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Citation:

Dashper, KL (2012) Together, yet still not equal? Sex integration in equestrian sport. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 3 (3). 213 - 225. ISSN 1837-7122 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/18377122.2012.721727>

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## **Together, yet still not equal? Women and sex integration in equestrian sport.**

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Sex-segregation is a core organising principle of most modern sports and is a key element in the marginalisation and subordination of girls and women in sport and beyond. In this article I explore the only Olympic-level sport which is not organised around sex-segregation – equestrian sport – in order to consider the implications of sex-integration for female participants. I draw on a study conducted with elite riders that found that, although sex-integration in equestrian sport does not lead to female participants being excluded from high-level competition, men continue to perform disproportionately well. This suggests that although sex-integration may be an important step towards breaking down gender hierarchies in sport, without accompanying wider changes in gender norms and expectations, sex-integration alone will not be enough to achieve greater gender equality in equestrian sport.

**Keywords:** Equestrian sport, sex integration, gender

## **Introduction**

Historically sport has been seen as a male preserve within which girls and women have been marginalised (Hargreaves, 1994). From its origins in the nineteenth century English public schools, organised sport has long been used as an important mechanism for the production and reproduction of particular forms of masculinity within the education of boys and men (Mangan, 2000). Although female participation in sport has increased dramatically and associations between femininity and active participation in sport are in a state of (re)negotiation, female sports and athletes are still generally perceived to be less skilful, less interesting, and thus less worthy of reward, attention and praise than are male sports and athletes (Pfister, 2010).

Sex-segregation is deeply ingrained in the organisation, practice and culture of sport (Anderson, 2008). Regardless of the strength, skill or age of participants, sex-segregation is usually applied uncritically with few sports participants and/or organisers questioning the rationale and logic behind it. The historical justification for segregating sport was built around ideas of sexual difference and the belief in the unsuitability of sport and physical activity for girls and women (Hargreaves, 1994). Sex segregation continues to play a part in the reproduction of inequality in most sports today. The contemporary justification for continuing to segregate sport comprises a complex mix of biological, economic and commercial arguments — many of which are highly contested. These are combined with social norms which continue to frame sport as a male domain (Foddy and Savulescu, 2011; Tucker, 2010; Anderson, 2009b). Sport thus reflects the wider, deeply ingrained, gender order in Western societies which continues to position men and women as categorically different and unequal (Connell, 1987).

The social construction of masculinity and femininity, as complementary and opposite, yet inherently unequal subject positions is deep-rooted in modern societies (Schippers, 2007). Sport forms a powerful mechanism for the reproduction of these unequal social positions by affirming the ‘naturalness’ of this differentiation between men and women

(Kane, 1995; Travers, 2008). Consequently, female sports and athletes struggle for recognition, space and resources within the sporting world. Many studies have reported a variety of barriers to female sporting participation and achievement, and the recognition and valuing of women's sport by the wider society. For example, female sports and athletes frequently struggle to attract lucrative sponsorship deals (Koranteng, 2008). Female athletes suffer ambivalence and sometimes even hostility in the media (Stevenson, 2004). They are also often accused of being unfeminine – sometimes even of not being female – as a result of their sporting involvement and success (Griffin, 1998). High-level sport continues to be seen as incompatible with female gender norms, which position women as caregivers rather than active athletes (Palmer and Leberman, 2009). The ongoing segregation of sport along binary sex lines may be one important element in the continuing marginalisation and devaluing of female sports and athletes (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008).

In this article I explore one of the few sports which is not sex-segregated – equestrian sport – in order to consider some of the consequences of sex-integration for female athletes in elite sport.

### **Sex-segregation in sport**

The biological bases of sex-segregation are highly complex and debatable, and the social legitimacy of the unequal status of male and female sport is contested. Therefore, a growing number of scholars are beginning to question the usefulness, practicality and justice of continuing to segregate sport in these ways (e.g. Foddy and Savulescu, 2011; Anderson, 2009b). Some feminists have responded to the ongoing devaluing and subordination of female athleticism by drawing attention to the sporting achievements of female athletes (Choi, 2000), by questioning the dominance of male-oriented sports and physical attributes (Messner, 2002) and by highlighting the shortage of women in sports organisations that limits the ability of women to shape and influence the development of sport as a social practice (Walker and Bopp, 2011).

A more radical position is offered by McDonagh and Pappano (2008) who suggest removing sex-segregation to redress the marginalisation and ‘Othering’ of female athleticism. In their provocative book, ‘Playing with the boys: Why separate is not equal in sports’ they explore the ways that sex-segregation in sport operates as a powerful tool in the ideological and material subordination of women, and challenge sports enthusiasts and scholars to reconsider sex-segregation in sport.

Sex de-segregation is “a politically charged proposition” (Anderson 2009b:11). Some feminist sports scholars suggest sex de-segregation would further marginalise females in sport and debar from them competition at the highest level (Tucker, 2010). Others have concerns that sex-integration might lead to the erasure of female-only sports settings which many women value highly (Zamin, 1997). Yet these arguments are largely academic, given that so few sports are sex-integrated, and there is little evidence to support either position.

Moreover, Anderson’s (2005; 2008) studies of heterosexual male ex-footballers within mixed-sex cheerleading in the US suggests sex-integration in cheerleading actually disrupts the orthodox masculinity that pervades segregated sports, like football, and leads instead to a more inclusive model which accepts women as friends and equals.. He found that many of the men in his study who had once held stereotypical beliefs about women as weak, and as mere sex objects, had their pre-conceptions transformed when they worked alongside women on the cheerleading squad. Thus Anderson (2009a) argues that sex-integration has positive, liberating outcomes for men which may also be felt to some degree by female athletes. However, he did not fully explore the consequences of de-segregation for women and cautions that the gains for women may be more limited. The experiences of women in sex-integrated sporting realms thus warrant further explorations.

So-called ‘alternative’ sports are frequently not organised around formal sex-segregation and thus they have the potential (in theory at least) to offer men and women sporting experiences unbounded by traditional gender norms, hierarchies and expectations (Midol and Broyer, 1995). However, on closer inspection ‘alternative’ sporting realms, like

windsurfing (Wheaton, 2000), snowboarding (Thorpe, 2005), and sky-diving (Laurendeau, 2004), often have the same male-dominated, heterosexist culture evident in sex-segregated sporting milieus. Thus, when it comes to gender equality they may not be quite so alternative after all.

### **Equestrian Sport**

In this paper I explore equestrian sport which, unlike 'alternative' sports, offers a unique opportunity to explore sex-integration in a traditional sporting environment in which men and women compete against each other on equal terms at all levels of competition, and have done for over 60 years. It is also the only Olympic-level sport which is not organised around sex-segregation. This makes equestrian sport—understood here to encompass the Olympic disciplines of show jumping, dressage, and eventing—a rare and valuable site for exploring the consequences of sex-integration for both male and female participants.

Moreover, there are no sex-based biological advantages for either males or females when it comes to equestrianism. Within this sport masculine sporting attributes like speed and strength play a more limited role than in many other sports, as it is through a combination of balance, precision, specialised training and the elusive concept of 'feel' that success is achieved, and these are attributes with no gender connotations. Strength of the rider plays a role, but this is limited as within the equestrian partnership the horse will always be the stronger partner, regardless of sex of the rider. Consequently, within equestrian sport men have no bio-physical advantages over women and this makes it an ideal sport for sex-integration.

Despite the fact that there is no significant physiological advantage enjoyed by male competitors, rankings show that men are performing disproportionately well in elite equestrian sport. The current world rankings for show jumping indicate that there are no women in the top ten and four in the top twenty (FEI, 2012). In dressage, there are currently six women in the top ten and nine in the top twenty (FEI, 2012). In eventing, there are two women in the top ten and five in the top twenty (FEI, 2012).

This dominance cannot be explained by greater numbers of male competitors.

Although equestrian sport developed from military origins, and was thus originally practised by men only, from the mid-twentieth century equestrian sport was opened up to civilian participants including women (Bryant, 2008) and is now dominated numerically by girls and women.

Thus sex-integration does not necessarily lead to the exclusion of women from top level sport in equestrianism, as some critics fear would happen if sport becomes sex-integrated (Tucker, 2010). Yet neither does it ensure sex equality. As I have argued elsewhere (Dashper, in press), sex-integration may have positive outcomes for men in equestrian sport, with gay men feeling comfortable and accepted and heterosexual men feeling under less pressure to 'prove' their heteromascularity. However, as world-rankings indicate, although some women do perform well at the very top levels of equestrian sport, men still dominate the upper echelons and this is particularly marked in comparison to female dominance of mid- and low-level equestrian sport. This study sets out to explore some of the ways that male dominance is maintained at the elite level of equestrian sport, given that there are no physical advantages for male riders and that women are not formally excluded from elite equestrian competition.

## **Methods**

The research presented below draws on an ethnographic study of the subworld of competitive equestrian sport in Britain that explored the everyday practices, norms, interactions and relationships of those intimately involved in the social world of equestrianism (Crosset and Beal, 1997). Over a three-year period (2007-2009), I employed a variety of data collection methods. As a competitive horse rider myself I was able to immerse myself within this social world, participating on a daily basis in the routine activities of horse training, care, and competition, as well as the social side that accompanies such a subworld. The participant observation aspects of this study were conducted predominantly in the midlands of England, although competitions were spread across England. Observations, informal conversations, and

reflections on my own participation in this subworld were recorded daily in a research diary. This data was supplemented with interviews and focus groups with riders competing regularly at a high level, many at an international level.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty-two women and eleven men, recruited via contacts in the equestrian world and snowball sampling. I did not try to gain equal numbers of men and women as this would not be reflective of the daily world of equestrianism. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 60, with a mean age of 35. All participants were White, indicative of the narrow racial profile of riders in Britain and in most areas of the world where equestrianism is practised. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, were recorded and transcribed. The interview data was then thematically analysed and coded (Boyatzis, 1998) and triangulated with the other forms of data collected. A number of key themes emerged in relation to women's experiences of elite equestrian sport.

## **Results**

Findings indicate a range of subtle barriers to female achievement and participation in elite level equestrian sport, despite the practice of sex-integration. These include: lack of participatory parity; the importance of gatekeepers; questions of female confidence and self-promotion; and challenges related to balancing sport and family.

### ***Lack of participatory parity***

There are no explicit, formal barriers to participation for girls and women at any level of equestrian sport, but this does not ensure equality of opportunity (Travers, 2008). Fraser's (2007) concept of 'participatory parity' is useful here, as it highlights how full participation requires more than just the removal of legal and other formal barriers. According to Fraser (2007: 28; emphasis in original), parity necessitates "the condition of being a *peer*, of being *on a par* with others, of interacting with them on an equal footing." Equestrian sport appears to offer the conditions for equality of participation for both men and women at all levels of the sport, including the elite level. However, this study suggests that subtle discrimination and

hidden barriers combine to produce a glass ceiling effect at the top levels of the sport, denying many women participatory parity in relation to their male peers.

Within this study, Laura, 18, exemplifies some of these subtle barriers. She has competed on junior national teams but has frequently struggled to get noticed by selectors and trainers, who act as gatekeepers in this context. Unlike many other young riders at this level, she does not come from a very wealthy background and her parents have worked extremely hard to try and help her break through into top-level competition. Gender and class have combined to disadvantage Laura in relation to upper-class male competitors:

It's really hard to get seen, to get noticed, especially with the selectors, because they're very, well, money oriented, and also there's only a few boys and they seem to get all the attention as well. There's so many girls and everything, and the boys just really stand out, I suppose, and they're from very wealthy backgrounds, the boys are, and so they do tend to stand out more and get, you know, first choice of things.

Laura experiences marginalisation due to her socioeconomic position and background, which means she does not have the contacts within the high levels of equestrian sport that many of her peers benefit from. Yet she is a talented rider, and this talent and hard work have resulted in her gaining a place on the national youth training squad, despite her background and inability to buy the most expensive horses. This, of course, can be a problem for males as much as for females but, during training and selection events, she feels her being female adds to her invisibility:

There's just so many rules that British Dressage have put down, people like us have to really work just to get there, you know, there's like set competitions throughout the year that they say you *have* to attend to even be considered for a European place, you have to attend these competitions, and so this year we did,

and it cost us a fortune, but when the European team was announced only, well of the four on the team they had probably only been to one of those so-called essential competitions, if that. One person, because he was a boy, had had his horse back in work after an injury for three months and he got on the team. You're supposed to have at least six months record, and it was a bad injury as well, but he still got on the team . . . their results weren't even good, you know, my results this year have been in the top five in every competition, and two of the people on the team – including the boy - I've beaten them in all of those competitions, so how do they justify putting them ahead of me? But it's because they have money.

Laura felt a sense of injustice here. The formal, publicised rules were not applied in the selection of the team, a point confirmed by my analysis of publicly available competition records for all riders in the UK. In this case, performance alone would not appear to explain the selections made. Financial resources and background may well have played an important, if unacknowledged, role in this selection. Being male in a female-dominated terrain may also have helped one of these young riders bypass the selection criteria applied to female riders, as by virtue of his gender he was able to ride the 'glass escalator' to success past his female peers, in much the same way as has been noted for men in female-dominated professions like nursing and primary school teaching (Williams, 1995).

This indicates a lack of participatory parity, as people like Laura may be disadvantaged both by their gender position, as male riders may stand out to selectors by virtue of their scarcity, and by their background and lack of contacts. Young riders in this context are not interacting on an equal footing, and not all young riders appear to be able to operate as, and be recognised as, peers (Fraser, 2007). As selection for national teams remains a necessary condition for breaking through into the very top echelons of equestrian sport, this represents a considerable barrier and indicates how gender combines with other axes of power, in this case class, to further disadvantage some girls and women. As Douglas (2005)

argues in relation to the intersections of 'race' and gender in women's tennis, gender is not the only important social location and position of power that influences an individual's sporting career and identity. However, given women's historically subordinate position within sport (Hargreaves, 1994), gender is always a relevant social position for female athletes and can combine with other positions to advantage or disadvantage some female athletes in relation to both other female athletes and male athletes.

### *Gatekeepers*

There are a variety of influential gatekeepers within elite equestrian sport. As well as selectors, top-level riders are frequently dependent upon the support of wealthy 'owners', who buy the expensive horses needed to compete at this level, and pay for their keep. Owners select a rider for their horse, and thus owners play a significant role in the career progression of riders. Isobel, 44, is a show-jumper who identifies what she sees as a clear bias among owners (male and female) that favours men over women:

There are lots of good women show-jumpers, but I think the problem is that we've always had quite a lot of team managers who've never picked women for the teams . . . I mean, locally, women have always competed and done well and we've got lots of successful women producers, but the top horses cost a lot more and the owners tend to want men. I think it's been a perception really, with owners and sponsors, they're just not prepared to sponsor the women to the same degree, so it's really hard for women to break through. There's (sic) one or two famous names but I think it's very difficult, and most women just can't afford it. And it's the time involved, you feel like you're batting your head against a wall, and then you have to sell your nice young horse because you've got to pay the mortgage, and so you just never make it above a certain level.

As with Laura, Isobel highlights how the significant financial investment required for success in elite equestrian sport poses real problems for would-be riders, and how this is exacerbated for some female riders in comparison to their male peers. As is the case in many other sports, within equestrianism the perception prevails that men are more competent, and thus a better investment for sponsors and owners. This is despite the many examples of female riders who have performed successfully in elite equestrian sport over the last sixty years. Even within this sex-integrated sport, perceptions persist among owners and managers of men being better than women. This represents a real obstacle for female participation and success at the elite level, as women have to compete head-to-head with their male peers for team selection, rides on top horses and lucrative sponsorship deals.

### *Confidence, ambition and self-promotion*

Some men in the study also suggested the existence of a ‘male advantage’ and of the benefits this has brought them in their riding careers as Steve, a 24-year-old event rider, explains:

A few people have actually said to me that if I were a female I wouldn't be where I am now, they did say that, and you know, just ‘cos you're a male you *are* looked at differently, I think you are, yeah, I do think you are; ‘cos when I worked on the last yard there were decent girl riders there, you know, they were more educated at riding than myself, but they didn't get the rides or the opportunities. The girls, they'd say things like ‘oh I'd be really grateful if we went round a pre-novice clear next week<sup>1</sup>’, where I'd be saying ‘I want to get to Burghley<sup>2</sup> one day, I want to be doing that, I want to jump these big fences.’ So people probably didn't think the girls were as confident or as good, because of how they spoke, whereas I was always showing off!

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<sup>1</sup> A pre-novice event is a relatively low level competition, dominated mainly by young horses and/or amateur riders. To ‘go clear’ around an event is often considered a worthy achievement, even if it does not lead to winning a placing in the overall competition.

<sup>2</sup> Burghley Horse Trials is a four-star three day event. This makes it an elite competition, constituting one of the six leading three day events in the world.

Steve highlights some interesting points related to the differential status of males and females within this subworld. He acknowledges that the women he worked with were better trained and probably more competent riders than himself but they did not get the same opportunities, reinforcing the points raised by Laura and Isobel about the perceived superiority of male riders within this milieu. Steve also raises the issue of confidence and suggests that a reason for his success relates to his ability to push himself forward and to state clearly and overtly that he wants to ride at the elite level. He said that the women he worked with did not do this, offering much more modest goals, and consequently the sport's gatekeepers (owners, trainers, selectors) did not see them as being ambitious and talented in the way they assumed him to be. This reflects many of the on-going differences in the socialisation of children and adults. Boys often develop gender identities based on cultural definitions of masculinity as power, success, agency and entitlement, whereas girls often develop gender identities based on cultural definitions of femininity, which continue to be associated with more passivity and docility (Jordan, 1995; Choi, 2000). This may also be a further example of how sporting culture, and equestrianism in particular, promotes men and marginalises women. This may lead to female riders lacking confidence in their abilities, constituting a further restraint on female performance. As with performance in business settings, female riders' unwillingness to promote their abilities and ambitions may actually hold them back, in comparison to their male peers who feel no such modesty (Southman, 2009).

### ***Balancing sport and family***

Throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, opposition to female sporting participation was based on the perceived incompatibility between sport and femininity, in particular motherhood (Hargreaves, 1994). Many female athletes have suffered as a consequence of their apparent inability to embody feminine gender norms, and questions have been raised regarding their femaleness, their sexuality and their ability to bear children (Griffin, 1998). This can be a distressing experience for female athletes who may suffer

attacks in the media and difficulties attracting sponsorship as a result (Stevenson, 2004).

Within most sports, female athletes can deal with the perceived incompatibility between elite sport and motherhood by completing their elite careers before having children. However, this is not possible for many female riders as they are unlikely to reach the peak of their career until they also arrive at prime child-bearing and raising years, as it can take a long time for a rider to build up the reputation, resources and support (from owners, sponsors and selectors) necessary for success at the elite level.

Riders do not usually reach the upper echelons until their late twenties at the earliest, and may continue to compete at national and international levels through their thirties and forties, and maybe into their fifties. This causes problems for riders, male and female, in terms of balancing family commitments with the demands of high-level sport. However, women are particularly disadvantaged in this respect, due to the dominant social expectation that they will be primarily responsible for childcare (Drew and Humbert, 2012). This operates to deter women from pursuing success at the elite level, which would necessitate frequent travel and stays away from the family.

A common belief amongst the riders I interviewed was that many female riders will opt-out of elite competition in favour of family life. This does not mean they will give up riding and competing, or will no longer make their income from equestrianism, but that they may choose not to pursue international success. Many riders marry other riders, and in each of the three couples I interviewed where this was the case it was the female partner who had scaled back her competition career to concentrate on the domestic side of the horse business (training and horse care), as well as taking the lead in childcare. This frees up the male partner to continue to pursue competitive success and the travel this entails, backed up by the support offered by their wives. As Dave, 53, put it, this “just seemed like the natural way to do things.”

This was not just among older couples who might be expected to have more traditional gender relations than younger couples. Andrew, 22, and Caroline, 21, are currently

unmarried and have no children. When discussing their views on why men seem to dominate elite equestrian sport they give some insight into their expectations for balancing their future career and family commitments:

C: I think one of the main reasons really is that women might have families and stuff so you want to do other things, you have different priorities then, don't you, well I would have, you wouldn't want to be putting all your time into riding then.

Caroline's suggestion that 'women might have families' reflects a traditional assumption that is still prevalent today: 'family' and children are women's responsibilities (Drew and Humbert, 2012). Caroline does not suggest that men might also have families, which might change their attitude towards elite competition and associated travel and absence from home. Underpinning this is the assumption that for men, having children is not restrictive in the same way as it is for women. Men can have children and still compete at the elite level, as they commonly have a supportive female partner to perform the childcare and domestic duties. When women have children they are expected to put motherhood ahead of sporting ambition, and there is no comparative assumption that a female rider's male partner would perform childcare and domestic duties to free her up to pursue competitive success. This marks a real barrier to female success in elite equestrianism, as many women may be unable to combine sport and family, and may have to sacrifice one in favour of the other in a way that is less common for men.

Andrew and Caroline's discussion indicates that, although young and not facing these challenges themselves yet, their views on sport/family balance reflect wider conservative gender norms:

A: I think you find quite a few women doing the livery side of it, rather than actually competing, so I think that if they partner up and get married you get

the woman doing the livery part, running the business side, whilst the husbands go off and compete.

K: why do you think it works out that way?

A: probably 'cos they're better at it!

C: it's social conventions though, isn't it, to stay more at home . . .

A: and they have to stay at home more with the family as well, I suppose, so it's easier to combine those duties.

Both Caroline and Andrew accept uncritically the association between women and motherhood, and the predominance of motherhood over sport. In agreement with Dave, they take this division of labour as self-evident and 'natural'. With marriage and children, women will stay at home whereas men will continue to perform an external role in elite equestrian sport. These gender norms and expectations act as a real restraint on female riders' ability and desire to compete in elite equestrian sport.

Some women do manage to compete at high levels after marriage and children, although for many this involves a difficult balancing act, negotiations with partners and children, and often feelings of guilt at not being able to devote sufficient attention to either family or sport (Palmer and Leberman, 2009). Anna, 45, is a show-jumper. She is married, with a five-year-old son, Rob. Anna feels torn between her desire to continue to compete at a high level, and her desire to be a 'good' mother.

I find that running the horses and the business and being a mother, you tend to forgo your social life a lot, that's the one thing that's really difficult, so in the school holidays I absolutely make an effort to invite other children to the house

to play with Rob, I have to make that effort, but then you miss out on other things. Like this Tuesday, I should be competing but I've already invited one of Robbie's friends round so I'm going to have to miss the show. I have to, it's one of the things I have to make myself do.

Anna does not suggest that her husband should supervise this children's play session in the way that Andrew and Caroline suggest female partners will perform childcare to support their husband's sporting career. It is Anna's responsibility, even if it means she will miss a big competition. She frequently scales back her sporting participation to make time for her family.

In an ideal world I try to make Saturday a show day and Sunday to be a family day where we don't do anything really, the horses just go out in the field, so that we can just be a family sometimes.

The tensions that arise between trying to balance family life and competitive sport are challenging, and for riders they present a real issue due to the longevity of a riding career. Many women may self-select out of performance at the highest level of the sport, and the travel and stays away from home this necessitates, as it is often too difficult to manage alongside children and family. As women are still responsible for the majority of domestic work and childcare responsibilities, this 'double shift' between family and sport represents "a formidable distributive obstacle to their full participation" in elite equestrian sport (Fraser, 2007: 29).

## **Discussion**

The fact that men are present in disproportionate numbers at the elite level of equestrian sport despite greater numbers of women competitors suggests that de-segregation

alone does not go far enough to overcome the long-standing and persistent marginalisation and subordination of women in sport. This study suggests that women continue to face a number of barriers to achievement at the elite levels of the sport, and these barriers represent “subtle, insidious ideologically based oppression” (Norman, 2010: 100) that goes beyond formal exclusion. Allowing women to compete against men has not done enough to redress gender inequality in equestrian sport because of the subtle but powerful gender negotiations that operate at a less visible level.

This study has identified how women in elite equestrian sport face a kind of “institutionalised access discrimination” (Walker and Bopp, 2011: 60) in the form of the ongoing perceptions of the sport’s gatekeepers that male riders are a better investment at the elite level. Women struggle to break through to the elite level as they may not be selected for national teams, may struggle to find sponsorship or to attract and retain rides on top horses. The sport’s organising bodies – led in the UK by the British Equestrian Federation (BEF) and supported in part by public funding – could implement a deliberate policy of promoting young female riders by offering owners an incentive to support female riders through the provision of top horses. To accompany this, the BEF could offer riders free childcare during international competitions and training events, to help all riders, but especially women, with the difficult challenges that arise from trying to balance elite sport and family life. Finally, a re-education programme would need to accompany these initiatives, aimed at all riders – male and female – as well as team selectors, trainers, and owners. In a similar vein to the ‘Human Rights for Aussie Rules’ campaign that uses sport as vehicle for education regarding a variety of human rights issues, including respect for women (Eastern Community Legal Centre, 2011), the equestrian education policy could highlight the success of female riders and the barriers and obstacles women face in reaching the elite levels of the sport. Such a combined programme of material support and re-education would require the input of significant resources, but the outcomes may enable equestrian sport to cement its position as a leader in gender equality and could act as an exemplar to other sports of how greater gender justice can be achieved within sport.

McDonagh and Pappano's (2008) contention that separate-is-not-equal in sport is a powerful rallying call to reconsider the values and ideals on which sport is based. However, the example of equestrian sport indicates that without an accompanying programme of re-education and positive action to support women in sport, sex-integration alone may not solve these persistent inequalities.

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