the gender balance, the study offered two explanations. Firstly, the competitions of dressage gather far fewer riders than showjumping and the number of competitions in dressage are also less significant than in showjumping. Therefore, competing in showjumping at a high level means competing every week whereas competing in dressage at a high level means competing more or less once a month. Thus, fewer competitions mean more time, this means that doing dressage at a high-level is more compatible with a private life. Secondly, competitive spirit and risk are more present in the discipline of showjumping. The analysis showed that women are

more risk averse and, in general, less competitive than men. Accordingly, women are more compatible with the discipline of dressage than showjumping at a high level.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conclusion of the research

The semi-directive interviews allowed me to generate data in order to answer my research questions. On the one hand, the analysis of the data allowed me to define working conditions in the horse-riding industry. On the other hand, it helped me explain to what extent the equestrian professionals had a perception of gender equality and inequality. The thesis also defines the ideal worker as someone who is passionate, full time available, flexible in terms of mobility, with a good physical condition, stress resistant, 100% committed to the job and with a strong and competitive character. This worker does not seem as disembodied as in the definition but tends more to have a better fit with male workers. The results given by the respondents allowed us to explain why the numbers of women in the horse-riding industry go down in the highest levels of showjumping.

The different analyses mentioned above, confirms the presence of a gender subtext in showjumping. As we saw previously, the gender subtext is *the set of often concealed, power-based gendering processes, i.e., organizational, and individual arrangements (objectives, measures, habits), systematically (re)producing gender distinctions in social practices through organizational and individual arrangements* (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998b, p5). Indeed, the thesis showed that some arrangements and habits in the horse-riding industry produced certain gender distinctions such as the tendency of investors to choose male riders for example. At first glance, the horse-riding industry seems to be gender neutral as it is one of the only Olympic sports where men and women compete together and are judged on the basis of the same criteria. However, the subtexts that are the habits and the arrangements are mostly implicit. Therefore, the organizational practices of the equestrian world appear to be neutral. This representation is made for the external people of the industry but also for the internal ones, namely the equine business managers, horse riders and the grooms. It is something that was well illustrated with the respondents who at first had a general impression

of gender equality in their sport, but then came with gendered explanations for the lower representation of women in showjumping.

5.2 Solutions

Regarding the facts that I have a real interest in the horse-riding industry in general and that I continued to develop it throughout this piece of work, this combined with some touching words from the respondents concerning certain situations, it was important for me to give some starting points for possible solutions to improve the work/life balance of the workers and to help women reach the highest level in showjumping.

First, the thesis showed that people have to spend a lot of time in competition or in stables when they work in the horse industry, and this is something difficult to manage with children. Therefore, my first proposition is to develop infrastructures to give workers the opportunity of bringing their children to work and to competitions. For example, stables could build bigger bathrooms with changing tables, some rooms to allow women to feed their baby and to let the baby take a nap. They could also put in place some activities or a nursery a few days a week for toddlers in order to give parents the opportunity of working later or taking their children with them to competitions. These kinds of solutions could help parents combine their work with their private life in an easier way.

The second proposition is to introduce a kind of mentoring in the early stages of women's careers. It could be in the form of interviews with women who managed to have children and still stay at the highest levels of showjumping at the same time. These women could explain how they did it, what kind of career path they followed, and give some tips and motivation for young women in order to show them that even if it is tough, it is indeed possible to be a woman and to stay at the highest level with a family life. At the same time, it could encourage successful women in the industry to share their career experience and give them more visibility.

Finally, the FEI could impose equity in the selection of men and women for the Olympics games. As we saw in the theory, some people are in charge to choose the riders to create the Olympic team for the following Olympic Games. Therefore, if the FEI imposes a minimum rate of women per team the balance between men and women competing at the highest level in showjumping could be more equal. It is also a solution to help women reaching the highest level in the equestrian world.

5.3 Limitations of the research

During the finalization of this thesis, I became aware of certain limitations. The first one appeared during the completion of the state of the art and the second one during the interviews process.

The first limitation I faced was the lack of literature about the gender subtext. Indeed, it was quite hard to find a large range of papers on this topic, which allowed me to work with a number of six papers. Moreover, within the available papers, only two were from 2008 and 2011, the others were written before the 2000s. It is also true that this literature was mostly applied to specific organizations such as banks. Thus, some concepts were not totally applicable to the domain of sport such as the different gender subtext presented by Bendl (2008) who presented eight forms of gender subtext on the basis of organizational discourses.

The second limitation appeared in the recruitment process for the interviews. As I said in the methodology part it was difficult to find people in the horse-riding industry who were available. I did not manage to find a certain kind of profile, namely women horse riders who have children and still compete at the highest level in the discipline of showjumping. It is a real limitation regarding the topic I analyzed. To conduct interviews with this kind of profile would have enabled me to understand how they managed to succeed in the equestrian industry and in their family life.

5.4 Directions for future research

As the topic of gender subtext in the discipline of horse-riding is an uncovered topic, there are many directions for future research that are possible. I will present the ones regarding the proposition of solutions I made.

This study with further developments, interviews with women who have children and who ride at the highest level of showjumping, and perhaps additional research about mentoring may be a starting point for the development of a mentoring procedure in the horse-riding industry and more specifically in the discipline of showjumping. The development of this procedure may help young women dare to start their career in the horse-riding industry thanks to the successful career stories of these women and therefore reduce the gap in the gender balance at the highest levels of equestrian sports.

Some research could be made to try to understand what kind of support (e.g., some infrastructures in the stables, some help during competitions, and so on) could really help riders who already have children to have a better working/life balance. In this kind of research, the voices of riders who are parents are very important to find the more effective infrastructures to develop.

Finally, it would be interesting to conduct other research to try to understand how the FEI could help women riders to achieve the highest level and how they could reach better equality in the number of men and women competing at the highest level. This can be an imposition to people who select the Olympic team to have a minimum rate of women in the team they compose.

6. General conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the presence of a gender subtext in the discipline of showjumping. I realized a qualitative study based on semi-directive interviews with 12 participants including equine business managers, horse riders and grooms in the discipline of dressage and showjumping. In order to determine the presence of a gender subtext, two topics were addressed: (1) a labour of passion characterized by harsh working conditions; and (2) the perception of gender equality in showjumping. I made a gender subtext analysis of the interviews by re-reading, deconstructing, and reconstructing them on the basis of these two topics. The results first showed an acceptance of hard working conditions by all workers in the horse-riding industry. This was due to the 'labour of passion' they all have for the equestrian world. Then, it also showed a first impression of gender equality in the horse-riding industry among the respondents. However, respondents came up with gendered answers about certain processes and arrangements to explain the low numbers of women competing at a high level in showjumping. This is a typical illustration of the gender subtext: people have a neutral perception of the organization, in this case the horse-riding industry, while implicit arrangements reflect some gender inequalities. Finally, the ideal worker of the horse-riding industry was not a disembodied worker with no specific gender but has to match some traits more associated with the male gender. Therefore, the analysis resulted in the confirmation of the presence of a gender subtext in the discipline of showjumping. Consequently, the presence of a gender subtext is an explanation for the differences in the numbers of men and women participating at the highest level of showjumping. To conclude, the horse-riding industry achieved good results in terms of gender equality in comparison to other Olympic sports, however there are still a lot of things to improve to achieve real gender equality within the industry.

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