

**RACING BODIES**

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### Introduction

Bodywork has so far largely been defined with regard to the work that women (and some men) do on their own bodies or the bodies of other women and men (Wolkowitz 2006; Gimlin 2007). There have, as yet, been fewer attempts to encompass the bodywork undertaken by humans on non-human animals, such as in the case of animal caregivers, veterinarians or farm labourers. This paper reports on the bodywork undertaken in racing stables, where thoroughbred horses are trained. Racing stables employ around 4000 stable staff whose job it is to give care to the horses, to exercise them daily and to transport them to race meetings. During two periods spent with stable staff and some of the horses, either at racing stables or at the racecourse (Miller 2010), it was found that there is a common labour process that involves bodywork, both on the racehorses and on their human caregivers.

The racing labour process is labour intensive and cannot be mechanised; there is huge reliance on lightweight and athletic human bodies to accomplish the production of fit and competitive racehorses. It is low paid but skilled work, where horse(wo)manship is embodied in stable staff (Game 2001), and is a 'skilled bodily craft' (Cassidy 2002:106). Women make up 47% of the basic grade of stable staff, offering employers the prospect of meeting a 60 kg body weight restriction imposed by industry requirements that racehorses bear low weights when being ridden. There is thus evidence of commodification of women's embodied capacity to restrict weight (Tolich 1996). However, women and men are equally expected to be tough and fit. They are also equally expected to display a 'deferential body', by remaining in the background when in the public gaze of race meetings, where all eyes are focussed on the horse, its jockey and trainer.

Emotion work has also, so far, tended to exclude the work undertaken by humans where the object of the labour process is not a human being but a live animal. This area has been neglected for a number of potential reasons. First of all, how/do humans engage with and have feelings about or towards the animals they work with? To what extent does this form of bodywork conform to work on/with the human body? Are these forms of employment seen as too peripheral to warrant serious investigation? This paper will address these issues through a discussion of bodywork, with which emotional labour is inextricably linked.

### Terminology

The industry has wrestled for some time with a change of name for stable staff but seems unable to move beyond the gender specific labels of 'stable lad' and 'stable girl' when referring to the workers who have daily responsibility for the care and well-being of racehorses in training. These job titles also reflect a traditional but out-moded approach of the racing stables as a 'family' and their continued use certainly underlines the subordinate role of stable staff in the racing labour process. Individual employers fair better, being referred to in the neutral as 'racehorse trainers'.

The racing labour process, reflects the three 'simple elements' of Marx's (1976:284) description, namely purposeful activity; the object of that activity; and the instruments of work. In racing these are (1) the exercising, care and transportation and racing of racehorses, (2) the racehorse itself and (3) the equipment and physical environment of the stable and racecourse.

The workplace in racing is generally referred to as a racing stable/yard in which horses are kept in individual boxes/stables. Boxes are mucked out, ie cleaned, daily; horses are exercised on gallops, ie ridden at speed on designated pieces of land, usually located on a slope; stable staff tack and untack horses, ie place and remove saddle and bridle before and after exercise.

There are two forms of horseracing: Flat racing and National Hunt racing. Flat racing is, as the name suggests, conducted on racecourses without obstacles, while in National Hunt (or jumps) racing horses must also clear a series of high fences, or rather lower hurdles. Trainers are more often licensed to racehorses in both codes of racing, although they tend to be more associated with one code.

### The racing industry

The racing industry is regulated by the British Horseracing Authority (BHA), with thirteen interest groups (representing trainers, owners, breeders and racecourse owners in particular) providing membership of the Authority's management committees. The fourteenth group, stable staff, has no voice in these deliberations although there has been some form of collective bargaining since the 1930s and national collective bargaining since 1975.

Horses are trained in approximately 600 small firms, racing yards or stables, located in mainly rural areas throughout the United Kingdom, with two racing centres, Newmarket and Lambourn, where larger numbers of stables are concentrated. Newmarket is associated with Flat racing and Lambourn with National Hunt racing. Taken together, racing stables employ 4172 stable staff of which 57% are men, 43% women (British Horseracing Authority 2009). The majority of stable staff, 83%, occupies the basic grade of Stable Lad/Girl, with 14% in the supervisory grades of Head Lad/Girl or Travelling Head Lad/Girl. The remaining 3% are trainees. It was not possible to breakdown these figures down further by age and

grade but the BHA statistics do show that 3261 of the total 7852 stable-based workforce (including stable staff) is in the age bracket 16-30; it could be concluded that this generally a young workforce.

It should also be noted that we are looking at sports workers, rather than competing athletes. Nevertheless, it will be shown that some of the demands made on jockeys, for example weight restriction, are passed on to stable staff. The health and safety implications of extreme dieting for jockeys have been studied (Leydon and Wall 2002) and can give us some indications of the likely effect on stable staff.

Methodology and theoretical issues

The original research project from which the current discussion derives was a study of the racing labour process and employment relations in racing stables, as an example of the small firm. However, it did raise some novel issues, which fell out of the scope of the study, particularly those of bodywork and of emotional labour, which this paper has returned to. Over the period 2000-2004, qualitative research was conducted with stable staff, trainers, key industry figures and through historical and documentary sources. The objective was to locate the labour process, and associated employment relations, in its widest industry and historical context. Table 1 sets out the phases of the research and methods associated with each phase. This paper focuses on the research undertaken in 2000 and 2003/4, where there was particular interaction with stable staff and where it was possible to observe the work they undertook, at the stables and at the racecourse.

One unexpected finding of the research was the importance of the horse-human relationship to the success of a racing stable. The working relationship between horse and human was founded in the need for safety of horse and human and also in a non-verbal form of communication to communicate instructions to the horse, when riding and when dealing with it 'from the ground'. It seemed clear that this was a gap to be returned to, as it had the potential to offer a different explanation for the exploitation of stable staff through low wages and long hours and lack of recognition of their skilled labour. Something else was going on here, and it seemed to be strongly linked to the literature on bodywork.

Table 1  
Phases of the Research

Year	Interviews	Questionnaire	Diary	Documentary sources
2000	Trainers and stable	Stable staff	Stable staff	None

	staff			
2000	None	Trainers	None	None
2001/2	None	None	None	Newspaper archive
2003	Key industry informants	None	None	Industry level documentary sources
2003/4	Stable staff, trainers	None	None	None

In order to streamline the first part of the discussion, two broad categories from the bodywork literature are used, care work and body production work, with a third formed from activities particular to the labour process in racing stables, communication work. Table 2 therefore sets out the types of bodywork undertaken by stable staff. I will argue that the fact that stable staff perform several types of bodywork is important not only to understanding their contribution to the labour process. It also offers a set of reasons for their low status in the labour process, despite utilising bodily skills without which it would be impossible to train racehorses.

Table 2  
Forms of body work in racing stables

Care work	Body production work	Communication work
Dirty work – mucking out; grooming; cleaning tack; dealing with a sick animal	Athletic work - Riding horse at exercise; grooming; mucking out; saddling	Riding horse at exercise; grooming; transportation; saddling
Sensory work – grooming; dealing with a sick animal; 'feeling your horse'	Weight restriction work; the deferential body	Embodiment of skill of riding

A second, and related, finding was the emotional labour that forms part of the racing labour process. In my earlier research, one common comment from the industry was that staff put up with much because of their love of horses. This seemed too facile an explanation, but did raise the question of emotional labour as a source of exploitation. In racing, this was the emotional labour of working with a non-human animal, which has the subject of less research than work with human subjects. Sanders (2010) considers the conjunction of dirty work undertaken by veterinary assistants with the emotional labour they also undertake,

labelling it the 'emotional dirty work' (ibid: 244) of dealing with pet owners with sick or dying animals. Game (2001) and Brandt (2005) both explore the engagement of human emotion when riding and competing on horseback but both studies are outside of the field of work-based study.

The racing labour process

The job of a stable lad or girl is largely physical, involving the manual labour of mucking out, grooming and feeding, coupled with the skilled physical work of riding racehorses during the exercise routine. In addition, staff are responsible for the transportation of horses to and from race meetings. During the course of their working lives they develop skills around equine veterinary matters, often detecting injury or illness and being involved in associated care work. Their working day is arranged around these activities, year round. For some there will be the additional work of breaking yearling horses, another skilled activity where year-old horses are initially trained to accept saddle and rider. Despite the varied nature of the work and the level of skill involved, stable staff remain in low paid, low status employment; as one stable lad put it 'we are looking after valuable animals but we're paid a pittance'. Stable staff surveyed were quite clear that they had to resort to overtime working to improve pay as shown in Table ?

Table ? I need to do overtime to improve my pay

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Total
Male	11	2	2	15
Female	8	0	2	10
Total	19	2	4	25

In the daily routine stable staff will be in close contact with at least three horses from early in the morning until early evening. They will check on the health and general well-being of the horse, moving on to grooming and preparing it for exercise. They will ride each horse, in turn, at the trainer's instruction, 'feeling' how it 'goes' when on the gallops and reporting back to the trainer. They will then settle the horse back in its stable.

Stable staff are thus akin to Beardsworth and Bryman's (2001) zookeepers in that they are working with a live, but domesticated, animal. They are coaxing the performance of certain 'tasks' out of the horse as part of the training process. This is not for daily consumption by the public as part of a regular daily display in the captive surroundings of the zoo or theme park. They are, however, caregivers to a large and dependent animal towards which they already have a predisposition, if not feelings of love. The majority of stable staff come from a background with horses as evidenced in my earlier research (Miller 2010).

It must be acknowledged that some duties require more than one form of bodywork but it is very difficult to completely separate tasks from each other into discrete types.

### The horse body

In the racing labour process, the human body confronts the horse body, which is often a very privileged body, to which human needs are seen as secondary. In his historical account of animals in the industrial revolution, Hribal (2003) argues that horses are part of the working class because they contributed to the development of capitalism, while reaping none of the profit. He sees this as analogous with the social relationship between workers and employers. It could be argued that this applies to horseracing also, as the racehorse is capital intensive and will bring profits to at least some of its investors. The value of a racehorse is vested in three sources: prize money, betting and breeding. The first two apply to all racehorses, whether on the Flat or National Hunt while the third applies in the main to stallions raced on the Flat. However, prize money is greater on the Flat as Table 3.1 shows:

Table 3.1  
Comparison of prize money 2006/7

Year	Flat racing	National Hunt racing	Total
2006	£66,243,811	£36,852,112	£103,095,922
2007	£63,153,933	£35,273,135	98,427,068

Source: British Horseracing Board 2008

There is a strong relationship between racing thoroughbred horses and breeding from them. The most profitable part of the industry is breeding, specifically stallions' fees at stud. This means that profitability is skewed in favour of the Flat racing branch of the industry, since National Hunt horses run as mares or geldings, while Flat racing horses run as fillies or colts (ie young stallions).

Horses embodying humans (p6). Mewett: socially constructed by humans.

Game (20001) remarks on the degree to which humans and horses embody each other in the process of riding.

### Care work in the racing labour process

Mewett (2008) finds that horse care predicated on human ways of caring. Care work in racing stables involves dirty work and sensory work. One of the problems highlighted in the literature is the fact that care work often involves dirty work of some variety (Twigg 2000), dirty work being defined by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999:413) as 'tasks and occupations which are likely to be perceived as disgusting or degrading'. This in turn is often associated with low status because society stigmatises this work. Nevertheless these tasks are essential to human care work and the same is true of horse care work. Stable staff clean up after the dirt produced by horses - removing urine and manure soiled bedding as they muck out the

stables; from the horse lorry during transportation; and at the racecourse stables. Mucking out will also bring them in contact with dust from clean straw and hay. They also have the job of cleaning muddy tack, rugs, and other horse apparel. They groom horses and keep their bodies clean, which will involve the genitals as well as the coat, mane and tail. They also deal with body fluids such as blood, pus or nasal fluid when dealing with a sick or injured horse, saliva when administering a worming compound.

In looking at another form of work with animals, veterinary work, Sanders (2010) finds that although vets are closely involved with animal treatment, it is the veterinary technicians who do the dirty work of cleaning up faeces and blood. He also finds that veterinary technicians are in a low paid occupation. There are clearly also parallels between stable staff and Sanders' veterinary technicians, as well as with the dirty work observed by Twigg (2000). Looking at human-related work, Twigg (2000:407) shows that 'bodywork is poorly regarded in terms of pay and employment esteem' (see also Fine 2005). It therefore seems likely that the low status of dirty work has an adverse impact on wages for stable staff also.

Part of the carework involves sensory work, discussed by Hockey (2009) in his study of infantrymen in the British Army. In racing this takes the form of olfactory and touching work, especially when checking horses for injury and illness.

#### Body production work

Stable staff are also expected to produce their own bodies in certain ways (Gimlin 2007). They undertake three forms of body production work: firstly, a fit and athletic body; second a weight restricted body; and finally a deferential body. The athletic human body has been the subject of research, by Wacquant (1995) in his work on professional boxers and by Brace-Govan (2002) who looked at women ballet dancers, body builders and weight lifters. They found that..... With regard to athletic work, stable staff keep fit by riding every day and by mucking out, both very physical tasks. Women and men are equally expected to be tough and fit; otherwise they will not be taken seriously as riders. Here the body is very central to the labour process. However, it is also a body at risk of serious injury since horseracing is a dangerous sport, even for support workers. Smartt and Chalmers (2008:376) found that the 'death toll from horse racing is only exceeded by swimming and rugby and hospitalisation rate exceeded only by rugby'. For those who are injured, there is a high risk of long term or permanent disability, as described by one Newmarket stable lad who, at the age of 17, fell from his horse, fracturing his pelvis in five places. He was not expected to ride again, though made himself get back on a horse after twelve weeks out of work.

Embodied capacities and attributes (Warhurst et al 2000) are represented by the specificities of the labour market regarding body type and age. Stable staff at the basic grade are predominantly young workers, with low body weight. The British Racing School, which conducts basic training for new stable staff, clearly stipulates the weight requirement of 60



kg on its website (BRS 2011). Very low body weight is particularly required in Flat racing where horses are raced as juveniles whose bodies are not fully developed. In order to avoid strain on the animal, workers are expected to keep to low weight thus transferring potential body stress to the worker. In National Hunt stables, where horses are older and carry higher weights workers still have to keep their weight down.

Women make up 47% of the basic grade of stable staff (British Horseracing Authority 2009), offering employers the prospect of meeting the weight restriction. Women who enter their working lives in Flat racing also tend to stay there. This is therefore evidence of the commodification of women's embodied capacity to restrict weight (Tolich 1996), particularly on the Flat. As Baum (2006:3) finds, it is easier for women to meet weight restrictions because they are 'naturally lighter and smaller'. Grimes and Ray (1995:97) remark that 'according to some experts, women tend, on average, to more closely exhibit the physical characteristics required of a professional jockey'. Pfister (2010) finds that women's participation in sport is connected to rigorous body management; to what degree this is true for women stable staff remains to be discovered.

While there have not yet been any studies of the dietary habits of stable staff, their union the National Association of Stable Staff (NASS) has warned employers of the possible adverse effects of not eating properly, eg lack of concentration, illness and absenteeism, impact on health and safety, poor physical strength (NASS 2011). Generally, eating disorders are less prevalent in men than in women. However, Baum (2006) argues that horse racing is a high risk sport for eating disorders in men, where there is a need to 'make the weight' (particularly for jockeys). There is also some evidence from the organisation, Racing Welfare, that young men working stables are more prone to eating disorders than young women. Baum (2006) remarks on the behaviours jockeys have to indulge in (sweating, skipping meals, vomiting, laxative abuse, cocaine and amphetamine use). It was obvious from my earlier research that levels of smoking cigarettes was high amongst stable staff, possibly as part of the need to suppress appetite.

Staff are not expected to portray one particular image, projecting the success of their employer's business (Wellington and Bryson 2001). In fact they are expected to remain 'invisible' when in the public gaze. At the stables there is less emphasis on personal looks and turnout because of the practical requirements of horse management discussed below. However, at the races, stable staff are expected to display a 'deferential body', by remaining in the background when in the public gaze, where all eyes are focussed on the horse, its jockey and trainer. Part of the body production work involved here is to be neat and clean but not to stand out against the horse.

This 'invisibility' and the low status of stable staff are further evidenced by the canteen and overnight accommodation facilities at UK race courses. The poor quality of some provision

was much commented upon and since then the NASS has been campaigning to improve provision. Staff surveyed responded as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3  
Racecourses should improve stable staff facilities

	Agree	Unsure	Total
Male	14	2	16
Female	10	0	10
Total	24	2	26

### Communication work

It is this third category that embraces the bodywork which marks out the racing labour process as inherently different from body work with humans. In some ways it is the most difficult to capture because it deals with the embodied skill of communication with an animal. Little attention has been paid to the human/animal relationship where communication has to be organised on a different basis since the horse can only communicate through behaviours. The human, of necessity, fills in the blanks.

Game's (2001) research on the horse-human relationship helps us to understand this. She looked at the ways in which horse and rider interact with each other very closely in a successful riding partnership. In racing, as in other forms of equine sport, horses rely on the bodily instructions that are given by their riders to know whether to go forward and at what pace, or to stop, or to be prepared to take off over a jump. Humans have to tell the horse these things by using a combination of weight in or out of the saddle, the riding 'aids' of leg pressure and manual manipulation of the reins. As Cassidy (2002:112) observes 'Riding racehorses is conducted according to its own detailed set of rules that cannot be extrapolated from the technology alone, so must be learnt'.

Stable staff must also use their bodies to move a horse around the stable and out of the way when mucking out, to persuade a horse to load on to a horse lorry, to stand still when being tacked up/untacked, or when 'legging up' a jockey into the saddle at the racecourse. Communication is essentially non-verbal for lack of a common, spoken language and is essential to successful performance of all these tasks. For stable staff this is part of a 'skilled bodily craft' (Cassidy 2002:106). However, it is not quantified or measured and recognised

through a formal qualification, a fact that probably contributes to the low wages received by stable staff.

Riding horse at exercise; grooming; transportation; saddling

Game – human embodying horse; Brandt also.

P 325 of Sharma and Black – parallels

Brandt (2005)

There is also 'feeling' the horse

### Bodywork and gender

Racing has traditionally been a male world, trainers and jockeys predominantly being men until the 1970s when it became impossible to exclude women legally as a result of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. However, women who wanted to be trainers before then had to operate behind the fiction that their Head Lad (male) or husband was the trainer as the Jockey Club would not grant licences to train to women who were not 'persons' as far as the Club was concerned. A long running legal battle by Mrs Florence Nagle culminated in her winning her case at the High Court in the 1960s.....

Women had worked as stable staff as early as 1919 but in order to break a strike of male stable staff at Epsom; this was repeated in 1938/9 when a strike over pay and trade union recognition interrupted training in Lambourn. Again women were used to break the strike which was long running and bitter [quotes]

Pfister (2010) 'The gender of sport in the past was clearly and conspicuously masculine'. 'For many years it was commonly believed....that certain types of sport and exercise were suitable for women' which very much supports the findings of Velija and Flynn (2010) who found that male attitudes to women jockeys were still much bound up in stereotypes of weaker women. P236 'Men's dominance of sports leadership and their control over the development of sport may have an adverse effect on women's participation in sport' – again ref Velija and Flynn re Jockey Club. Also facilities at yards and racecourses. P238 'One sport which has become an almost exclusive preserve of girls is horse riding. For girls horses are more than just sports apparatus, but their fascination mostly vanishes when they grow older. P239, women who enter 'men's' sports 'adjust to the norms and values which dominate them', ref Grimes and Ray. P242 'The analyses of club and federation boards that are available reveal unanimously that men continue to be in firm control of the sporting world'.

Velija and Flynn (2010) - sexism towards women jockeys still exists in Jockey Club and in racing. P304 despite the fact that licences granted to women since 1970s 'attitudes toward

female jockeys remain largely unchanged'. Despite the fact that 'women's riding is currently more acceptable...resistance to female jockeys assumes a different more subtle form of resistance'. All female bodies in riding are judged to be weak and frail. Owners and trainers are resistant to employing women jockeys, even arguing that horses could sense the gender of their rider and respond differently to women and men. Horses behaviour in racing is explained through gender stereotypes. Gendering of roles *within yards* 'provided further evidence of continuing gender inequalities within the racing figuration' (310). Assumption that women are more caring, nurturing and domestic than males thus sweeping the yard, plaiting horses manes.

### Animals and emotional labour

[\[insert passage from CESR paper in this section\]](#)

The field of human/animal emotion work is under researched. The emotional labour literature presupposes the human-to-human relationship of a customer/worker situation. Sanders, Game, Brandt.

This is work that requires a close bond with the animal as stable staff are expected to 'know their animal' inside out. This is devolved to them by the trainer who cannot personally deal with each animal in her/his stables. Stable staff are thus likely to become attached to 'their' horses. It is however a complex attachment based on love for horses, the need for trust and the instrumentality of the employment relationship. From my personal experience of my feelings to my own horse and observing those of other horse owners, the emotional bond once established is deep, satisfying and enduring. To part irrevocably from one's horse is painful and many owners deal with this by 'not looking back', when selling a horse. That is to say, once the horse has gone to a new home, its old owner never enquires after its progress, well-being; it is a closed and locked door behind which painful emotions lie, at least for some time after the horse has departed.

Emotion work in racing is a complex phenomenon; for example, to what degree are stable staff 'producing' the 'right' emotion or 'acting' as if they felt that emotion, ie love of horses?

Construction of a social reality where animals are dependent/helpless and humans are obliged to care for them as a social responsibility.

Emotions born out of the fact that horses are very large animals. Emotion management strategies on the part of workers. Roemer (2005) argues that humans often have to display a range of techniques to manage emotion, particularly to deal with emotional attachment to foster animals. In her study of animal foster care providers in the United States, she found that human-animal relationships are government by rules which encourage strong attachment, a particular problem for animal foster carers who must always expect to have to relinquish caring for the fostered animal at some point. Stable staff lack such strategies

since horses are 'given' to them on an open-ended basis, lasting at least until the animal retires from racing, is moved to another trainer, or dies.

Animal/human relationship 'empowers' humans? In racing the thrill of galloping, jumping. The pride when 'your' horse wins, the pain when a horse dies. Pride in riding skill. Stable staff role in winning may be recognised by prize money, 'presents' from the horse's owner, 'best turned out' prize but this is variable pay and not guaranteed as part of the wage-effort bargain.

In racing emotional labour is important to the smooth running of the stables but it is an implicit part of the labour process. It is generally assumed to be happening rather than be expressly linked to company performance although the emotional contribution to the success of a horse is recognised by some in other parts of racing [quotes]

Feeling rules (Hochschild 1983) for racing stables: horses must be cared for/about; be 'listened to' when at exercise; be handled with sensitivity when being transported; be the object of devotion in order to swallow long hours/low pay/poor treatment. As with flight attendants, the job of stable staff is to elevate the status of the horse over their own, to put the needs of the horse above all else. The fact that they choose to work in racing to meet an aspiration to work with racehorses (sometimes also the aspiration to be a jockey) becomes a potent weapon against them.

They are expected to believe, if only temporarily, that they have some ownership of the horses in their charge. Trainers refer to 'your horse' and workers routinely showed, by so referring to the horses, that they had internalised this message.

### Conclusion

Probyn (2000:14) 'In an obvious manner, sport highlights that bodies do something'.

It was found that racing bodywork contains an array of elements: 'dirty work' when grooming and mucking out the horses (Sanders 2010); sensory work connected with animal health and care giving (Hockey 2009); athletic work when exercising the horses (Wacquant 1995; Brace-Govan 2002); body production work (Gimlin 2007) through weight restrictions imposed on stable staff and through presentation of the 'differential body'. A further, and important, aspect is the pleasure that workers derive from the highly physical and tactile tasks that make up the labour process. This complexity offered a striking set of reasons why stable staff have such a strong bond with horses. It does not solely derive from the love of horses, which staff undoubtedly have (Cassidy 2002; Miller 2010), but also from the practical need to avoid being kicked, bitten or thrown off a horse, all potential dangers inherent in the bodywork referred to above. Their emotional labour is inextricably linked to these bodywork requirements.

This reflects Wolkowitz's (2006) concern with the way in which our bodies are implicated in particular labour processes. Consideration of the bodywork undertaken by stable staff

showed that the reason why stable staff 'love' horses is bound up in the specificities of the particular labour process in racing stables. It was also found that worker status in the industry is inextricably linked to body work; while the work is skilled it is low paid because the skilled element goes unrecognised in a formal sense, overlaid by the stigma of undertaking dirty work.

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