

CHAPTER III. PERFORMING FEMININITY THROUGH DRESS AND ACCOUTREMENTS

Representations of the Cowgirl in Contemporary Social Consciousness



Figure 1

RUBIE, RUTH, AND NEVA JO

Painting by Donna Howell-Sickles

“Here the three cowgirls are brought together on the Indian blanket beneath their feet. Although they form a triad with a single guardian [the dog], their individuality is emphasized by the clothes they wear” (Streep 75).

In the social construction of femininity, cowgirls and their clothing are tightly woven. When Adrienne, in chapter one, referred to the “cowgirl” as a fashion, she was, at least in part, referring to the clothing we traditionally imagine when we bring to mind the image of a cowgirl. Likewise, Mary-Ellen said the first image that came to her mind when she conceived of a cowgirl was a “buckle-bunny,” a term that connotes tight jeans, chaps with fringe and beading, sequined tops, pink and turquoise Western boots, a matching hat, and a large silver or gold belt buckle to boot. Peggy argued that “cowgirl” is a “cutesy” term used today, to sell t-shirts. My

own conception of “cowgirl” is of a woman wearing a fringed skirt, beaded vest and bright red lipstick.

Most of these mental images are, indeed, stereotypical and likely based on costumes employed for rodeo performance throughout history as well as in contemporary society. Joyce Gibson Roach describes some early (circa 1915) rodeo costumes in her book, *The Cowgirls*.

Cowgirls wore bloomers made of corduroy or satin and fastened with elastic under the knee. Bright-colored stockings made of silk showed between the boots and bloomers. The shirts were loose blouses with low necklines. Large triangular scarves, which hung to a point in the back and tied in a knot in the front, were worn with the blouses. Enormous bows perched on the back of long curls were complemented by wide-brimmed western hats. Cowgirls were also bedecked with bright silk sashes worn around the waist. (123)

Roach further illustrates the later addition of beading, embroidery, sequins, and rhinestones to the costume and she argues that the modern trend towards rodeo wear did not evolve until the 1940s (124). Despite the glittery accoutrements, modern rodeo wear was, and continues to be, more practical because women incorporate jeans into the costume, which allows them to ride astride as they compete in numerous rodeo events. Perhaps because of their more masculine attire (jeans), Roach argues that rodeo women typically mark their status as women by wearing long hair (125). She further illustrates that “the consensus is that it [long hair] is more feminine, looks better under a western hat, and adds an element of the dramatic when blowing in the wind” (125). Even while rodeo clothing tends toward gender ambiguity (men have also been known to wear jeans and sequined shirts, after all rodeo contestants are, indeed, costumed performers), Roach suggests that gender in rodeo culture is often marked through the length of the riders’

hair. Rodeo men typically wear shorter, more traditionally-masculine hair styles; whereas, rodeo women typically wear their hair in longer, more traditionally-feminine styles.

In the book, *Cowgirl Rising: The Art of Donna Howell-Sickles*, author Peg Streep also briefly historicizes the clothing worn by cowgirls of the past.

Amid the demure divided skirts and blouses favored by many of the early cowgirls, the flamboyant Prairie Rose Henderson ... stood out from the crowd in her leather bloomers and vest, embroidered with all manner of sequins, studs, and even ostrich feathers. Tillie Baldwin ... scandalized the world outside the rodeo and the one within it by devising a costume of bloomers to give her more freedom of movement. ... Vera McGinnis would, over the course of her career, ride broncos and wild steers, win relays and race Roman, but she never forgot trying to race wearing the ladylike corset she thought was obligatory. [She wore the corset once and then she] never wore one again. Legend has it that Lucille Mulhall, feminine in her middy blouse and divided skirt, was the rider from whom the word “cowgirl” was coined. (16)

Corsets and most other traditionally feminine attire are simply not functional for a cowgirl’s work. The women Streep speaks of, Prairie Rose Henderson, Tillie Baldwin, Vera McGinnis, and Lucille Mulhall, all attempted to fit within the normative feminine ideal alongside wearing clothing that was at least somewhat functional.

Donna Howell-Sickles’ contemporary artwork is influenced by the few remaining 1900s postcards depicting cowgirls (Streep 14). In her painting entitled *Rubie, Ruth and Neva Jo* (Figure 1), the women’s clothing incorporates a variety of attire ranging from that considered more traditionally masculine to that considered more traditionally feminine. Rubie, the woman

on the left, wears black lace-up leather boots, a mid-calf length skirt (probably denim), a white cotton button-up shirt, a man's zip-up vest, and a tie. In her hand she carries a large brown (felt?) cowboy hat. Of the three women in the painting, I might argue that Rubie's clothing best conveys a combination of masculine and feminine elements, though it is unlikely that Rubie will ride a horse in the attire in which she is depicted (unless she rides sidesaddle). Skirts are simply not conducive to safe riding in a traditional Western saddle.

The woman in the middle, Ruth, is seemingly clothed in the most masculine outfit of the three women, at least as according to the normative standards of feminine beauty. Ruth wears dark-wash blue jeans, bat-wing chaps (this style of chap is mostly worn by men) of suede and brown leather, a narrow Western leather belt, a man's button-up cotton shirt, and her cowboy hat. I cannot see her shoes in the painting but based on the remainder of her clothing, I estimate they are some type of men's leather Roper work boot. Ruth's attire best subverts traditional gender norms in that she mostly adopts the style and dress of men. By adopting male dress, her clothing is also the most functional in terms of allowing her to ride horses and complete the associated manual chores.

The woman on the right, Neva Jo, wears the most traditionally feminine attire of the three depicted in Howell-Sickles' painting. She dons brown lace-up leather, heeled tall boots, a suede skirt hemmed at the ankles, a Western leather belt with a large belt buckle, an effeminate white shirt (as compared to the other two women—the lines are softer and curvier), a red handkerchief gathered by a pin, and a softer Western hat. Neva Jo holds the reins of her horse's bridle in her left hand, a detail I find interesting, given how difficult it is to ride in a skirt. What is not clear through the painting, however, is whether or not the horse is outfitted in a sidesaddle (a saddle

befitting of a woman in a skirt) or a Western saddle (a saddle which nearly forces the rider to ride astride the horse).

Despite the varying degrees of traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine clothing adorned by the women depicted, the viewer remains able to discern the women's gender not only through their dress but also through the length of their hair. Still the women's hair, clothing, and accoutrements are not the only signifiers Howell-Sickles employs to enable the viewer to discern gender. As described by Corlann Gee Bush in her chapter entitled, "The Way We Weren't: Images of Women and Men in Cowboy Art," cowboy painters employ a wide variety of artistic devices to represent gender differences in contemporary art. She argues that "the function of cowboy art ... has been to paint stories that freeze the frontier myth in the cultural subconscious" (21). A large part of the frontier myth is to retain a separation of men and women based upon traditional, and often Victorian, conceptions of gender.

Bush posits the following typology for the painterly depiction of men and women in cowboy art. It is a typology to which many (although certainly not all) cowboy painters subscribe and that often reifies the gender binary in the telling of the frontier myth. She writes

1. The men in the paintings have direct eye contact with something or someone either within the painting itself or implied by it. This convention is used to demonstrate the individuality and integrity of the subject.
2. The palette is restricted and austere, employing black, brown, and gray tones to emphasize the seriousness of the story. These somber tones are occasionally relieved by a spot of vibrant color, usually red, to stress the individuality and courage of the subject.

3. Black and white contrasts reinforce the story as a battle between good and evil.
4. Vast, impressionistic landscapes form the backdrop for the epic action. This convention acts as a metaphor for the enormity of the American West at the same time that it masculinizes the western landscape.
5. Objects in the painting are rendered in realistic detail, thus seducing the viewer that the story is as realistically portrayed as the surroundings.
6. Subjects are portrayed holding guns and other weapons to underscore the elements of violence and danger in the story.
7. The subjects of paintings are shown in noncontiguous groups (i.e. arrayed across the canvas) in order to emphasize the loneliness and isolation of the frontier. No matter how many men are depicted in a scene, each is portrayed as separate and apart, a man alone in an epic, individual battle. (28-29)

Oppositely, Bush illustrates her typology for women depicted in cowboy art:

1. Women stare beyond the picture frame at the viewer, presumably male—in Berger's¹ phrase, looking at being looked at. This convention makes women the objects of viewing, not the actors in a drama.
2. The palette is rich, warm, and earthy, using gold, green, and ochre tones to emphasize the femininity and "naturalness" of the subject.
3. Most female subjects are bathed in a warm, luminous, sometimes reverential glow to emphasize their state of blessedness. Sharp contrasts are used only to portray fallen women or women as victims.

¹ See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

4. Women are set against a close and limiting backdrop which holds them within the scene, confining them and limiting their action. This convention serves as a metaphor of protection and emphasizes women's docility and dependence.
5. The objects and artifacts of the surroundings are painted abstractly, thus narrowing the focus of the painting and removing the subject from the particularities of time or event. This convention emphasizes the symbolic, rather than the specific, context of women's lives.
6. Subjects of paintings are shown in close, contiguous groups, frequently holding children. This shows women's story to be allegorical and communal, rather than epic and individual.
7. Women are seldom shown using weapons or even tools. When a woman does hold a gun, it is frequently bigger than she is or she is frightened of it. Western women are supposed to be defenseless and dependent. (29)

To offer a reading of Donna Howell-Sickles' painting, *Rubie, Ruth, and Neva Jo* according to Bush's typology solidifies the notion that, in this painting, gender is never fully ambiguous, although it is, indeed, complicated. Bush turns to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* to help her delineate the varying effects of the gaze (both male and female) in cowboy art. As Berger notes when artistically rendered, women often "watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object" (47). All three of the women (as well as the dog) pose with their gaze focused outside of the frame and on the viewer (presumably male). While, it is possible to read these women's external focus as objectifying, it is also possible to read these women's external focus as a

transgression of this gendered artistic convention for their direct eye contact with the viewer elicits a sense of their agency. Many women portrayed in cowboy art fall into the stereotypical categories of harlots, Victorian women “forced” to move West, or Native American women. Instead the women Howell-Sickles portrays are cowgirls who are always already imbued confidence and action as per the cowgirl myth. Rather than watching themselves being watched, these particular women seem to, instead, meet the viewers gaze directly, either as a challenge or an invitation to join them in their contentedness. Although my reading is likely influenced by the overlaying of the mythological cowgirl and the independent spirit the myth connotes, the gendered gaze here appears to me to be more complicated than Bush’s typology allows.

Likewise, as Bush suggests, Howell-Sickles employs warmer tones than the blacks and grays often utilized when portraying men in cowboy art. Her color palette consists primarily of earthy browns and blues, and is highlighted with hints of red, as illustrated by Neva Jo’s scarf and the reddish-brown heads of the horses standing behind the women. Perhaps the red, here, signifies “the individuality and courage of the subject” that Bush describes when discussing the ways in which men are often depicted in cowboy art. While the women are not bathed in a “reverential glow” they are indeed set against a “close and limiting backdrop,” which may, as Bush suggests, limit their ability for action. However, as I described above, the sense I receive from this painting seems to be more of a snapshot of three women as opposed to a commentary on their ability to act. To me, the women appear happy and strong, agents both in will and in physical capability.

Bush further suggests that the background upon which women in cowboy art are painted is often abstracted, and as such, signifies “the symbolic, rather than the specific, context of women’s lives.” Here the horses, the Navajo rug, and to some extent the dog, are abstracted in

comparison to the women. Yet as I've learned about Howell-Sickles' painterly techniques, she regularly employs symbolism not solely to universalize but also to celebrate the individual lives of the women she depicts. As Streep illustrates,

Combining the older, mythic symbolism with the graphic boldness of the American cowgirl has allowed Donna Howell-Sickles to explore what it means to be a woman in universal terms. Mythology has provided her with a set of terms that, on the one hand, honor the uniqueness of the female, and on the other, offer a symbolic shorthand to express the very gifts that were once thought to be part of the female essence. (38)

While the universality of womanhood may be suspect, I cannot ignore the celebratory nature of womanhood and femininity apparent in Howell-Sickles' painting. Given this celebratory nature of Donna Howell-Sickles' oeuvre and the text by Peg Streep that accompanies her published works, I have to wonder whether or not these women can be read purely in light of Bush's typology for cowboy art.

While the women in the painting are depicted in a contiguous group, Streep argues that Howell-Sickles employs this technique to illustrate "a profound sense of the interdependence and interconnectedness of living things" (60). This argument both supports and contrasts Bush's typology. It is possible to read the depicted women's story as allegorical and communal (and therefore feminine in accord with Bush's typology) after all the women are, indeed, painted as a group. But it is also possible to read their story as epic and individual (and therefore masculine, which is also in accord with Bush's typology). I can imagine these women leaving the frame of the painting, mounting their horses, and heading out on a cattle drive. Finally, while none of these women hold weapons, they do, indeed, handle tools seemingly with confidence. To hold a

horse's bridle (a tool) in order to pose for a "snapshot" such as this, illustrates the women's confidence with not only the bridle as a tool but also, possibly, with the horse as a tool for completing her ranch-work.

Basing my reading of gender-specific painterly devices in Donna Howell-Sickles' painting, *Rubie, Ruth, and Neva Jo*, illustrates both Sickles' coherence to and straying from Bush's typology, which, to me, suggests the ways in which Sickles' cowgirls perform gender in unique ways that challenge a normative reading of femininity. In this painting, gender is complicated yet the viewer can, indeed, identify that each of the subjects depicted is a woman. Even Ruth, the most masculine-dressed of the three women, wears bright red lipstick, make-up, and has her hair coiffed in a style that emphasizes traditional norms of feminine beauty. For these women, like the horsewomen I interviewed, gender is never entirely ambiguous. Instead the clothing they are depicted in both supports and subverts traditional feminine norms.

It is important to note that the clothing which commonly conjures the image of the cowgirl (particularly as defined through archival and artistic representation), most often ascribes to the standards of normative feminine beauty and style. These normative standards of appropriate feminine attire have changed dramatically over the years, and cowgirls (alongside everyone else) have, more often than not, adapted to these changing standards. In this chapter, I discuss how the contemporary women I spoke and spent time with perform femininity variously through their clothing and accoutrements. Furthermore, I analyze the ways in which their choices in clothing both constitute and subvert traditional norms of feminine beauty. In so doing, I hope to bring to light the ways in which these women and myself, carve out a new feminine performance in a world still traditionally associated with men and the masculine. Finally, in this chapter, I seek to move past the artistic and archival representation of horsewomen in order to

understand how these garments affect my own as well as this group of women's actual performance of self and femininity.

Connecting Dress and Performativity

Who said that clothes make a statement? What an understatement that was. Clothes never shut up. They gabble on endlessly, making their intentional and unintentional points.

–Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity*, 81

In her book, *The Fashioned Body*, Joanne Entwistle combines structuralist, post-structuralist, and phenomenological approaches in order to theorize and link the concepts of fashion and embodiment. She argues that previous studies of fashion are either primarily material in that they seek to examine clothes as they are made; or sociological in that they seek to examine clothes as they are consumed. In both of these approaches to fashion, Entwistle contends that one of the primary elements of fashion, the body, is mostly left out of the equation. In *The Fashioned Body*, she reintroduces the body as integral to fashion and argues that the two are inextricably intertwined.

Entwistle further argues that identity remains a crucial part of the mix. She writes that “dress in everyday life is always more than a shell, it is an intimate aspect of the experience and presentation of the self and is so closely linked to the identity that these three – dress, the body and the self – are not perceived separately but simultaneously, as a totality” (10). Here and throughout her book, although not in so many words, Entwistle acknowledges the performative nature of clothing and dress. As I will soon illustrate, I mark myself as a horsewoman through my choice to wear boots, Western-styled jeans, and Western-styled belts. In choosing these articles of clothing, I perform my sense of self as a horsewoman in the public domain and, in so doing I constitute my identity as such, for self and for others.

To complicate her argument, Entwistle also recognizes the variety of social forces and cultural expectations that regulate dress and she further illustrates her contention that dress is, in part, a cultural performance. She maintains that “bodies are socially constituted, always situated in culture,” and since this is the case, dress becomes the “outcome of *practices* which are socially constituted but put into effect by the individual” (11). According to Entwistle, “when we get dressed, we do so within the bounds of a culture and its particular norms, expectations about the body and about what constitutes a ‘dressed’ body” (11). For when we traverse these cultural boundaries (in terms of both body and dress) we often experience punishment and/or social repercussions that come along with our transgression.

Entwistle’s notions of discipline and control are reminiscent of the theories of Judith Butler and Foucault. As Butler contends, “gender performance always and variously occurs. Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (*Gender* 190). What is considered “right” for gender performance varies depending on cultural context but is always influenced not only by one’s immediate context but also by the cultural standards of the larger community. For example, I wear English breeches (a fitted riding pant that non-riders often associate with “spandex”) regularly around the barn for riding. If I were to wear these pants to run non-horse related errands, some non-riders would recognize the breeches and mark me as an equestrian, others may misunderstand my performance of self as a horsewoman and may, instead, judge me as eccentric or even improper (after all, the pants are, indeed, quite tight and revealing).

Paraphrasing Foucault, Entwistle argues that discipline for such transgressions “rather than being imposed on the ‘fleshy’ body through torture and physical punishment, operates through the establishment of the ‘mindful’ body which calls upon individuals to monitor their own behavior” (18). And monitor we do. Contemporary American society is one of constant bodily monitoring. In fact, according to Entwistle,

We are no longer content to see the body as finished, but actively intervene to change its shape, alter its weight and contours. The body has become part of a project to be worked at, a project increasingly linked to a person’s identity of self. The care of the body is not simply about health, but about feeling good: increasingly, our happiness and personal fulfillment is pinned on the degree to which our bodies conform to contemporary standards of health and beauty. (19)

Fashion magazines, contemporary music, television shows such as *What Not to Wear*, and other similar medium all illustrate the ways in which people are continuously encouraged to discipline their bodies to fit within patriarchal standards of beauty. As is evidenced by these examples, bodily “control is produced less by brute force and more by surveillance and stimulation” (124).

Susan Brownmiller delineates the self-surveillance experienced by many, but by no means all, women when she writes in *Femininity*:

Appearance, not accomplishment, is the feminine demonstration of desirability and worth. . . . Because she is forced to concentrate on the minutiae of her bodily parts, a woman is never free of self-consciousness. She is never quite satisfied, and never secure, for desperate, unending absorption in the drive for a perfect appearance—call it feminine vanity—is the ultimate restriction on freedom of mind. (51)

I feel better about my body image now than I was prior to December 20, 2007, when I entered the hospital to undergo the bariatric surgery that re-shaped my body from a robust size twenty to a petite size four. My weight loss was certainly an accomplishment; however, most often the commentary I receive from others resoundingly reflects only my change in appearance. Furthermore, when someone does comment on my accomplishment, I often deflect these compliments and instead attribute the drastic changes in my body shape and size to my surgeon. I am unsure as to why I answer compliments in this manner; however, I suspect I do so in part because I am afraid I may be judged as egotistical for taking credit for my shift in body image. Likewise, by acknowledging my accomplishment, I must admit that I ascribe to Entwistle's conception of the "mindful body." I must admit that I view my body as unfinished and that I seek, at least in regards to reducing my weight, to fit within the current standard of traditional feminine beauty norms.

My choice to pursue surgery was influenced by several additional factors. Most obviously, I wanted to become healthier and hoped to reduce my high-blood pressure and risk for diabetes. But my primary reason for choosing to undergo surgery had more to do with my want to truly become a horsewoman. To me, my body image did not fit this role. My weight was taxing to my horse and to my ability to ride in a balanced position. Furthermore, I had to have my size twenty English riding clothing specially made because most companies simply do not sell equestrian attire to fit a plus-sized frame. I had to purchase men's cowboy boots because women's boots were not cut large enough to fit around my calf. To wear tall boots (those used for dressage or jumping), chaps, or half-chaps was simply out of the question because the sizes did not run large enough to fit me, despite that at size twenty I was much closer to the size of the

average American woman² than I am at my current size four frame. But even in a size four, I must select mediums and larges when I purchase equestrian clothing. Women's equestrian clothing is cut small, which intrinsically suggests the cultural assumption that horsewomen should be of below-average weight.

In part, my ability to adorn myself in equestrian apparel constitutes my identity as a horsewoman. Furthermore, this ability is (or has been in the past) regulated by my conception of self and social expectations of what I may or may not wear as a woman of size versus as a thin woman. Following my surgical weight-loss, I was finally comfortable calling myself a horsewoman because, for the first time, I was able to purchase clothing that constituted that identity for me. Given my experience with my body image and equestrian clothing as I've thus described, when I entered into my interviews, I was curious to learn how other horsewomen felt about their bodies and equine fashion. To prompt the women in our discussion, I posed the following list of questions:

1. Describe your favorite articles of clothing for riding and/or training. Describe how they feel and why they're your favorites.
2. Describe how you might dress for a special occasion. How do you feel when you wear this clothing?
3. Describe the way you might dress for a horse show. How does that dress make you feel?
4. What articles of clothing make you feel particularly feminine, or not?
Describe how you feel when wearing these pieces of clothing.

² According to Emili Vesilind staff writer for the Los Angeles Times, the average American woman weighs approximately "162.9 pounds and wears a size 14."

I hoped that my questions were open-ended enough to allow a wide range of possible answers. Furthermore, I hoped that my questions would prompt the women to speak of the way they feel when clothed in a variety of manners. I quickly discovered that question four was limiting and prompted mostly unsurprising, even stereotypical answers such as: bras, skirts, heels, and jewelry. It is possible that in conceiving or asking this question, I unintentionally encouraged the women to answer in regards to traditional notions of femininity. Still, if so, their comments suggest just how robust a template traditional femininity remains against which other performances of femininity are tested and, as such, is worthy of my analysis.

Clearly Joanne Entwistle's and Susan Brownmiller's readings of fashion, femininity, and the body illustrate the ways in which clothing is performative. Such views echo well with Judith Butler's notions of gender and performativity. In *Performativity*, James Loxley argues the following about Judith Butler's perspective: "the kind of performativity that Butler is interested in, then, works itself out through the body: 'social conventions' can be seen as 'animating the bodies which, in turn, reproduce and ritualize those conventions as practices'" (134). Obviously, clothing is one such social convention and/or animator.

My questions, listed above, prompted the women to discuss their clothing choices in three very specific instances. Questions two and four mostly prompted the women to speak to the notion of "dressing up;" whereas questions one and three mostly prompted the women to speak to the importance of functional clothing. In the sections that follow, I first share stories of the horsewomen dressing up for a variety of special occasions and I explore the ways in which they feel feminine (or not) when they don clothes that are non-horse related and often aligned with traditional conceptions of femininity. Next I illustrate how most of the women addressed the importance of wearing functional clothing while working with horses and around the farm. In

this section, I choose to highlight a long excerpt from my discussion with Karen Scholl, mostly because of her use of thick description and sensory detail. Finally, I share Mary Ellen's story of riding sidesaddle and suggest the ways in which femininity and disability might inform her identity in this instance. I choose to share Mary Ellen's story in part because until our discussion, I was entirely unfamiliar with the practice of sidesaddle riding. Additionally, I find her story interesting because of its adherence to a somewhat more conventional theatrical performance in that the performance is given within the show arena. Finally, I discuss the ways in which her performance both maintains and subverts traditional norms of femininity.

Special Occasion Attire and the Horsewoman

I feel sexy in my boots. I have lots of boots in my closet. I have boots for riding English style, boots for riding endurance style, boots for riding Western style, boots for mucking out stalls, boots for hacking around the farm, and boots for special occasions. It's in this pair, my special occasion Western boots, that I feel the sexiest. They have a leather sole and slight heel. The toe is squared. The body of the boot is made of light brown leather; whereas, the leather that encompasses my ankle and calf is lime green with multi-colored embroidery. I can't explain exactly what it is about these boots that makes me feel sexy. Perhaps it's because they are supportive and allow me to feel grounded and strong. Perhaps it's because these boots are the first boots I purchased following my weight-loss surgery and they are more traditionally feminine due to their coloring, embroidery, and finer structure. Perhaps it's because they are imbued with the mythological power of the cowgirl. Perhaps it's because, when I wear them, I'm different than everybody else—at least from those people who do not wear boots. Perhaps it's because my boots visually mark me as a woman and as a horsewoman, which, to me, is special.

It's 8 o'clock PM. Time for me to dress for an evening on the town with old friends and the man I've been dating. I step out from the hotel shower, dry off, and still damp, peruse my suitcase. I pull out and put on a pair of white cotton underwear, low-rise, which is important in this day and age of short-waisted jeans. I then remove my favorite pair of Wrangler jeans from my suitcase. They are low-rise, a light wash, stretch fabric (meant not only to allow some room for movement but, more likely, meant to emphasize my buttocks and thighs), slim fit, and boot cut. I sit on the edge of the bed and wiggle myself into the jeans. The jeans are snug but they will loosen as the night wears on.

I replace the towel I'm still wearing around my torso with my favorite white lace bra and search in my suitcase for the perfect shirt to wear. I decide on a simple white cotton v-neck stretch t-shirt, that fits snug to my body and curves. I pull the shirt over my damp hair, tuck it into the jeans and dig for my belt. I brought my favorite turquoise and leather brown Western belt along, specifically for tonight. I slip the belt through the loops in the jeans and fasten it around my waist. I grab a pair of white cotton tall-boot socks and roll up my jeans leg. I pull the socks up over my calf, relishing the feel of the material against my skin. I then slip on my favorite pair of Western boots, my "special occasion" boots. I feel strong and sexy in these boots, like I could command the world. I pull my jeans leg back down over the boots so that only the toe shows—no one will ever know that my legs are encompassed in lime green leather. But I do. And knowing that, to me, is what matters.

Despite that I'm headed out for a night on the town with a group of non-horse people, I feel it necessary to somehow highlight that aspect, the horse aspect, of my identity. In fact, I find that I consistently mark myself as a horsewoman, even when I'm not participating as an

equestrian. My choice of clothing makes visible this vital part of my identity to the remainder of the non-horse world. In addition to marking me as a horsewoman, the clothing I describe above also imbues me with a sexualized femininity. I wear Western boots, tight fitting Wrangler jeans that emphasize my curves, and a Western-styled belt. The white t-shirt, too, while slightly see-through and form-fitting, is reminiscent of the old working cowboy's style (picture the Marlboro man with his cigarettes rolled into his shirt sleeve). In this instance, I consciously choose to adorn myself so as to appeal to heterosexual and normative cultural standards of the feminine ideal. I make this choice in part to attract the attention of the man I'm dating. I also make this choice in part because in this clothing, I feel sexy. I feel pretty. I feel strong. I feel feminine.

I can't fully explain exactly why I feel the need to mark myself in the ways I've described above. Perhaps my need comes from my desire to be distinct from my non-horse friends and colleagues, after all few horsewomen participate in the academic world of the theatre. Perhaps I adorn myself in clothing that marks me visibly as a horsewoman within a larger cultural context so that outsiders acknowledge my unique status in the world. Or perhaps I wish to illustrate (more to myself than others) the fact that I am, indeed, thin enough to don equestrian clothing, something that I have been unable to do until fairly recently. Likewise, perhaps my need derives from my want to appear (and feel) confident, and physically and emotionally strong.

Qualities such as these commonly surface in both contemporary and historical representations of cowgirls in a variety of media. While I prefer to be called a horsewoman myself, I can imagine the feeling of uniqueness and even power, that Karen describes in chapter one, when she relays the story about the little girl who looks up at her and exclaims, "Look a cowgirl!" The girl's statement functions somewhat as a performative as derived from J.L.

Austin.³ In dubbing Karen a cowgirl, the child imbues Karen's role with the mythological agency inherent to the term. Perhaps I mark myself visibly as a horsewoman because I unconsciously crave this agency. Furthermore, I associate these qualities with most of the actual horsewomen I've met in my journey to both write this dissertation and to adopt the identity of horsewoman myself.

Cowgirl poetry is often rife with images of horsewomen who struggle against cultural expectations to perform traditional femininity. Much of the poetry focuses on the cowgirl's choice to buck traditional feminine clothing in exchange for garments and other accoutrements that both function and are, seemingly, better suited to create their own performed identities. The following poem, by Georgie Sicking,⁴ entitled "Be Yourself" serves as an example of this kind of poetry.

When I was young and foolish
 the women said to me,
 "Take off those spurs and comb
 your hair, if a lady you will be.

 "Forget about those cowboy ways.
 Come and sit awhile.
 We will try to clue you in on women's
 Ways and wiles."

³ The most commonly cited examples of Austin's speech act theory include saying "I do" at a marriage ceremony and naming a ship. In both instances the act of speaking connotes an action. See Loxley, James. *Performativity* for an overview of performativity as a concept stemming from J.L. Austin to Judith Butler. See Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things with Words* to read Austin's lectures regarding performativity and speech act theory.

⁴ Georgie Sicking is an 88 year old horsewoman and cowgirl poet who was recently inducted into the Cowgirl Hall of Fame. She phoned me on July 7, 2009 after receiving my letter requesting the rights to reprint her poem, "Be Yourself" in my dissertation. She gave me permission to print her poem and then we talked for about an hour about her life as a Western cowgirl and her perceptions of being a working cowgirl alongside mostly cowboys. A recent documentary film pays tribute to her life. It is entitled, *Riding and Rhyming* and can be found at www.farawayfilm.com.

“Take off that Levi’s jumper, put up
those batwing chaps.
Put on a little makeup and we can get a
date for you perhaps.”

“Forget about that roping, that will make
callouses [sic] on your hands.
And you know it takes soft fingers
if you want to catch a man.”

“Do away with that Stetson hat for
it will crush your curls.
And even a homely cowboy wouldn’t
date a straight-haired girl.”

Now, being young and foolish,
I went my merry way,
And I guess I never wore a dress
until my wedding day.

Now I tell my children,
“No matter what you do,
stand up straight and tall.
Be you and only you.”

“For if the Lord had meant us all
To be alike and the same rules to keep,
He would have bonded us all together
just like a flock of sheep.” (50-51)

The speaker in the poem is often associated directly with the poet in cowgirl poetry. While this association is certainly not always the case, Sicking did suggest to me in a telephone conversation that her poetry is, indeed, autobiographical. Here, she illustrates the social pressure she felt when she was younger to conform to traditional conventions of feminine attire. We learn from Sicking that she was expected to wear make-up, comb and curl her hair, don traditionally feminine clothing, and cultivate soft skin. In our conversation, Sicking proudly told me that she defied traditional femininity in order to become a “cowboy” and she stated that “It’s always

bothered [her] that in order to be womanly you have to sit in front of a mirror and put on makeup ... It's a lot fuller life being a tom boy than being pretty."

Just as Sicking's poem (and our subsequent conversation) suggests her discomfort with these more traditional elements of the feminine beauty ideal, as I illustrated in the last chapter, so too do many of the horsewomen I interviewed. Adrienne, Mary Ellen, Nancy, Tina and I all express discomfort at the idea of wearing make-up on a routine basis. In fact, for me as well as many of the women I interviewed, make-up is employed mostly for special occasions. Neither do most of us regularly wear clothing that is traditionally considered feminine. Our choice to don attire that fits firmly within normative standards of femininity is generally regulated to the times when we "dress up."

Like my story of dressing up, Adrienne also described the ways in which she feels it necessary to mark herself as a horsewoman when she dresses for special occasions. Although, I shared Adrienne's story of dressing up in chapter two, here, I add how she sometimes likes to feel "cowgirlish" when she goes out. She says, "you know I wanna put my hat on ... and cowboy boots. ... I just feel "grrr" [growls playfully]. You know? [laughs]" Adrienne seems to indicate that, like me, she feels physically and emotionally strong, as well as sexy when she dons her hat and boots and when she performs her role as a horsewoman through her dress for an audience beyond the paddock or trail. With regards to "dressing up," our performance of femininity differs from all of the other horsewomen I interviewed. Whereas Jeannie states, "I've got a couple long [Western-styled] skirts that I like to wear," both Adrienne and I choose to wear tight jeans and boots in order to feel like feminine horsewomen when we go out.

Jeannie's description better supports traditional feminine conventions of attire (in that she describes wearing a long, flowing skirt) than does my and Adrienne's performance. Notably,

Adrienne and I are the youngest of the women who participated in my dissertation project, a fact which may enlighten audiences as to why our ability to feel feminine is in part defined by our ability to feel sexy in our clothes. As Naomi Wolf illustrates in *The Beauty Myth*,

Costumes and disguises will be lighthearted and fun when women are granted rock-solid identities. Clothing that highlights women's sexuality will be casual wear when women's sexuality is under our own control. When female sexuality is fully affirmed as a legitimate passion that arises from within, to be directed without stigma to the chosen object of our desire, the sexually expressive clothes or manner we may assume can no longer be used to shame us, blame us, or target us for beauty myth harassment. (273)

Adrienne's playful growl and my delight in my "sexy" attire indicates that we've already, at least to some extent, reached the state in which "costumes and disguises" are "lighthearted and fun." Perhaps our perspective is, in part, related to our participation in the culture of a younger generation, a generation that regularly and somewhat comfortably subscribes to and transgresses the beauty myth as Wolf describes. But, I've also noticed both through my interviews and in my everyday experiences with other horsewomen that horsewomen tend to be a subgroup defined by strong personalities. Perhaps, at least in my and Adrienne's case, our secure identity as horsewomen lends to us the confidence necessary to wear clothing makes us feel sexy as well as feminine in a larger cultural context.

Nancy, too, links feeling sexy with performing femininity. I was nervous when I began my interview with Nancy because it was the first interview that I was to conduct. I did not know what to expect or how my questions might be perceived. Nancy was as patient with me as she is with her horses and the students to whom she teaches basic horsemanship. We set up the

interview on her large wrap-around porch that overlooks the various 1800s outbuildings and a number of majestic, old, maple and oak trees. I sat in a lawn chair across from where Nancy relaxed on her porch swing. She was attired in Wrangler blue jeans, Nike tennis shoes, and a bright yellow sleeveless shirt. Her shoulder-length brown hair, starting to show some streaks of gray, blew lightly in the breeze. Although I had known Nancy to be fairly outspoken through my brief time spent with her on the Michigan Shore-to-Shore in June 2008, I was a little surprised by her candidness when she spoke about a date she recently went on with her husband Terry. The following excerpt from our interview was prompted by my question, “How might you dress for a special occasion?”

N: Well... I actually got dressed up the other night. I went on a date.

S: I bet that was nice!

N: [laughs] It was! I had on this skort—it was white, about down to here [points to her knees]. And I had on this little, like wrap, v-neck, little shirt, and ... that actually shows cleavage [laughs]. And I had diamond earrings that I wear a lot ... And I have a big sparkly cross that I wore and it just happened to hang right down in the cleavage. ... And I don't normally dress with cleavage showing and legs and everything but I had all of it hanging out that night. And I was feelin' like really, HOT! [laughs] I'm tan, ya' know? And I did my hair and I put make-up on. And I went to meet Terry's two friends from Tennessee, who are these Memphis cops. And ... I ... It was the first time really in a long time that I was like, “Hello” and they were, like, staring at my boobs okay?

S: How did that make you feel?

N: I was like ... [leans forward] Sexy! Really sexy! And I was sitting there talkin' to the one guy ... And he was lookin' at me and he goes, "Terry" while lookin' at me, "Terry you didn't tell me you had such a pretty wife." And I was like ... "Wow, I feel really sexy!" ... 'Cause I don't dress up very often. 'Cause we just don't go anywhere, you know?

In this instance, Nancy celebrates traditional femininity through her clothing. Her performance of her sexualized feminine self is very different from her daily performance of feminine identity, in which her clothing is generally more masculine and functional as opposed to traditionally feminine.

She illustrates that she enjoys the (albeit somewhat negative) attention she receives for performing femininity in accord with the contemporary cultural standard. Admittedly while Susan Brownmiller's following assertion may be a bit dated and even overstated, it aptly describes exactly what Nancy seemed to express in her discussion with me. As Brownmiller points out, "and then there are the compliments, the ultimate reward, for men are known to be highly appreciative when a woman has taken the trouble to create an entire human being who looks and acts and smells so different from them" (79). Nancy seemingly enjoys the compliments paid to her by her husband's friends. In fact, she maintains that these compliments encourage her to feel sexier than simply would the donning of feminine clothing, the showing of her cleavage, the wearing of makeup, the fixing of her hair, or the wearing of jewelry (notably jewelry that highlights her cleavage).

Because she is white, thin, and able-bodied it is likely that Nancy has more cultural currency with regards to the feminine beauty ideal than might a woman of color, size, or disability within culture at large. Still she strives on a daily basis to maintain her weight and

health. As Entwistle notes “the body in consumer culture is subject to a myriad of ‘disciplining’ techniques aimed at manipulating it to ‘look sexy’ ... the beautiful body is a valued one” (124). Nancy participates in a number of disciplining techniques regularly, from walking several miles a day, to training and riding horses, to completing farm work, taking a yoga class, and carefully watching what she eats. She maintains her petite and muscular frame through this self discipline and, it is probably because of her fitness level that Nancy feels sexy and beautiful in traditional feminine clothing and accoutrements and therefore sees herself as “valued.” This is not to state that, prior to donning her more feminine apparel, she lacked value of any kind. However, the compliments received from her husband’s friends and her feelings of “sexiness” help her to feel even more special. As Entwistle points at the beginning of her book, “Wearing the right clothes and looking our best, we feel at ease with our bodies” (7). Here, because Nancy wears the right clothes for her social situation, she feels at ease and sexy.

Although Peggy never commented about feeling sexy in her clothes, she did describe the clothing she might typically wear for a special occasion. Like Nancy, Peggy also has a significant amount of cultural currency by nature of her being white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and thin. We situated our interview in her kitchen so that she could prepare for the small get-together she was sponsoring that evening. I sat at the kitchen table and Peggy cooked throughout the entire two-and-a-half hour interview. She bounced back and forth between the sink, stove, and refrigerator, stopping on occasion to give me her full attention. At those moments, she leaned languidly against the counter and directed her attention between me and the video camera. She wore jeans, a t-shirt, no shoes, and had her long blondish-brown hair pulled back into a low ponytail. Peggy adorned herself with light make-up simply for our interview probably because

she seemed a little self-conscious about being videotaped. When I asked her the question about dressing for special occasions she, like Nancy, described what she might wear on a date:

I have a, uh, green velvet, a swishy green velvet dress that I like. And then I have these really soft tall boots that are three-inch heels. And they're balanced just perfectly so you don't feel like you're in three inch heels 'cause I don't do heels usually but for some reason they just fit so nice and they're so soft. And they're, they have this purple leather on the inside and they're black leather and they have a little buckle strap. And so I wear those and the green dress. And then like a, see-through, girly black shirt over the top of the green dress.

When I first began conducting my interviews and observation sessions that inform my dissertation in August of 2008, my time spent with Peggy was limited. However, I've since accepted her offer to lease the upstairs of her farm house. When I moved in with Peggy, my perspective regarding her beauty routine became clearer.

Because her statement so aptly reflects my experience of Peggy's performance of femininity, I include here a longer reflection from Susan Bordo's "Beauty (Re)Discovers the Male Body:"

I don't think the business of beauty is without its pleasures. It offers a daily ritual of transformation, renewal. Of "putting oneself together" and walking out into the world, more confident than you were, anticipating attraction, flirtation, sexual play. I love shopping for makeup with my friends. (Despite what Rush Limbaugh tells you, feminism – certainly not feminism in the nineties – is not synonymous with unshaved legs.) Women bond over shared makeup, shared beauty tips. It's fun. (145-146)

I regularly tease Peggy about her beauty routine—with her application of numerous cleansing, revitalizing, moisturizing, and other face creams. Perhaps I tease her because I'm uncomfortable with this more traditional performance of femininity (despite that I also, on occasion, participate in the performance of traditional femininity). Perhaps I tease her because in my own way, I'm attempting to highlight her adherence to the beauty myth. Or perhaps I tease her, simply for the final reason Bordo states above, "It's fun." Peggy, too, participates in the banter, both making fun of and having fun with the beauty products we employ on a daily basis. Through our banter we recognize that while we, indeed, condone the beauty myth by participating in it ourselves, we also subvert the beauty myth by recognizing its mythos.

Both Nancy's and Peggy's clothing choices (as well as Peggy's use of numerous beauty products) adhere to the traditional feminine beauty ideal as is suggested by the non-horsewomen portrayed in Sicking's poem. The fabric is softer, whispier, and lacier as opposed the coarser denim and cotton that most of the horsewomen don for their daily chores. Peggy speaks of wearing three-inch heels, a choice that obviously wouldn't function for her when she is mucking stalls or baling hay. The face and skin creams soften skin damaged by working in the wind and sun. As Kathleen M. Higgins suggests in her essay, "Beauty and Its Kitsch Competitors," "Self-adornment and other attention to one's appearance of necessity involve some conscious effort" (105). In this section, I have illustrated the effort that Peggy, Nancy, Adrienne and I employ in order to feel (and/or appear) feminine on special occasions. In the next section, I turn to a discussion and analysis of how I, and the various women I interviewed, perform femininity through our riding and/or work attire, despite (or perhaps because of) the rigorous physical demands of equine culture and its corresponding connotations of being a "man's world."

Functional Attire and the Horsewoman

It's 6 o'clock AM. Time for me to dress for our local 4-H Fun Show. The Fun Show is a horse show for people who seldom compete in other "official" horse shows. Most of the competitors are trail riders. We don't have to outfit our horses in the special gear required by more traditional horse shows. Nor are there any specified requirements for our own dress or accoutrements. Still, I like to look nice and I want to look like a horse person. I want to fit with the crowd. My dress for these days, in part, depends on which saddle I choose to put on my horse.

I decide that, today, I will ride Noble in his English saddle. This choice, then, defines the clothing that I will wear. While it is physically possible to ride wearing jeans in an English saddle, the seams of the denim rub against the sensitive leather and leaves rub-marks on the saddle. Additionally, jeans tend to chafe the rider more when he or she rides in an English saddle. I don't know why but I've experienced this chafing, myself, so I instead choose a pair of soft, cotton-stretch, medium-blue, fitted, riding tights.

I first put on my undergarments, comfortable underwear and a heavy-duty bra (which is imperative when you are large-breasted in order to minimize the bounce), then I slip on a pair of white cotton socks. I shimmy into the tights. Riding tights are similar to English breeches, in that they are fitted. The largest difference is that the tights have no zipper and instead are elasticized around the waist. They are also much cheaper than most breeches and, as such, are my favorite non-Western riding pant. These particular tights have suede in the calf to help me to better "stick" to the horse and saddle. I wish I owned a pair of full-seat breeches (breeches with suede covering the entire leg and seat area) but unfortunately these breeches are too expensive to fit my graduate-student budget.

I search my closet for an appropriate shirt and choose a light blue, fitted t-shirt with multi-colored horses embroidered across the chest. The shirt fits me well enough to look tailored, yet is large enough to allow for the range of movement necessary when I am in the saddle. It is also just long enough to allow modest coverage of my behind. I like to look good in my clothes and the riding tights aren't the most flattering for my *dérrière*. Before I leave my closet, I grab a light-colored, cotton, long-sleeved shirt that matches the t-shirt I'm wearing. The long sleeves help to keep my fair skin from burning when I spend all day in the blinding sun at a horse show.

I sit on the edge of my sofa and pull on my pair of dark-brown leather, lace-up, endurance riding boots. They are very similar to hiking shoes, except that they have a slick sole (to allow my foot to leave the stirrup with ease in case of emergency) and a slight heel (to keep my foot from going through the stirrup). They also have a steel toe. While a steel toe is not a necessity, it is certainly helpful because I spend a large amount of time around 1100 pound horses, who, on occasion accidentally step on my feet.

After I've arrived at the barn and groomed my horse, I complete my outfit by adding two more important functional pieces of clothing, my helmet and my half chaps. My helmet is a so-called "Western-styled" helmet (albeit most Western riders would laugh condescendingly at this notion) in that it is light tan leather with a brim to help block the sun. I sit on the edge of the picnic table at the barn to finish the day's look by putting on my half chaps, which are made of suede and brown leather to match my shoes. I slide the strap of the chap over the ball of my foot and snugly fit the strap in the arch of my shoe (in between the ball of my foot and the raised heel). I then zip up the chap, snugly from ankle to knee and snap the leather firmly in place over the zipper. Chaps should be snug. Because English riding tights are so fitted and thin, the chap helps to keep the rider's leg from chaffing. Additionally, they keep the trail rider's leg from

getting entangled and cut by briars, thistle, and other branches or obstacles he or she might encounter on the trail. Finally dressed myself, I adorn Noble in his English saddle and embark on my half mile ride to the arena where the 4-H Fun Show is held.

Although both sets of clothing mark me in different ways as a woman and as a horsewoman, the clothing I have described here functions differently than does the clothing I wear for “going out,” that I described in the last section. Whereas my “going out” clothing is functional for that purpose and for some light dancing, it is not functional for riding horses. Wearing tight jeans and sitting in the saddle (even if they are made of stretch denim) is simply asking for a social *faux pas* (think split seams in culturally inappropriate places). Instead, in the example of riding Noble in the local 4-H Fun Show, I don clothing appropriate for the situation—clothing that is functional and in which I still feel pretty, feminine, and special. I feel pretty and feminine, I think, because the clothing looks good on me (despite that I wear it more for function’s sake). Although men do, indeed, wear English breeches and tights for riding (especially in the English, jumping, and dressage show arenas), at our local 4-H Fun Show, few to no men adorn themselves in this style of English attire most likely because few to no men ride English style. Thus, in this particular cultural context, my tights further visibly mark my performed femininity.

In the situational context of the Horse Show, my clothing partly constitutes my identity both as a horsewoman and as feminine. I am unsure as to why I feel the need to mark myself as feminine in this arena, but I suspect that my need partly comes from the fact that being a horsewoman inscribes me with a particular agency. I am a petite woman who can aptly control an 1100 pound animal. It is likely that the power dynamic I describe here is problematic (an issue I discuss further in chapter four), still I am proud of this ability. Furthermore, I feel special

because the clothing absolutely marks me as different from the remainder of non-horse people in society. In this more functional clothing my membership in the social group—horsewomen—is perfectly clear to rider and non-rider alike; whereas, as I illustrated earlier in this chapter, in a larger cultural context my clothing might be considered odd or inappropriate.

Throughout history one of the primary socially acceptable arguments for horsewomen (of all disciplines—from early ranch women to contemporary Olympic athletes) to wear more “masculine” clothing has been its functionality. When it was a social requirement that women wear skirts, horsewomen either had to ride sidesaddle, straddle a Western saddle in a skirt (which was both uncomfortable and unsafe), or buck social norms altogether and wear pants. Like Sicking illustrates in her poem, horsewomen typically don clothing that not only allows them to go about the work on their farms but, perhaps more importantly, also ensures their safety. In this section, I illustrate through my own observations and stories the women told in our interviews, how the types of clothing contemporary horsewomen typically find functional for their work and safety inform their performance of femininity and identity.

In my interview with Peggy, I posed the following question in order to begin our more general discussion of clothing and accoutrements: “describe your favorite articles of clothing for riding and/or training.” This question prompted Peggy to answer as follows:

I like expensive things. They are nicer than the cheap stuff. Um, but we cannot always play in the stuff that we really like. I really like, uh, deerskin stuff. I like, um, the, tights that you pull on that have the big deerskin patches from the inside of your thigh down to the inside of your calf. ... It grips really well. It holds up. It's so soft. And it doesn't get all, like crinkly and hard, ever. It's so soft. And I

like deerskin thinsulate gloves for the winter. Um, they hold up really well and really are warm ... And, I like, uhm, like a tight fitting shirt underneath of other shirts. I gotta wear layers a lot of times because you start out working and you're not warmed up ... So I really like layers that I just whip off as I go. ... I prefer paddock boots. I like Ariats the best. ... I like the paddock boots with the half chaps. ... Ariat socks because they hold your foot real tight. And then, uhm, they last forever. And they're bullet proof. I mean not bullet proof but they have Kevlar in the toe and heel so they're strong. And so I like to joke around and be like [jumps], "I got my bullet proof toes on!"

Peggy describes an equestrian outfit that is fitting mostly for English and endurance styles of riding, with the deerskin tights, paddock boots, and fitted top. Such clothing is mostly standard for riders of all genders who specialize in these styles of riding.

Here, Peggy's clothing marks her not only as an English equestrian but also of a higher economic status, although this marking of status is often a misnomer. It is generally assumed that people who ride and dress in the English style are financially better off (even rich) than those riders who prefer to ride Western. While there is truth to this assumption because English attire and tack is often more expensive than similar products sold for Western riding, certainly this is not always (or even often) the case. As Peggy points out in her statement above, "we cannot always play in the stuff we really like." Deerskin tights cost anywhere between 300 and 500 dollars for a single pair and, while Peggy prefers to ride in these tights, she does not own a pair. Instead she settles for used, well-cared-for, English breeches that she purchases on E-bay at a reduced cost.

Peggy's goal in wearing English riding apparel is to support her riding with functional clothing, not to consciously mark herself as a member of a higher social class. Still, consciously or not, Peggy remains thus marked by her apparel. As Entwistle writes, "fashion and dress have a complex relationship to identity: on the one hand the clothes we choose to wear can be expressive of identity, telling others something about our gender, class, status, and so on; on the other, our clothes cannot always be 'read,' since they do not straightforwardly 'speak' and can therefore be open to misinterpretation" (112). Using this logic then, Peggy's clothing speaks straightforwardly and highlights her social performance as an equestrian, even somewhat as a horsewoman; however, her clothing misidentifies her in respect to her actual class and social status.

Whereas Peggy prefers to ride in English apparel, Jeannie prefers more of a Western style. Our recorded conversation took place mid-day in her bright and sunny eat-in kitchen. I was more familiar with Jeanie when we began the process than I was some of the other women because I had already attended a clinic held at her ranch, so I was fairly comfortable during our weekend together. Jeanie is a Natural Horse-trainer (a form of horse-training that supposedly puts the horse's needs first, a concept I discuss in depth in chapter four). She further believes in spiritual healing and natural remedies. In the next account, Jeannie describes her favorite riding and work clothes.

I'll start from the bottom. Ariat boots. I have tried so many different kinds of boots and I always end up with Ariat lace-ups because they give me support and they make my feet feel good. ...

Blue jeans. Uhm, and in the last couple of years, stretch denim blue jeans are the most comfortable [laughs]. Uhm, in my barrel racing days it was the

Rocky Mountain's with no pockets but now they've gotta have pockets 'cause that's where I put everything on file. [laughs] Uhm, yeah, blue jeans. I've got some, some stretch pants that I thought I would wear to ride in, but it just feels foreign to me. And I wear 'em under my blue jeans in the wintertime for insulation but I just, I keep going back to blue jeans. I love my chinks⁵ and chaps.

... And I like long sleeved cotton shirts. And then, I, I like to wear a vest especially when it's a little bit cooler. I like the fleecy vest. It gives you a lot of freedom but it keeps your back warm ... And then when it's a little bit colder, I like, uh, a bulky denim jacket with a hooded sweatshirt underneath. Then you've got layers, and you can pull the hood up over you if you get really cold.

I like baseball caps because it keeps the hair out of my face but I love my cowboy hats. I've got a selection of cowboy hats and if I didn't live in Michigan, I'd wear them all the time [laughs]. But I do love cowboy hats. I've got white ones and black ones and brown ones. So, I do like that. And it's hard not to buy a new one every time I go into the hat store!

Jeannie seems to choose her clothing mostly for its functionality and comfort, as do many of the other women I interviewed. Nancy, Mary-Ellen, Adrienne, and Judy all described clothing similar to Jeannie's for working in and around the farm and with the horses. According to Entwistle, "how we perform our identity has something with our location in the social world as members of particular groups, classes, cultural communities. The clothes we choose to wear represent a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong, and our own individual desires" (114). While most of the horsewomen I interviewed

⁵ Whereas chaps generally fit fairly snugly and cover the entire leg, chinks are cut more loosely and instead cover the leg only to just beneath the knee.

performed their identities as horsewomen through their choice to don functional work-clothing, Karen Scholl seemingly feels the need to further mark her femininity even when wearing more functional work clothes.

My interview with Karen took place late in the evening on October 11, 2008, after she'd finished teaching the day's clinic about "horsemanship for women," in which I and six other women participated. Because I was camping on the grounds where the clinic was held, we pulled up folding chairs just outside my horse's stalls and the stall in which I was sleeping. I handed her a bottled margarita from my cooler as I set up the video camera. With humor, when I began recording, she looked straight into the camera, held up her margarita as if shooting a television commercial, and declared "I don't know what your advisor's going to say when she sees how you get your interviews!" This statement is representative of the humor that Karen seems to maintain throughout her daily interactions with her students and others and that was evident throughout my time spent with her. Late in the interview, we entered into a discussion of clothing, which I prompted by asking the same question I've previously noted: "describe your favorite articles of clothing for riding and/or training."

Karen's narrative spoke so strongly and with such depth regarding the functional value of her clothing as a clinician and trainer, that I share it with you here in full. She spoke continuously about her clothing for several minutes, which only further serves to illustrate the import she places on her clothing's function, for ease as well as for her safety. What follows is an unedited excerpt from our interview:

For what I do, I need jeans. They hold up really well. I love English riding pants. I mean they are just more comfortable. I wish I could wear them. [In English riding pants] I have no pockets. I have no pockets. It doesn't hold a belt.

It doesn't ... You know, do all those things. So, uhm, you know, my jeans are a tool. So are my boots ... These are my new favorite boots. [Pulls up pant leg to show me her boots]. I finally just went and invested in new custom boots. And my friends say ... "You have to tuck your jeans in!" [because the boots are so fancy]. And I go, "No, I can't." And, uh, the reason I can't ... I like a tall boot because this [points to the leather over the calf] protects me if a horse, you know, steps on me or strikes or something like that. This protects my lower leg. It also has a spur ridge to hold that [the spurs]. A cowboy boot is pointy at the front so you can find the stirrup. It also has an angle on the back of the heel so if your foot did go through it [the stirrup], you could pull your foot out. That's what that angle's for. Heel obviously keeps it from going through the stirrup and things like that. Leather. I prefer a leather sole. You can see, I gotta hole in my sole [laughs]. It's time to replace that leather. But leather on leather [leather sole on a leather stirrup] is ideal. Tackiness without trapping. I do not like rubber soled boots. ...

And then I'll wear leather chaps or chinks. And again, leather on leather is the ideal stickiness. One time I went to a clinic and I was just riding my horse Bergante and I didn't have my chaps or chinks on. And I thought, "Ah! You know, I'm just riding him around the arena." Well he got playful. He got kinda frisky! And I'll tell you what, when you feel your seat shift just a little bit, you miss it. And I told my husband, "Honey I don't care what I say," I said, "Bring!" You know? "I need those on. Don't let me ride without them!" And I see people ride without them all the time. But that's what I have to ride in.

Then I prefer a belt because I run my Mecate rein up through my belt. Also, you know, if you get into a situation, you can have a belt to catch a horse, or do something. Again, it's a tool. I wear a flat buckle on there 'cause if I lean across a horse bareback, I want it to be smooth. I've had belt buckles that will dig into the back of a horse. And you don't think of that until a horse is going, "Ow!" You know?

A long sleeved shirt to keep the sun off. Cotton. Um, I'll tell you what, if I ever find the right riding bra [laughs] ... Sport bras? You know, they're just, they're awful! I don't wear rings that will catch on things. Even my watch has a little bit of a gap right there so that if it did get hung up it would break off. I don't wear French hook earrings because it could tear my ears. You could get the mane caught in it. I wear posts.

So, uh, my hat obviously, because that is, you know, shade to keep the sun off my face and also because it gives you better vision, 'cause its keeping the sun from coming out of your eyes. ... When you don't have it, even when you have sunglasses on, the sun comes in through the top of your sunglasses. It was funny, one time ... I said "That's it! I am not wearing a hat! I want my hair back!" I wanna, you know, to have my hair. ... I had my sunglasses on and I went out to help this horse, uhm, who had recently been gelded. It had probably been two or three weeks and he had this very stud behavior. And it was this time of night when the sun was setting and the horse was in front of the sun. He was in

silhouette. And I didn't see right away that he was coming at me striking.⁶ ... [When] I saw it, I went "Man! I'm not sure how long he'd been setting up to do that" because I didn't have this [points toward hat] keeping the sun out of my eyes. And then I realized it's [the hat] a much greater tool.

It [the hat] keeps me from bumping into things. You know, branches and things when I'm riding. It forms a protective barrier around my head. And rain too! People don't think of that, you know when it rains. Everybody's walking around going [illustrates protecting head from rain], and I'm walking along going, "What's the matter with you guys?!" Okay? So, it's a very strong tool. I have also watered my horse out of my hat. Like the Stetson picture? You can actually, on a well-made hat, you can fill that with water and have enough to [allow your horse to drink]. ... Because its custom made it fits my head. ... It doesn't give me a headache, or any of those things because its made to the exact shape of my head. So it fits perfectly without crushing my skull. And that makes a big difference 'cause I hated, I hated wearing hats! And it wasn't until I had problems with skin cancer of different types ... And they [the doctors] said, "You just have to wear a hat."

... There was a, kind of a funny story, because, you know, I had to wear a hat. And so I tried different shape and things to find out, kinda, what I liked. And, uh, I guess because of my height / I'm not that tall but with cowboy boots, I kind of look, like, 6'2" or something. And, uh, people would mistake me for a man.

⁶ Because horses are prey animals, they generally prefer to run when they sense danger and will only fight when absolutely necessary. Striking is when a horse rears on its hind quarters and strikes out forward with one of its front legs. Striking occurs both during play (within a herd of horses) but also when a horse feels threatened enough to fight.

Isn't that strange? They wouldn't look up, you know, like people giving you your change at a cashier or something? They'd go, "Okay. Thank you sir." And I'd stop and they'd look at me and go, "Ah!" You know? And go, "I'm sorry." And I'd say, "No, that's okay." It really happens all the time. All the time. I've had women stop me from going in the ladies room. "Sir! Sir!" That's why I started growing my hair longer in the back [laughs]. And I think it's the height and the cowboy hat because there aren't many women that, just, walk around in a cowboy hat. And so I put the pink binding on here and along the edge of it because I want something even more, kind of obviously, feminine. ... [laughs] It'll happen this week. At least once. Isn't that funny?

Karen's account illustrates a number of complex factors that seem to influence her choice in clothing and at this point, I turn to an analysis of some of these factors.

What is perhaps most obvious in her account is that she takes the view that she chooses her clothing based primarily on its functionality. Because she is a laborer and clinician who spends a number of hours in the saddle each day, she chooses clothing that is appropriate for her work and her safety. Secondly, since Karen is avowedly often mistaken for a man she chooses through a variety of manners to highlight her feminine identity, despite her more traditionally masculine attire. One way of analyzing Karen's attire is, admittedly, as masculine. But another and I think more interesting, way of theorizing her clothing as androgynous. What intrigues me about androgyny, however, is that in fashion androgyny generally signifies a woman incorporating more typically-considered masculine clothing into her own way of dressing. As Fred Davis, author of *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, points out, "strictly speaking, true androgyny would involve a melding or muting of gender-specific items of apparel and

appearance so thoroughly as to obliterate anything beyond a biological ‘reading’ of a person’s sex” (36). Furthermore, “the items meant to represent androgyny are, in terms of their gender-associated origins and allusions, located much more often on the male side of the gender division than on the female” (36). As such, the concept of androgyny, when applied to Karen’s attire, while interesting, remains problematic.

For clothing to be truly androgynous it must signify neither masculine nor feminine within its cultural context. At this point it is important to remember that, as Entwistle points out, “there is no natural link between an item of clothing and ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’; instead there is an arbitrary set of associations which are culturally specific” (143). Thus, since Karen views herself in light of the cultural significations of her height and clothing, she suggests that she is commonly mistaken for a man because she is tall, wears cowboy boots, and a cowboy hat. As Woodhouse illustrates, “when we meet someone for the first time ‘we *think* we see their sex, but in fact we do not. What we see is their *gender appearance* and we assume that this is an accurate indication of their sex” (qtd. in Entwistle 141). Because the gender binary is so ingrained in contemporary American social consciousness, when gender’s constructedness is highlighted, people (like the cashiers to whom Karen refers) often become confused, embarrassed, or even angry and violent.

According to Davis, “notwithstanding fashion’s frequent encouragement to women to borrow items and modes of men’s dress, the norms of Western society demand that gender identity be grounded finally in some irreducible claim that is clearly either male or female, not both or some indeterminate middling state” (42). Middling states are abject and as such, androgyny, transvestitism, and butch lesbianism transgress the gender binary thereby calling into question the ways in which gender is constructed and performed. As Butler argues, “the loss of

gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists, ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (*Gender* 200). Perhaps Karen’s effort to further signify her femininity through additions to her masculine attire is her attempt to avoid abjection. In the remainder of this section, I examine Karen’s description of her clothing as functional and I highlight the ways in which she further marks her feminine identity through her seemingly careful and conscious choices in attire.

The first article of clothing Karen refers to as essential to her ability to perform her job adequately is her jeans. She, like myself, wears Wranglers, first and foremost marking herself as a horseperson. She also explains that she chooses her Wranglers because of where the pockets are placed. She has adequate room for both of her knives, a hoof pick, and other various tools that she might need when riding or training. Jeans originated and have long been associated with “workingmen, hard physical labor, the outdoors, and the American West” (Davis 70). Davis further argues that “much of the blue jeans’ fundamental mystique seems to emanate from populist sentiments of democracy, independence, equality, freedom, and fraternity” (70), and, perhaps because of nostalgic value “by the late 1960s blue jeans had achieved worldwide popularity and ... had fully crossed over the occupation, class, gender, and age boundaries” (71). Davis suggests that, at one point, jeans held hope for the first truly unisex article of clothing through their “relative unconcern for fit and emphasis on comfort; the fly front for both male and female; the coarse denim material” (75). What Davis does not recognize in his statement is that the fly front is, indeed, a gender specific feature.

That jeans were ever truly “androgynous” remains problematic, given my above discussion of androgynous clothing. If, indeed, blue jeans were initially conceived of as a

working pant for male laborers, then once again, the androgyny stems only from women adapting culturally signified masculine clothing for their own purposes. In fact, in contemporary society, jeans have been further embellished and sexualized to more clearly signify the difference between feminine jeans and masculine jeans. According to Davis, the

“jeans for gals” sales pitches of manufacturers, the use of softer materials, cutting jeans so short as to expose the buttocks, and in general, the transmogrification of jeans from loose-fitting, baggy trousers into pants so snugly pulled over the posterior as to require some women to lie down to get into them. So much for comfort, so much for unisexuality! (75)

The jeans Karen and I wear for riding are cut for the purpose of riding. They contain ample room in the seat and legs to be comfortable in the saddle. They have the pockets Karen feels are necessary to contain her tools. The jeans that I described in the last section, the jeans that I wear for “going out” are of the “jeans for gals” flavor that Davis describes. These jeans are imbued with culturally signified, and sexualized, femininity. They are low-cut and so skin-tight that I must lay prostrate on the bed to zip them.

From Karen’s description of her *custom-made* cowboy boots, it is evident that they were purchased primarily for their functionality and their ability to shield her legs from the various mishaps that can occur when working with horses. What is not evident in her description, however, is why her friends said to her, “You have to tuck your jeans in.” The lower part of her boots is traditionally styled in brown leather. What is unique about her boots is the turquoise and pink coloring of the leather that encases the calf and the cut out and embroidered hearts going up her leg. Despite that Karen wears a conventionally masculine work boot (for function’s sake), her custom boots soften the masculinity signified by the traditional cowboy boot with feminine

additions (the coloring, embroidery, and cut out hearts). In *Femininity*, Susan Brownmiller discusses the “softening effect” and argues that such softening occurs when “compensatory femininity extracts its due in form of fancy embellishments to modify the suspect masculine model” (95). Think back to my description of Neva Jo’s shirt at the beginning of this chapter. I described her shirt as more feminine than the other two women in the painting because of its softer line and appearance. Similarly, Karen’s addition of hearts and colored leather softens the effect of the traditionally-considered harsher masculine work boot, while allowing her to maintain the functionality essential to her safety and work.

Karen softens her mostly masculine attire in more ways than just through her boots. Her long sleeved cotton work-shirts are almost always pink in color, a color often traditionally considered feminine when worn by women and effeminate when worn by men. Out of the three day clinic with Karen, in which I participated as well as the time I saw her present at Equine Affaire, she’s worn her pink shirts all but once. She also wears basic jewelry including a watch, chain necklace (light weight so that it will break if it gets caught on the saddle or other tools), and post earrings. Although she wears very little, Karen has worn make-up each time I’ve seen her, yet another signifier of compliance with socially accepted norms of femininity.

Perhaps the most telling example of Karen’s emphasizing her femininity through (or despite) her “masculine” attire, is through her cowboy hat. Because people kept misperceiving her performance of gender, Karen added a pink band to her cowboy hat in an attempt to clarify and further mark her femininity. She said, “I want something even more, kind of obviously, feminine.” She laughed while relaying her story of people’s uncertainty with her gender; although, as I noted earlier, her attempt to mark herself more clearly as a feminine subject, may tell of her own discomfort with this confusion. Karen recognizes her failure to perform to the

standards of socially-sanctioned norms of femininity and alters her performance as per Brownmiller's "softening effect" in an attempt to more clearly signify herself as a female. She does this through her choice of shirt colors, the addition of make-up, jewelry, accessories (the pink biding on her hat), and by allowing her hair to grow longer so that it more obviously shows from underneath her hat.

Karen finds the humor in being mistaken for a man when she laughs and says, "It'll happen this week. At least once. Isn't that funny?" Yet she still seems to want to be recognized as a female and she makes additions to her masculine clothing in order to assist others in reading her sought after gender performance. Karen's want of gender recognition is understandable given that she teaches "horsemanship for women." Her primary clients are women and I suspect that her livelihood partly depends on potential client's ability to read her gender as recognizably female. I would feel, and I imagine some other women might feel similarly uncomfortable attending a "horsemanship for women" clinic taught by a man.

If my suspicion regarding the link between Karen's performance of femininity and her ability to attract clients to her clinics is accurate, then her incorporation of feminine additions into her masculine attire can be read as disciplinary. As Sandra Lee Bartky contends, "the absence of a formal institutional structure and of authorities invested with the power to carry out institutional directives creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural" (75). Bartky further argues that "the lack of formal public sanctions does not mean that a woman who is unable or unwilling to submit herself to the appropriate body discipline will face no sanctions at all" (76). Karen's adoption of feminine elements to her daily dress, while voluntary, is also disciplinary for it is likely that Karen's livelihood would suffer if she so chose to ignore or further transgress the feminine ideal. Still, it is possible that in

embracing the addition of feminine aspects to her masculine attire, Karen gains agency. Self-discipline can function as a positive force. Since Karen recognizes that she must contend with the beauty myth in order to grow her business, through her practice of self-discipline, she marks herself as more obviously as feminine. In so doing she becomes an agent in her own right. Her careful and conscious effort to perform femininity alongside her status as a professional horse trainer and clinician, contributes to her ability to attract new students, which in turn, contributes to her financial security.

Admittedly, not all horsewomen go to the pains that Karen does in order to spotlight their performance of femininity. Still, jeans, work-boots (often Ariat brand), cotton long-sleeved shirts or t-shirts, ball caps (often emblazoned with an image of a horse or other horse-related saying) and/or cowboy hats, all play a part in marking these women as horsewomen both within her immediate community and to the greater public. As Entwistle points out, “while dress signals our membership to particular communities and expresses shared values, ideas and lifestyle, at the same time we do not want to be ‘clones’ dressed in identical fashion to our friends” (114). Despite the commonalities, through their choice of clothing, each of the women also mark themselves as individuals. To me, Nancy is famous for her sleeveless button up shirts and ball caps. Jeannie is almost always wearing something (either jewelry or clothing) turquoise. Karen wears her long-sleeved “Horsemanship for Women” dress-shirts. Mary-Ellen wears her helmet with a large brim glued to the front. And Adrienne goes out to feed the horses in her flip flops and pajama pants (perhaps not the safest practice, but it makes her who she is).

To further theorize the link between one’s body and identity, Entwistle writes,

In contemporary culture, the body has become a site of identity. We experience our bodies as separate from others and increasingly we identify with our bodies as

containers of our identities and places of personal expression. We can use dress to articulate our sense of ‘uniqueness’, to express our difference from others, although as members of particular classes and cultures, we are equally likely to find styles of dress that connect us to others as well. (138)

Not only do the women use their bodies, consciously or unconsciously, as a site of personal expression through the more unique apparel choices and accoutrements I listed above, they also mark their bodies as horsewomen and as members of that particular social group through their work attire. Karen goes even further in order imbue her masculine work attire with her feminine identity. In her case, not only do the clothes make the woman but the woman makes the clothes—she seeks to embellish her clothing to better represent her conscious performance of self.

Thus far, I’ve examined the ways in which horsewomen perform femininity through their clothing and accoutrements both on special occasions as well as when at work. In so doing I illustrated various performances of femininity given by me and the women I interviewed. These performances range from performances that constitute traditional femininity and the beauty myth, to performances that transgress traditional femininity in favor of more functional, “masculine” clothing. Finally, through my discussion of Karen’s attire, I illustrated the ways in which on occasion, horsewomen soften their more masculine functional attire in order to better identify themselves as women for others. In the next section, I discuss how clothing functions in the somewhat more “theatrical” realm of horse showing. In particular, I share Mary Ellen’s story of riding sidesaddle and I possibilize the variety of ways in which her costume for riding sidesaddle fits, on one hand, the expectations of a more traditional performance but also, and perhaps more importantly, how that performance constitutes her identity.

Riding Sidesaddle and the Performance of Femininity

Riding sidesaddle is probably a quintessential example of women performing traditional femininity or even hyper-femininity while riding horses. According to Elizabeth Claire Flood, author of *Cowgirls: Women of the Wild West*, the sidesaddle style of riding was introduced into Europe in 1382 by Anne of Bohemia (31), and was later popularized by Queen Elizabeth I “to mask in part her physical deformities”⁷ (38). For the hundreds of years since the sidesaddle’s introduction, it was almost unheard of for women to ride astride. In fact, it wasn’t until the early 1900s that American cowgirls and ranch women regularly began to challenge these earlier Victorian riding conventions (31). Women who, like Georgie Sicking, were interested in riding for ranch-work purposes needed clothing that was more functional. Flood points out the lack of functionality in conventional sidesaddle costumes when she states, “the long skirt was cumbersome, easily caught on brush, and frankly dangerous” (36).

Dating back mostly to the Victorian era, one of the primary reasons behind the early development and institutionalization of the sidesaddle form of riding was to highlight the clothing and accoutrements of upper-class Victorian ladies. Initially the sidesaddle habit⁸ consisted primarily of a Victorian-styled skirt, fitted white blouse, white gloves, laced tall-boots, hat, and a riding crop or whip. There was little riding functionality to the attire. Despite its publication date, in *Femininity*, Brownmiller aptly addresses the performance of traditional

⁷ I have sought to discover what deformities Queen Elizabeth I might have had that necessitated her riding sidesaddle and, while I have found no solid evidence, there exist two possibilities. First, as Queen Elizabeth I is often associated with Richard III in the representative literature, it is possible that Flood conflated his deformities with the Queen. Second, Queen Elizabeth I is often rumored to have had a “sexual deformity,” which kept her unable to have children (or to have sex). Although this rumor has never been proven, and while it’s likely that even if the Queen did have a “sexual deformity” it would not inhibit her ability to ride astride a horse, it is possible that Flood notes this rumor as evidence of the Queen’s so-called “deformity.”

⁸ The habit is the “costume” donned by a woman riding sidesaddle. Mary Ellen describes the habit further during the long excerpt from our interview included in the following pages.

femininity and traditional feminine attire when she writes, “feminine clothing has never been designed to be functional, for that would be a contradiction in terms. Functional clothing is a masculine privilege and practicality is a masculine virtue. To be truly feminine is to accept the handicap of restraint and restriction, and to come to adore it” (86). Certainly not all (or even most, particularly within contemporary middle and upper-class societies) feminine clothing lacks functionality. Still, it is not difficult to extend Brownmiller’s reasoning to early sidesaddle riders and their clothing, as this clothing most certainly restricted (and disciplined) these women’s bodies. As Bartky illustrates in *Femininity and Domination*, “feminine movement, gesture, and posture must exhibit not only constriction, but grace as well” (68). The clothing donned by sidesaddle riders enforces the bodily constriction Bartky refers to and in so doing, ensures a “graceful” performance of Victorian femininity by the woman from atop her horse.

While riding sidesaddle was, in part, a cultural performance of performing traditional (and upper class) femininity “properly” for the Victorian lady, this upper class social expectation spilled over into the realm of women of middle and working class status. Many early American cowgirls and ranch women felt that sidesaddle riding was a form of restraint and restriction imposed on women. One early cowgirl, Agnes Morley Cleaveland, describes her journey to quit riding sidesaddle in the early 1900s:

My own great concession to a new age was to abandon the sidesaddle. Why, for ten years, I continued to ride sidesaddle is a mystery to me now. I recall the steps that led to emancipation. First I discarded, or rather refused to adopt, the sunbonnet, conventional headgear of my female neighbors. When I went unashamedly about under a five-gallon (not ten-gallon) Stetson, many an eyebrow was raised; then followed a double-breasted blue flannel shirt, with white pearl

buttons, frankly unfeminine. In time came blue denim knickers worn under a short blue denim skirt. Slow evolution (or was it decadence?) toward a costume suited for immediate needs. Decadence having set in, the descent from the existing standards of female modesty to purely human comfort and convenience was swift. A man's saddle and a divided skirt (awful monstrosity that was) were inevitable. (qtd. in Flood 38).

Cleaveland's transition into a divided skirt and Western saddle (from her more traditionally feminine attire and sidesaddle) caused conflict within her family. As Flood points out, Cleaveland's brother refused to ride with her when she first made the transition (38). In choosing to ride astride, Cleaveland appears to have given her body the freedom of movement and balance it needed in order to perform her work on the ranch, despite the social ramifications that stemmed from her choice.

Perhaps because of many American Western women's feelings of restraint, the functionality of women's riding habits did shift in the early 1900s when they were redesigned with women's safety (more) in mind. Women began wearing riding pants under their habits. The habit shifted from a full skirt to a safety apron, which is a large flap of fabric that "tucks" under the leg that appears to be a skirt but is actually one continuous piece of fabric. Although the apron fabric still poses a danger (because it could still get caught on obstacles or entwined with the saddle⁹), the change lessens this danger. In the excerpt that follows, Mary Ellen refers to sidesaddle habits made of cloth such as wool, cotton, and suede. With the exception of wool,

⁹ Most horsepeople avoid wearing clothing that might get caught on the saddle because being attached to the saddle is dangerous if they were to fall from the horse. Extra fabric (or cameras on strings, backpacks, etc...) can mean the difference between the rider falling cleanly to the ground or being drug underneath or behind an out of control horse.

these newer fabrics allow contemporary women to “stick” to the saddle, as opposed to earlier, more traditional Victorian fabrics which were less amenable for riding.

Sidesaddle riding, which had waned nearly to extinction by the 1940s in the United States, is slowly but steadily making a comeback in the show ring today. Since women riding astride the horse is now the norm and is by no means considered a social transgression, contemporary sidesaddle riding is a historical performance in which women *choose* to participate. Their ability to choose is important because “having a choice” gives the contemporary sidesaddle rider agency, which was less available (although not unavailable as evidenced by Cleaveland’s story) to horsewomen of the past. Despite that Cleaveland chose to ride astride, she still had to contend with the social repercussions that resulted from her transgression (when her brother refused to ride with her).

Furthermore, whereas riding sidesaddle once constituted the “proper” performance of Victorian femininity, today’s sidesaddle circuit combines a celebration of these same Victorian ideals of womanhood alongside the audience’s admiration of the woman rider who has the skill necessary to balance so precariously atop her horse in her Victorian costume. Eliette Markbein describes the French Amazones (a group of contemporary French women who show sidesaddle and ride in exhibitions) as follows, “they canter into view, skirts flowing, gloved hands light on the reins. The very image of elegance ... [They] seem to come from another century ... Locks of hair do not stray, but are tucked into a chignon net under a half top hat banded with a scarf” (34). Markbein argues that the women who choose to participate in sidesaddle riding do so because they feel that “it marries athletic challenge with the aesthetics of ladylike posture and costume” (34).

I must admit that out of my many hours of interview material and pages of field notes, my choice to include Mary Ellen's story, which follows, is largely because sidesaddle riding, in so many ways, proves to be rife with traditional femininity. Additionally, the costumes she describes seemed worthy of inclusion and analysis as per my goals for this chapter. Furthermore, until I met Mary Ellen, I had never given any thought to sidesaddle riding and whether or not women continue to participate in this style of riding today. Still, in my attempt to remain ethical in my decision to include this material, I must ask myself whether I, here, participate in what Dwight Conquergood terms the "four ethical pitfalls" of performance ethnography in his essay, "Performing as a Moral Act" (4). I go back and forth between asking myself whether I participate in Conquergood's "Custodian's Rip-Off" and "Curator's Exhibitionism" or not, and I remind myself that my goal is not simply get good material (although that may have influenced my initial decision to include Mary Ellen's story), sensationalize women who ride sidesaddle, or astonish my audience by presenting "exotic" information (5-7). Instead, I seek to possibilize the variety of factors that inform both Mary Ellen's choice to ride sidesaddle as well as the particular performance of femininity she offers when she does so. It is through my possibilizing that I am able to maintain a more "dialogical" ethical standpoint (Conquergood 9-11).

Mary Ellen is an avid long-distance trail rider, a riding instructor, and a horse trainer (although she trains mostly her own horses). My long weekend spent with her was relaxing. She lives her life at a much slower pace than do I, or most of the other women I interviewed. Mary Ellen's pace of life is somewhat due to the fact that she is a nearly retired veterinarian (she still works one or two afternoons a week), but it is also due to the fact that she lost part of her leg to bone cancer when she was fifteen. Her doctors amputated the leg (way above where the cancer was found) and put her on, as she expresses, "a new drug—it was a chemotherapy drug—which

there were hardly any on the market at the time.” Unfortunately because the drug was new, she continues “they really didn’t know a lot about what kind of dosage was really gonna be effective because it’d only been used in clinical trials. And so ... they would give me as much as they could without making me so sick that it killed me.” Mary Ellen, while grateful to be alive, expresses that she still feels tired today due to her chemotherapy treatment, which she underwent for five years because the doctors did not know when it would be safe for her to stop treatment altogether.

I was a little uncomfortable asking Mary Ellen to talk about how she lost her leg. After all, to my mind at the time, my dissertation was going to be about horsewomen and how they express femininity when working with their horses. Internally I battled with whether to ask Mary Ellen about her prosthesis, or not. I worried whether I would offend her. I worried whether I had the right to ask her a question regarding disability when I’m not writing about disability per se. In the end, I decided that her disability was indeed linked to her performance of feminine identity. I waited until about the middle of the interview to ask the following questions: “Do you want to talk a little about your leg and how it makes you, “you?” And how you meet the challenges of being disabled and riding?” Normally extroverted and excitable, Mary Ellen was quiet and more introverted when she spoke about her experience with cancer. She seems to be self-conscious, even to this day, about allowing others to see her prosthetic leg, although she apparently trusted me not to judge her because she wore shorts during part of the time I spent with her (something she says she rarely does in public).

In retrospect, I wish I had been comfortable opening up our conversation about her experience with cancer and the loss of her leg earlier in the interview because after this discussion, she reflected more clearly about how her disability affects her performance as a

horsewoman. Our discussion regarding sidesaddle riding surfaced when, late in the interview, I asked her the following question: “How does your favorite saddle feel to you?” Her description follows: “Well, my biggest problems [sic] with saddles is getting them to work with this [smiles, and points to her prosthesis]. So for a while my sidesaddle was my favorite saddle because instead of trying to stretch around a horse, it was almost like sitting in a chair.” She goes on to explain that as the mechanics of prosthesis-making advanced, she was able to get her prosthetist to build her a leg that was more conducive to riding astride the horse. It was then that she gave up sidesaddle riding.

Initially, I was surprised when Mary Ellen began to talk about riding sidesaddle. At the time I thought of sidesaddle riding only as a style that is restrictive to women and steeped in traditional femininity. I remember thinking “Why would she *choose* to participate in this style of riding?” To me, the sidesaddle style was simply representative of the ways in which patriarchal and Victorian ideals of femininity repressed (and in some cases, continue to repress) women. Still, I’m glad that I asked Mary Ellen to embellish on the reference she made to sidesaddle riding because, in retrospect, I’ve learned that there is much more to her story than I initially thought. Here, I first share what Mary Ellen had to say and then I return to reflect on my initial reaction as I analyze her story. I consider her participation in the sidesaddle show arena as a more traditional form of performance and I also consider how this performance, at least in part, constitutes her identity in everyday life.

ME: I got into riding sidesaddle for a while. And then I had to make my own clothes. I made my sidesaddle habits ...

S: Oh! Talk about those because I don’t know anything about that!

ME: Oh! Well, uhm, [laughing] I even have a t-shirt that has three people riding sidesaddle in the different sidesaddle outfits, and it says, “Sidesaddle. So habit forming.” [laughs] Uhm... sidesaddle ... uhm, you wear a habit. [laughs] Uhm, and, it’s some sort of pair of riding pants, usually something that’s kind of stretchy. Uhm... and over the top of that you have a safety apron. And the safety apron looks like a skirt when it’s on the horse. But it isn’t a complete skirt. It’s, uhm, you’re sitting on the horse. This leg [the left] is down along the horse’s side and this leg [points to her prosthesis on her right leg] is over the horn and the safety apron comes up over here and then it’s got a little piece that just tucks under this leg while the other leg holds it down. So that it looks like a skirt, uhm, but you know, if you folded it back, you would see that you had jeans [or pants of some type] on.

So when you go to get on your horse you just kind of gather that up and throw it over your shoulder and the gentleman helps you mount, which is the proper way to get on a sidesaddle—is to have a *gentleman* help you mount [laughs and mimes bowing from her seated position]. And then you just arrange the habit. ... There’s Western sidesaddle, in which you wear a Western-looking sidesaddle habit, which might be, uhm, like a, maybe a suede cloth apron and a Western shirt and a Western hat. Uhm, or you can have a Hunt Seat sidesaddle habit, which is very, very formal and its usually made out of wool. You know? The wool apron and the wool jacket that looks like a traditional hunt jacket and the derby [hat]. And then you have to have a sandwich pouch that actually has to have a sandwich in it.

S: Like an actual sandwich?

ME: Yeah. Like, if you're showing? And they will check. They check your habits. They lift up your apron to make sure you're wearing the right thing underneath and you have to have the gloves tucked into a certain place. And, it's just like, very, very formal. It's cool! But it's very formal.

And then you have your Park sidesaddle, which is kind of equivalent to saddle seat. And, uhm, you usually have some sort of a conservative color of apron and, and a very tight fitting, uhm, it's a jacket but it's almost like a tight fitting blouse. Very tailored. Very tailored. And then you wear, like a derby, which is like what I [was wearing] in that Mackinac sidesaddle video that you saw? That blue thing that I was wearing?

And, uh, actually even when I was just trail riding in my sidesaddle, I always wore an apron just because that's what you do. That's what you do. Yeah... And I had aprons that were made out of very light material for summer. And I had some aprons that were a heavier material in the winter, which were nice because they were really warm. ... But when you ride sidesaddle, it's all about etiquette. And so even when I was trail riding, I did the part. I did the etiquette and wore my apron.

Before I turn to an analysis of the various ways in which Mary Ellen seems to constitute her identity through her above description, I'd like to illustrate how her story fits within more traditional realms of performance. After all, the horseshow arena, like the sports arena or museum, may also be read as theatrical. While my analysis of sidesaddle riding as a more traditional theatrical performance is limited, I believe that highlighting a few of the theatrical

elements that encircle Mary Ellen's sidesaddle performance compliments my later analysis of her performance of femininity and disability. To begin, Marvin Carlson, outlines in his "Introduction" to *What is Performance*, "two rather different concepts of performance; one involving the display of skills, the other also involving display, but less of particular skills than of a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior" (4). Both of these conceptions of performance are evident through Mary Ellen's description of sidesaddle riding and its associated accoutrements. In the show ring, the sidesaddle rider must display an enormous amount of skill in terms of bodily balance and the requisite centering. The rider must align her center of gravity with the horse's center of gravity and she must do so from an asymmetrical bodily position. Furthermore, she must be able to maintain this balance and posture while coordinating between herself and the horse in order to execute a number of dance-like movements at a variety of gaits. Finally, she must do so while dressed in a constricting costume, not at all conducive to the sport of horseback riding, in order to exhibit the requisite Victorian "grace."

When showing sidesaddle, Mary Ellen also participates in Carlson's second concept of performance, which is the display of "a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior." In her account, Mary Ellen makes clear the etiquette expected of women who ride and/or show sidesaddle. That men do not ride sidesaddle is purely taken for granted. In fact, it is likely that a man who chose to participate as a rider in a sidesaddle event, even at a contemporary horseshow, would be disqualified. At best, he would probably not be taken seriously (even if he exhibited the requisite skill) and would be considered a novelty. The exclusion of men is in large part because sidesaddle etiquette is steeped in early Victorian expectations of the feminine ideal. It is the only horseshow class that I know of, in which the rider is judged not only on her riding skills but the entirety of her performance. Judging begins as the riders mount. They must be helped into the

saddle by a *gentleman*. She must arrange and wear her habit in proper form. In fact, this element is so important to the overall performance that the judges (who are often, but not always, male) actually lift the habit to ensure that it is worn properly. I also know of no other horseshow class, in which the judges are required to look underneath the rider's skirt.

The rider must carry a sandwich tucked into the appropriate pocket. Certainly the contemporary rider does not need to eat a sandwich during the three minutes it takes her to perform in the show ring. Yet, the incorporation of the sandwich into the costume remains an important aspect of contemporary sidesaddle performance, which stems from a time in which Victorian women rode for leisure as opposed to work. As such, even the sandwich, can be read as a part of the Victorian performance of femininity expected in today's show arena. The mounting (with a gentleman), arranging and checking of the habit, and even the inclusion of the sandwich all align with Carlson's contention that performance displays a "recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior." These patterns constitute women rider's performance of Victorian femininity in the contemporary sidesaddle show ring.

As I reflect on my initial response to sidesaddle riding, I believe it is the seemingly blatant and seemingly uncritical acceptance of Victorian norms of femininity that offends my feminist sensibility. What I realized, however, in speaking with Mary Ellen, and perhaps even more clearly as I reflect upon our conversation in the present moment, is that her performance of gender and identity as related to sidesaddle riding is much more complex than a simple acceptance and reification of Victorian gender norms. Throughout my interview and my time spent with Mary Ellen, I got the sense that she was uncomfortable regarding herself as feminine because of her discomfort with allowing outsiders to see her prosthesis. She, like many of the women I spoke with, conflated norms of traditional femininity with other versions of femininity

when she noted that she seldom wears skirts (and when she does, they are long) because she is self-conscious about her leg. In *The Rejected Body*, Susan Wendell argues that

Physical ‘imperfection’ is more likely to be thought to ‘spoil’ a woman than a man by rendering her unattractive in a culture where her physical appearance is a large component of a woman’s value; having a damaged leg probably evokes the metaphorical meanings of being ‘crippled,’ which include helplessness, dependency, and pitifulness. Stigma, stereotypes, and cultural meanings are all related and interactive in the cultural construction of disability. (43-44)

Mary Ellen’s discomfort wearing traditionally considered feminine clothing may stem, in part, from her attempt to negotiate her identity in a culture that stigmatizes her due to her disability. Riding sidesaddle gives Mary Ellen a way to transgress this stigma. Through her transgression she gains agency that was unavailable to earlier women who had no choice but to ride sidesaddle. Not only does Mary Ellen get to choose to ride sidesaddle but in making that choice, it appears to me that she escapes the “metaphorical meanings of being ‘crippled,’” and obtains freedom of movement and ability.

When I asked Mary Ellen to talk about how she views the world when she’s riding, she spoke about how riding (in general, not just sidesaddle) allows her to “be like everyone else.” She was emphatic as she stated,

That’s very important to me because, uhm, when I get on a horse, I am suddenly equal or better than the rest of the world. [pauses] I say “better” because I feel like I’m a really good rider and that I can accomplish things on horses that a lot of people can’t. So it’s like I go from being a disabled person to being a person with even more ability than somebody average. And, uh, when, when I get on a horse,

especially if I'm in the woods, I just feel like the weight of the world goes off my shoulders. ... I have the time to see ... details in things. Because when I'm walking, I'm concentrating on walking. ... I just don't get to see things and appreciate it because I'm making such an effort walking. But when I get on a horse, I just am totally free and everything. I can see every detail and notice how beautiful everything is.

Riding allows Mary Ellen a freedom of motility she otherwise cannot experience. Ironically, she finds this freedom even within the constraints of sidesaddle riding. Whereas Cleaveland sought to free herself from riding sidesaddle in order to escape repressive Victorian ideals of femininity, Mary Ellen appears to have turned to sidesaddle riding in order to discover the freedom of motility (as I've described above), the freedom from stigma associated with her disability, and also the freedom to perform traditional femininity, a performance that, admittedly, embarrasses her in other situations.

In choosing to ride sidesaddle, Mary Ellen gains the agency to perform traditional femininity by adorning herself in clothing that she would normally avoid so as to not expose her prosthesis and "out" her disability. Near the end of our interview, I asked Mary Ellen to describe a moment when she's ridden or trained horses in which she felt particularly feminine, or had a heightened awareness of her being a woman. She looked at her lap and her prosthesis, thought for a second, and then said,

Every time I rode sidesaddle. Because I always wore an apron even when I was trail riding. And it's probably the one thing I miss most about selling the sidesaddle. I sold it because it didn't fit Black Jack right. But, I loved riding sidesaddle because I felt really feminine. I loved it. It was a way that I could dress

up and not feel self-conscious that I was dressed really nice and I've got this stupid prosthetic leg. Because when I was on a horse, it didn't matter. Nobody knew. Nobody knows, you know? And, and I got to wear, you know, pretty outfits and stuff [laughs], and so, I, I always kind of dressed nicer when I rode sidesaddle because it made me feel feminine.

Here Mary Ellen describes her feeling that riding, in part, erases the stigma associated with her disability but she also describes how she is able to wear more traditionally feminine clothing, which, in turn makes her feel feminine. When Mary Ellen sits in her sidesaddle, she places her left leg in the saddle's stirrup and wraps her right (prosthetic) leg around the saddle's horn. Once her habit is properly arranged, her disability becomes hidden from other's view. Not only can others not see the hitch in her step (because the horse becomes her legs), she is also now able to perform the essence of feminine grace—through both her motility and her clothing, clothing in which she would be uncomfortable in most any other venue.

Certainly it is possible to view Mary Ellen's performance of the Victorian feminine ideal as hyper-feminine as I posited near the beginning of this section. As is evidenced by my own initial reactions to sidesaddle riding, it is a style that is often viewed as a restrictive, patriarchal, and misogynistic form of social restraint on women. When riding sidesaddle, unlike in any other riding style, traditional femininity is blatantly put on display and seldom critically critiqued. Had I dismissed Mary Ellen's performance of sidesaddle riding based upon my initial surface reaction as I was want to do, I would never have discovered the complexity of her performance of identity. At least in Mary Ellen's case, it seems to me that the traditional performance of femininity inherent to sidesaddle riding grants her agency in ways that might be unobtainable for her elsewhere. In this situational context, Mary Ellen can perform traditional femininity,

unselfconsciously, through her clothing, accoutrements and the freedom of motility the horse allows to her. It is to this freedom—the freedom of motility to which I turn in chapter four.

Return to Representations and Conclusion

I chose to begin this chapter with a close reading and analysis of gender as portrayed by Donna Howell-Sickles in her painting *Rubie, Ruth, and Neva Jo*. Initially my choice was governed by the simple fact that I was looking for a way into my writing. But through my writing, I've come to see a variety of ways in which the painting evokes the work I've attempted to do in my preceding discussion. Just like the women I interviewed, the women depicted in the painting wear clothing that incorporates more traditionally masculine attire alongside more traditionally feminine attire.

Susan Brownmiller writes the following of women donning men's clothing:

Some women have worn men's clothes to accomplish their work. Some women have worn men's clothes to indicate their temporary or permanent sexual attraction to other women. Some women have worn men's clothes to experience the power and freedom of being a man. Some women have worn men's clothes because they hated their female bodies. Some women have worn men's clothes because they looked so adorable in them. Some women have worn men's clothes because they sought an alternative to the confining clothes they were expected to wear, and expected to delight in, as women. (93-94)

Probably throughout history various horsewomen have worn men's clothes for all of the reasons Brownmiller states above. In this chapter, I illuminated the ways in which women have worn more traditionally-considered masculine clothing because of its functionality for their work with horses. I suspect that these same women also choose to wear more masculine (or should I simply

say, functional) clothing because it is less confining than what might otherwise be expected of them if they were to perform their identities as according to the expectations of traditional femininity.

But Howell-Sickles' painting reflects yet another layer of work I hope to have accomplished in this chapter. Representational art, like gender, is constructed, although art remains the construct of a particular artist (situated in culture) and gender remains a social construct. In the event of *Rubie, Ruth, and Neva Jo*, the artistic construction of gender operates on two levels. The first level reflects the mythological cowgirl with which contemporary horsewomen continue to contend. Throughout my dissertation I have delineated the pervasiveness of this myth, the corresponding Western myth, and the images they perpetuate. I, and the horsewomen I interviewed, all have an image of what a "cowgirl" looks like in our heads. This image stems from both the Western myth as well as the mythological cowgirl, as represented by artists, advertisers, and even historians.

In representing the mythos of the cowgirl, Howell-Sickles' reinforces yet another constructed myth—the beauty myth. As Peg Zeglin Brand writes in her introduction to *Beauty Matters*,

Feminist theorists have begun to view the female body as it has been depicted by male and female artists throughout recorded history as "contested territory"; their analysis of the portraiture of women artists highlights crucial links between issues of identity, sexuality, and empowerment. Furthermore, beauty has come to operate in new and unusual ways; under the influence of the fashion world, artists are now making "girlie art" that represents "the perfected image of what beautiful is." (3)

In *Rubie, Ruth and Neva Jo*, Howell-Sickles depicts three cowgirls. All three of the women appear to be white. All three of the women appear to fit social constructions of the feminine beauty ideal despite that they wear varying degrees of traditionally-considered masculine attire. To use Zeglin Brand's words, these cowgirls represent "the perfected image of what beautiful is." Perhaps these depicted women are able to wear masculine clothing because, as Brownmiller suggests, "they look so adorable in them." Furthermore, none of the women depicted appear dirty, sweaty, or physically sore. If the three women depicted represent what it is to be a cowgirl, then the painting illustrates a gap between actual horsewomen's experience and representations of how a horsewoman should look.

As Naomi Wolf argues throughout her book, *The Beauty Myth*, contemporary women have no choice but to contend with the beauty myth, which is promoted through advertising, artistic representations (such as Howell-Sickles' painting), television, and the cosmetic and diet industries. She writes that "the real issue has nothing to do with whether women wear makeup or don't, gain weight or lose it, have surgery or shun it, dress up or down, make our clothing and faces and bodies into works of art or ignore adornments altogether. *The real problem is our lack of choice*" (272). What Wolf perceives as a "lack of choice" may not be so simple. Images of beautiful women proliferate in our contemporary consumer culture, yet I do not feel the need to look like these women in order to feel pretty or feminine, especially when I am working in seclusion with my horses and not participating in culture at large. Neither Aristotle nor Noble cares whether I wear makeup, fix my hair, or wear masculine or feminine clothing when I spend time with them. With my horses I am able to escape cultural expectations regarding feminine beauty and, instead, perform a version of femininity based on internal and individual psychological and physical strength, as opposed to external appearance. Despite that many of the

horsewomen I interviewed argue that they are, indeed, not feminine, I suspect that this argument stems from their perception of femininity as defined by the beauty myth.

As I illustrated in chapter one, Tina conceives of a cowgirl as secure, free, and open. Relatedly, Judy suggests that femininity is being connected to the world and nature and not “fru-fru.” Furthermore, while the horsewomen typically reinforced traditional cultural norms of femininity as per our conversations, their actual performance of femininity did not adhere to these same norms. Most of the women I interviewed did not wear make-up during my entire stay with them. The one exception was Peggy, who put on make-up just before my starting to record our discussion—she felt that she needed to look “nice” for the camera. These women perform a femininity that both acknowledges and ignores the beauty myth. The myth plays a much greater importance to the women on special, notably public, occasions (such as Nancy’s date with her husband) than it does in their everyday, more private, routines. Our horses give to us a private realm in which we may choose to ignore, or in the case of side-saddle showing, to play up the beauty myth, in a safe environment, where we will not be judged for doing so, even when members of the public are present.

Perhaps there is something to be garnered from these distinctions between public and private performances of femininity amongst women in equine culture. To begin, members of the public who visit these women’s farms and stables are either already participants in the world of horses, or are outsiders. Insiders are familiar with the various styles of clothing appropriate for horse work; whereas, an outsider’s ability to judge a horsewoman’s attire is largely influenced by his or her ability to place the horsewomen in the appropriate cultural context. As I noted earlier, an outsider witnessing my English riding attire when I’m not surrounded by horses has little contextual currency from which to judge my “strange” clothing. On the farm, however, the

outsider gains the ability to place my English attire within the appropriate context, which allows for the clothes to represent me as a horsewoman, as opposed to “strange” or “eccentric.” Thus, the farm and the horses, in part allows women freedom from the beauty myth, largely because it places them in a context that is seemingly “appropriate” for a performance of identity that is less traditionally feminine. On the farms of these women, public and private performances of femininity for both self and other appear less conflicted than they might be in a larger cultural context.

In this chapter, I illustrated the ways in which the horsewomen and I offer a performance of femininity closer to that of traditional femininity through our adoption of clothing for special occasions. Still, just as the masculine clothing worn by the women depicted in Donna Howell-Sickle’ painting does not negate these women’s performance of femininity neither does the actual horsewomen’s adoption of more masculine clothing negate our performance as feminine subjects. Performing femininity is wrought with conflict. It seems to me that we are torn between performing femininity as according to social norms of beauty and external appearance and, at the same time, bucking the norms in favor of a performance of femininity that directly corresponds to our identities as horsewomen. In the next chapter, I move away from my discussion of clothing and beauty and into the realm of horsewomen training their horses. I explore the ways in which the women I interviewed and observed employ their bodies both as a tool for physical labor and as a tool to communicate with their horses through Natural Horsemanship. Further, I argue that Natural Horsemanship as a training style offers to women modalities bodily comportment that further complicate performances of traditional femininity.