Mediated gender relations in a mixed-gender sport
Representations of gender in equestrian sports during the Olympic games in 2012

**Purpose and research questions**
The purpose of the study is to analyse mediated gender relations in equestrian sports in two Swedish morning papers during the 2012 Olympic games. The study is focused on the following research questions:

1) How is gender constructed in media coverage of equestrian sports?

2) Do mediated gender constructions in coverage of equestrian sports, where women and men compete with and against each other, differ from other gender constructions in sports coverage?

**Background**
Thanks to government subsidies, equestrian sport is more widespread in Sweden than in many other countries. Horse riding is associated with girls and femininity on a “sports for all” and leisure level. Even though girls and women are in majority in equestrian sport, there are many male riders in the elite (Hedenborg, forthcoming). The Swedish Olympic equestrian team of 2012 consisted of six male riders and six female riders.

**Method**
The study is based on 45 articles from two different Swedish morning papers printed between July 27th and August 13th, 2012.

**Theory**
Butler’s theory of how society is based on a two-gender system, where differences between men and women are emphasised in order to uphold heterosexuality, is used to shed light on how gender differences are constructed. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity is used as well as Anderson’s contesting theory of an inclusive masculinity, in order to show how masculinity is constructed in the articles.

**Results**
The source material shows four main themes:

- "The silver medal(ist)s’ different values": a female medalist’s achievement is downplayed.
- "The rocker and the gentleman": two different ways of portraying masculinity.
- "The wretched heroine": what happens when a female rider embodies masculine qualities.
- "The choir of excuses": men’s failures are explained by reference to external factors, while female riders are blamed for their own failures (connected to psychology).

**Conclusion**
There are many contradictions in the media coverage of equestrian sports in the 2012 Olympic Games, and it seems that gender mixing in sport may disrupt the gender constructions usually seen in the media. Nonetheless, there are evident disparities in how masculinity and femininity are constructed.

The study will be published as an article in Sport in Society.

**References**
Hedenborg (forthcoming) "Svensk ridsport - 100 år." Svenska Ridsportförbundet