



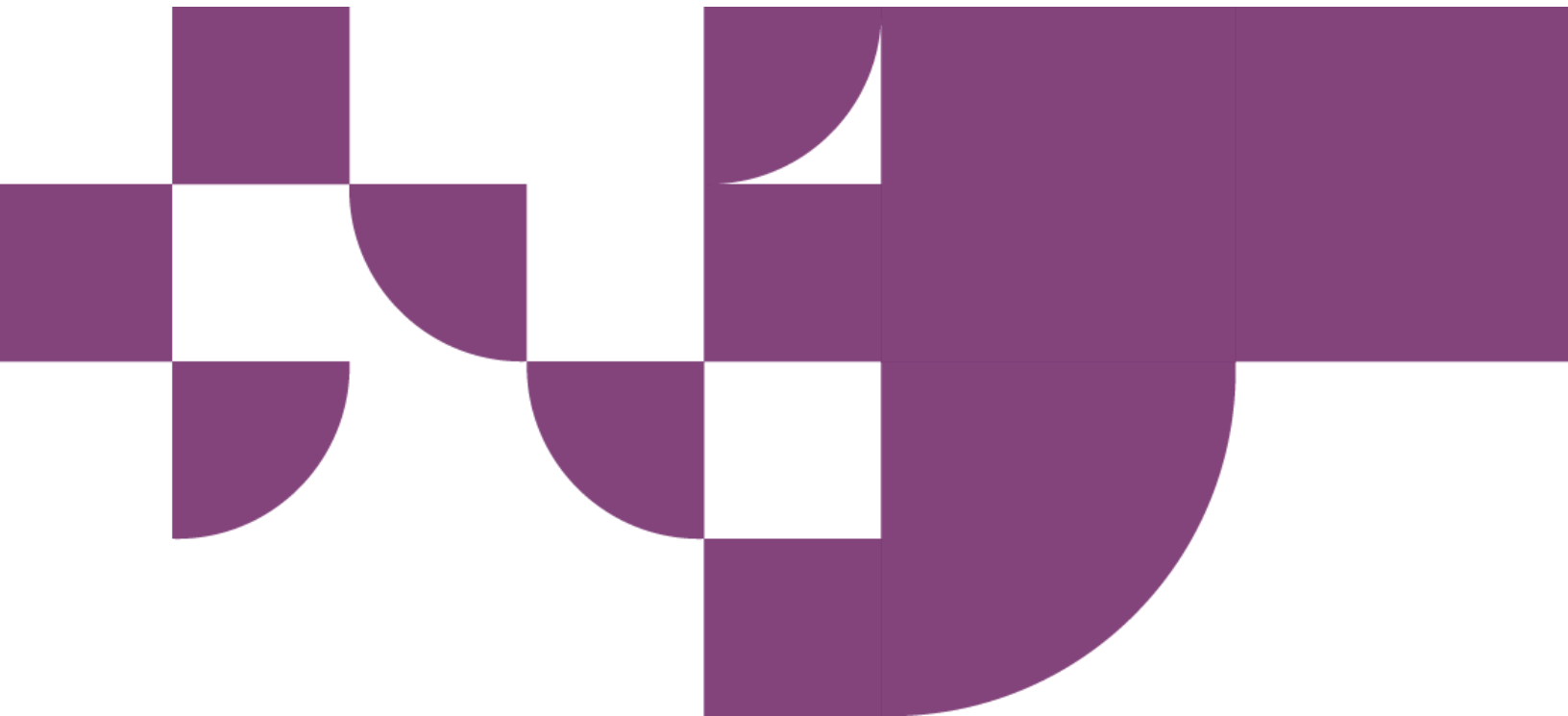
# **Gender, Education and Work in the Horseracing Industry**

Summary Report

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## **Gender, Education and Work in the Horseracing Industry**

1. This summary report provides an overview of key findings from a PhD research project which was partially funded by the Racing Foundation carried out at Durham University<sup>1</sup>. The project focused upon lived experiences of women in the horseracing industry during the period 2015-2020.
2. The weight of evidence presented by the research shows that like wider society, the racing industry has a number of cultural challenges, but that these can be fixed.
3. There is a need to understand the complexities of the industry and requirements for change, to be able to make evidence-based solutions to the problems that were identified within the research.
4. The main aims of the study were to:
  - Examine the lived experiences of young women in the horseracing industry with the aim to provide recommendations for more people to join and stay as part of the horseracing workforce.
  - Consider how young women develop their identities in preparation for working in horseracing.
  - Examine why some young females have been less successful than males in their career trajectories.
5. A qualitative methodological approach was therefore employed to gain greater insights into the lives of participants. In total, 140 people were involved within the PhD study (focus groups and interviews). However, outside the scope of the PhD, a further 71 females came forward confidentially to disclose their experiences after a presentation of the findings at Windsor at the annual Racing Foundation conference on 30th September 2021.
6. The study revealed four clear themes in relation to gender inequality, which collectively identified a male-dominated culture into which women, who are an

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<sup>1</sup> The University received a world top 100 position in the QS World University Rankings 2023. The work was led by Dr Eleanor Boden, Professor Stacey Pope and Professor Martin Roderick. The study was undertaken in the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, ranked in the top 10 of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) for 2021. The Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences leads research to help reduce inequalities, promote social justice and ensure better health and wellbeing within and through sport, exercise and physical activity.

essential part of the industry workforce, were routinely exposed. The Women were aware of the widely embedded power relations that inform beliefs and behaviours, which are reflective of their ability to accrue appropriate skill, recognition, and in some cases, value. Therefore, women's experiences must be at the centre of any future changes to recruitment and retention policies, if these are to be effective.

7. The four themes outlined below are not exhaustive. However, the research suggests that:
  - Those unable to present a racing identity (through looks, behaviour and language) are often considered 'other'.
  - People who are successful are those who learn how to 'play the game'. In other words, some women are navigating and dealing with unique behavioural expectations and standards in order to thrive in the industry.
  - There is an overpowering culture across the sport that can contribute to young females feeling like they need to leave the industry.
8. The conclusions drawn in this research are specific to the sample used and all learnings are designed to challenge and change the accepted norms within the horseracing culture for all.
9. **The four key themes are:**

### **Sexual Misconduct**

- a) A number of interviewees referenced an occasion when they had witnessed or been subject to sexual harassment.
- b) The research suggests that horseracing's culture normalises some inappropriate sexualised behaviours. Unchallenged sexual misconduct of varying levels of severity was shown to be accepted, and sometimes expected by girls and women, regardless of age or position within the sport.
- c) It was believed by many research participants that most people who were making comments and acting inappropriately, do not understand that their behaviour constitutes sexual misconduct.

### **The Perceived Limitations of the Female Body**

- a) Research participants referenced as a matter of course the way male and female bodies in the racing industry were recognised differently. The participants consistently commented on the way masculine characteristics were prioritised.
- b) Interview data regularly referenced the challenges connected with strength and fitness, body shape, ill-fitting equipment (designed with the male body in mind), and periods and period shame.
- c) Frustrations at their perceived competence, physicality, and a lack of opportunity were replete throughout the interviews and focus groups. However, a further significant finding is that to “fit in” the racing industry, some young women are choosing to take contraception to avoid ‘period shame’ and disruption to their working pattern.

### **The Maternity and Pregnancy Penalty**

- a) It was recognised by the research participants that they felt a traditional ‘racing way of life’ can be incompatible with aspirations for motherhood. Thus, it was widely discussed how some women feel that they must leave the racing industry to start a family. At an informal level, the idea that they are unable to continue working in the industry during pregnancy and after childbirth are taken-for-granted beliefs. Participants normalised the idea that racing should be “your whole life”.
- b) Prioritising the “lifestyle” associated with racing over the ability to take time away for maternity leave, reinforces the traditional model of work practices and workplace. Maternity and pregnancy break the assumed continuity of career development and so can act as a penalty on that trajectory.

### **Gender Stereotypes and Expectations**

- a) For many of the women interviewed, ‘getting on’ in the horseracing industry felt like they were required to ‘play a game’ to meet normalised expectations. They all recognised that a value is placed on those in the industry who can demonstrate a certain set of characteristics in the workplace, and another set when distanced from the manual aspect of associated labour and the assumed/accepted heterosexual expectations of the sport.
- b) For instance, in horseracing, those marginalised as being the “wrong shape” or having “no grit” are perceived as inferior and those who can demonstrate more

stereotypical 'racing' traits, such as taking risks and being strong, are more likely to succeed.

- c) Although it is important to note that this does not solely relate to heterosexual relationships, hyper sexuality is assumed and rewarded within the industry and therefore certain types of behaviour are embedded within the culture.
10. The stable staff shortage and wider perception of the industry is unlikely to change sufficiently until there is an increased awareness and education of inappropriate behaviours and correct reporting lines. There are multiple, historical examples of workplace cultures adopting policies in relation to sexual misconduct, which have seen landmark changes.
11. The report acknowledges that sexual misconduct is embedded in our [societal] culture and sexual harassment in the workplace can be commonplace: importantly, harassment includes sexual comments. What has become evident throughout is that people do not always get protected from unwanted behaviours. Most recently, the #MeToo movement has drawn the spotlight on sexual harassment and emphasised that it is not a new phenomenon.
12. It must be stressed that men can also be victims of sexual harassment (perpetrated by both women and men), and women can be perpetrators (against both men and women). This summary report acknowledges the risk that this research portrays this as an issue that only affects women, which, in turn, could discourage male victims from reporting complaints. Further highlighting the importance of a behavioural code of conduct that outlines the expected behaviours that are expected, and, consequently, those which will not be tolerated.

### **Recommendations listed in the PhD:**

The key policy and operational recommendations from this study are:

- An industry wide code of conduct that is governed within the British Horseracing Authority's governing power.
- Annual continuous personal development opportunities for all staff to ensure that practices stay current and in line with legislative expectations.
- An educational e-learning module on sexual harassment
- The development of a Sexual Harassment toolkit developed in conjunction with key industry stakeholders.

- The need to highlight the importance of fit of equipment and clothing to ensure safety and comfort of women in the workplace in line with other occupational health and work research.
- A consultation into female jockey facilities within the racecourse to highlight and subsequently reduce the barriers to achievement associated with gender.
- A further understanding of the limitations and barriers to participation associated with menstruation and period shame.

The invisible/unconscious nature of the challenges can be further understood through strategies to increase consciousness, which drives the rationale for these recommendations.

These recommendations have been shared and considered by British racing and are either already delivered or drawn into an ongoing, long term, industry action plan.

## **SUMMARY**

In short, this research suggests that:

- Sexual harassment can remain unchallenged and accepted as “banter”.
- The racing identity is very strong and it unconsciously structures horseracing through encouraging people to alter appearance, language and behaviours to ‘fit in’.
- Some young women are leaving because they do not feel that they belong or will not be able to reach their potential.
- Gendered stereotypes are widely accepted and unchallenged.
- People who are successful are those who “learn how to play the game” yet “women can never really win” – this is within the racing workforce culture.

Horseracing has an opportunity to improve practices with specific reference to the experience of female participants, who are often the most negatively affected by the horseracing culture, which is widely, subconsciously reinforced.