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Becoming horseboy(s) – human-horse relations and intersectionality in equiscapes

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ABSTRACT

Leisure studies have given scant regard to human-animal relations and intersectionality. In this paper, I respond to calls for research analysing leisure as a complex, multispecies phenomenon by exploring human-horse relations and intersectionality in boy's/men's equestrian stories through the concept of *intra-activity* and creative analytical writing. Thinking and writing through intra-activity brings insights into the co-constitution of humans and horses, as well as the entanglement of other power relations and social categories. The paper illustrates that becoming horseboy(s) is a process of material-discursive intra-activity where boys/men, by transcending the human-animal divide simultaneously transcend the female-male/masculine-feminine divide. Thus, engaging materially with horses can allow and encourage boys/men to be less constrained by dominant gender discourses. The paper also illustrates the importance of studying gender, not as a separate or primary category of privilege or inequality, but as one that is entangled with race, class, sexuality, age and other animals. I finally argue that bringing horses, as well as discourses, into discussions of the enactment of gender in leisure landscapes offers a productive site for elaborating the much-debated question, posed by feminist posthumanists, of the agency of matter.

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Something happens when I ask about the horses. Or when they speak about the horses themselves. Eyes that light up. Voices and bodies that soften. Warmth that trickles out between the lines. Affect. This is a dimension, maybe the only one, present in all interviews.

Field note 13/5 2012

In an earlier study, I interviewed 19 Swedish boys and men about their experiences of equestrian sports, a sport and leisure activity that in Sweden is heavily dominated by girls and women and commonly associated with 'girliness' (Hedenborg & Hedenborg White, 2012; Plymoth, 2012). One of the main conclusions was that participation in a female-coded leisure landscape, like equestrian sports, can open up for other, and less stereotypical, ways of being a man than participation in male-coded leisure landscapes (see Linghede, Larsson, & Redelius, 2015). By enacting that in equiscapes,¹ boys and men practice both masculine and feminine-coded positions, the *histories* challenged dominant discourses about men and women – how they are and what they like. Since I was interested in the construction of gender in boys and men's stories about equestrianism my analysis was guided by feminist poststructuralism, a theoretical framing

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that made me look for competing gender discourses and multiple positioning. However, already when thinking and writing the analysis, I felt that there was one aspect that I did not explore sufficiently: the relationship with the horses. As the field note above highlights, there was something with the horses, or the relationship with the horses, that seemed to *do* something with the boys and men. This was evident both during the interview sessions (in eyes, voices and body language) and when reading the interview transcripts. I started to think about how the relationship with another living being, like the horse, was involved in the construction of gender.

When later approaching posthumanist theorising and beginning to think with theorists like Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, I became even more curious to return to the interviews – now with a focus on the human-horse relation. Thinking with posthumanism means starting from the ontological assumption that humans are not separate, unified and autonomous subjects, but intimately entangled with other humans, animals, machines and the environment (Pyhtinen, 2016). To speak with Haraway (1991) our bodies and those of others do not end at the skin but are rather active in naturecultural entanglements where anything present is potentially agential. In the growing field of human-animal studies, researchers emphasise a need to move beyond anthropocentric studies and explore how human and non-human lives are entangled and co-constitute each other. When it comes to horse-human relations there are studies enacting how horses become agentic in the self-construction as horse and human conjointly make each other up (see, for example, Birke, Bryld, & Lykke, 2004; Brandt, 2004; Dashper, 2017; Game, 2001 and Maurstad & Davis, 2016), but as Maurstad and Davis (2016, p. 191) state ‘there is a need for research that focuses on practices, relations and processes in order to increase understanding about how humans and horses grow as biosocial becomings’. Little research has also, as Birke and Brandt (2009) and Finkel and Danby (2018) point out, addressed questions of how gender is enacted within human-horse relationships.

Thinking back on the earlier interviews I also realise that I did not consider that the boys’ and men’s stories not only came from localisations marked and affected by gender and sexuality, but also by race, class, ethnicity and other matters. As intersectional researchers rightfully have pointed out, this analytical insensitivity to the entanglement of multiple categories and power structures has been symptomatic of gender studies in most disciplines (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008). Leisure and sport studies are no exception and as Watson and Scraton (2013, p. 36) argue, ‘thinking intersectionality is a useful means of analysing leisure as a dynamic interplay of individual expression and the social relations within which leisure occurs’. In retrospect, I can see that thinking through an intersectional lens, including more categories than gender and sexuality, would enrich my analysis, make it more complex.

Responding to calls for research exploring leisure as a complex, multispecies and intersectional phenomenon, I am, in this paper, doing a rereading of my earlier interviews. In this rereading or extended analysis, I explore both the human-horse relation and intersectional categories such as class, ethnicity/race and age. To my help, I ‘plug in’ Karen Barad’s concept of intra-activity and use creative analytical writing as a method of inquiry. The paper is structured in three main parts. First, I introduce the concept of intra-activity and its methodological implications. Secondly, I illustrate how I have used dialogue as a method of inquiry. I then present the analysis in the form of two dialogues, or scenes, combined with more explicitly theoretical readings. Finally, I discuss how an exploration of human-horse relations and intersectionality as intra-action can contribute to the field of (gender) leisure studies.

Intra-action

Drawing on the works of among others Foucault and Butler, the philosopher and quantum physicist Karen Barad proposes a posthumanist notion of performativity – one that incorporates important material *and* discursive, human *and* non-human, and natural *and* cultural factors. For her, a posthumanist account ‘calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of

“human” and “non-human” examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized’ (Barad, 2003, p. 808). Barad uses the term material-discursive intra-activity as a way of crossing boundaries between nature and culture, non-humans and humans, and to enact how matter and meaning are always already co-constituted. The notion of *intra-action* (in contrast to the more common *interaction*) marks that it is not a question of interplay between independent and autonomous entities that meet but part unchanged, but rather of entanglements of inseparable entities in mutual transformation (Barad, 2003, p. 815). Referring to these entities as *relata*, Barad states that ‘*relata* do not pre-exist relations; rather *relata*-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions’ (Barad, 2007, p. 140). The point is thus not merely that there are important material factors, for example, other animals, bacteria and hormones, in addition to discursive ones, rather, the issue is the co-joint material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions and practices (Barad, 2003, p. 823). Haraway (2008, p. 17) applies this thinking to human-animal relations, stating that ‘The partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with: those are the mantras of companion beings’. Hence, as partners that intra-act, both horses and humans change by engaging with each other. To explore the construction of gender in boys’ and men’s stories about equestrianism without considering how the horses are co-implicated in the formation of and enactment of gender, is, to speak with Barad (2003, p. 810), to cheat the horses out of the fullness of their capacity.

Intersectionality as intra-action

To explore how gender is enacted in human-horse relations one must also be attentive to other intra-acting dimensions, for example, how gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age and other matters are intertwined in and constitute each other. In kinship with Lykke (2010), I find it useful to think about intersectionality in terms of intra-action. One of the things which has been contested within an intersectional tradition is, namely, the usefulness of the very concept of intersectionality (Ken, 2007). Based on the metaphor of ‘intersection’, it implies that different roads cross at specific points but are otherwise unrelated. This is problematic if you hold the view, which most gender researchers do, that an intersectional perspective means conceptualising different categories and power dimensions as constitutive in the sense that they are not separate but entangled and mutually transformative (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Davis, 2008).

Thinking and writing with theory as methodology

From a Baradian perspective, we as researchers, do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world. Every I/Eye come from somewhere and it matters where we *site* and how we *sight* when we sense, analyse and (re)present the world; we are *of* the world, a part of its lively and ongoing intra-activity (Barad, 2003). Our ways of telling and naming (wording) is to create a world with material consequences (worlding) – for which we are responsible. Barad’s onto-epistemology – where the observed object and the observer are not separated, but entangled – affects how qualitative researchers can engage with the world and has contributed to methodological reinventions, rethinkings and revisions of qualitative research practices. According to Giardina (2017, p. 265), such postqualitative practices are characterised by a turn towards thinking about ourselves more as entangled philosophers of inquiry rather than as researchers using fixed methods to gather data. What makes such ‘thinking with theory’ different from more traditional qualitative methods is that theory drives the methods and shapes how data and transcripts are produced, how one intra-acts with data and how one writes research (Kuby et al., 2015, p. 142). Writing is not something that happens after thinking and analysing but an intra-active part of research practice. To cite Richardson & Adams St. Pierre (2005), writing is a ‘method of inquiry’.

In this paper, I think and write with Barad’s concept of intra-activity. By using creative analytic writing, like dialogues and poetic pieces, I break with the depersonalised, decontextualised and

bodiless writing style that is characteristic of traditional academic writing. I engender a position for experiencing myself as an intra-active sociological knower/constructor – not just talking about it, but doing it (Richardsson, 1992, p. 136). Creative analytical writing makes visible the intra-actions between the researcher and the researched and thus provides a way to expose and contest the constructedness of all writing. Even when research findings are represented in a more realist way, it is the researcher who chooses which quotations to exclude or include and give weight – in other words, which research story to tell (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005; Sparkes, Nilges, Swan, & Dowling, 2003).

Dialogue as a method of inquiry

By using dialogue as a method of inquiry I join a growing number of social science and leisure/sport researchers who make use of creative analytical writing to analyse and sensuously (re)present data that is already emotional, compelling and ambiguous and to evoke an empathic understanding with otherness (see for example Barker-Ruchti, 2008; Berbary & Johnson, 2012; Dowling, Garrett, Lisahunter, & Wrench, 2015; Sparkes, 1997; Sparkes et al., 2003). Starting from a premise of proximity rather than distance and recognising the role emotions play in our understanding of social phenomena, creative analytic practices like storytelling, poetry and dialogue can help us engage in and create other knowledge-worlds in a way that normative social scientific knowledge-making is less able to do (Dahl, 2012, p. 152; Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005).

Interviews

The two dialogues in this paper are situated in the stories of 19 Swedish boys/men, between the ages of 13 and 55, who I interviewed about their experiences of equestrian sports in 2012. The boys/men were active on different levels and in different disciplines connected to the Swedish Equestrian Sports Federation. About half were competitive riders, some on the elite level, and about half were ‘stableguys’ who just liked to ride and hang around with the horses. Among the competitive riders, the disciplines show jumping, dressage, eventing, gymkhana, horse driving and endurance riding were represented. Ten of the interviewees were recruited through a list of names produced by the Swedish Equestrian Sports Federation and nine were recruited by going through lists on national team riders and members in local youth sections. In the selection of persons to contact I strived to get a variation regarding age, discipline, level and geographic residence. Of the boys/men, I finally interviewed all but one was white. No question was explicitly asked regarding sexual orientation, but several of the boys/men came out as straight during the interviews. One of the interviewees lived openly as gay. During the interviews, it also emerged that there were differences in class background.

The interview questions revolved around their way into equestrian sports, their experiences of equestrianism, treatment from others and views on women, men and equality. In line with the theory, I understand the boys’ and men’s’ interview statements and stories as articulations of material-discursive constraints, conditions and practices, not as representations of essential subjects and experiences. Furthermore, the interviews were produced in intra-action with me, which means that I have to take my own location as a white, middle-class and female researcher seriously. Inhabiting categories such as ‘white’ and ‘middle class’ I run the risk of not paying enough attention to issues concerning, for example, race and class (Mohanty, 1988) – but also the responsibility for doing so (Lorde, 1984). Although I cannot give a full and final answer to the question of how my particular location influenced the knowledge production, I felt that differences and similarities in gender, age, and class – but also the fact that I was a researcher – mattered during the interviews. Sometimes I got the impression that the boys/men wanted to establish a good report with me as a woman (and gender scholar) by associating with positive attitudes about women and sometimes I felt that they, on the contrary, felt a need to underline ‘macho’ attitudes. I also think that they might have found it easier to

discuss things like fears, feelings and fags with me as a female researcher. Some of the boys/men were inhibited by the interview situation and seemed to find it difficult to speak with a researcher in a relaxed manner. Perhaps this resembled the tension I felt when interviewing elite riders and boys/men with distinct ‘macho’ manners. The process of interviewing was, as always, played out in a complex web of power relations where the interview questions also contributed to a certain doing of gender. Presenting the analysis in dialogical form is a way of making my intra-actions with the interviewees, as well as with the transcribed interviews, visible.

Writing dialogues

The interview transcriptions were read and re-read with my eyes, ears and other senses on human-horse relations and intersectionality. Informed and inspired by the interview stories (as well as my bodily memories of the interview sessions) I then engendered a playwright/storyteller position from which I created two ‘scenes’, that could hold the identified intra-actions and display a contextual meaning (see Linghede et al., 2015 for a more thorough illustration of the process of transforming interviews into literary pieces). Based on the interview material, I created two dialogues written as an ongoing conversation between me and six characters (Adam, Bobby, Carl, Daniel, Eric and Filip), on a fictive thematic day about boys and equestrian sports. In the dialogues, and through the characters, a passionate venue was created between me and the interviewees, a meeting point where they and I, by reciprocity, got voice and body. To put it differently, the six characters you meet in the dialogues are created in intra-actions with theory, the interview material, and my imagination and knowledge of the field. Adam, Bobby, Carl, Daniel, Eric and Filip make visible ideas and thoughts rather than persons and show experiences and perspectives in a way that hopefully will reverberate with the reader not only as information, but also as emotions and desire. To highlight some theoretical ideas, I have also interwoven short, poetic vignettes in the dialogues.

Reading dialogues

Although the dialogues are both analytical and able to speak for themselves, I have chosen to include a more explicitly theoretical reading/discussion of them. In this reading, I follow and discuss some of the analytical threads enacted in the dialogues. However, I also want to invite readers to engage in meaning making from their own *sitings* and *sightings* – and potentially conspire to move beyond these. I thus want to open up for readings other and more than mine.

Scene 1: horseboy intra-actions

We’re sitting in a conference room in a hotel in Stockholm, talking about horses and equestrian sports. Me and six boys/men. My colleague is in the room next door talking to seven others. They are all invited to the Swedish Equestrian Sports Federation’s thematic day on ‘boys and equestrian sports’. This morning conversations in focus groups is on the schedule. We’ve just been talking about their ‘way into’ equestrian sports and soon it’s time for a coffee break.

Me: What would you say is the best thing about equestrian sports? What do you say Eric?

Eric: It’s got to be all the girls! (*giggles*) No, to be honest, the atmosphere in the stable is MAGICAL. As soon as you get there it’s like being in a different world. And the combination, the social aspect and the horses, the two most atmospheric things I know, and in the stable, I get them both.

Adam: For me it’s the horses. Horses are AMAZING animals! After loving all the cute things about them, they just become more and more interesting. I can sit and look at them for hours.

And when you've known a horse for a long time, it becomes incredibly personal. It becomes a close, close friend. You can sense when it feels good, when it's happy, what it needs.

Eric: Yeah... horses are really special. They're silent friends who listen, and who love you for who you are. If you have a problem, you go to the stable and talk to a horse, bury your face in its mane. It just stands there, puts its head on your shoulder, maybe neighs. Then it's impossible not to get into a good mood.

Adam: The actual riding is also fantastic. The flow, the feeling when it's going well, when everything just works. You're so in it, you don't think about yourself anymore, just about what you're doing right then and at the same time, instinctively, about what the horse is doing and how you're working together. Where does the horse end and I begin? When you really manage it it's GREAT! When you manage to think a thought through your body which is expressed by the horse and then you respond to that. But it can also be frustrating, when it doesn't work...

Carl: Yeah... but for me, I got hooked when I understood that it was about interaction and communication with the horse. I also played soccer and hockey before and then it was just me. If I ran faster and shot harder, I was better. But here that's not enough, you have to get the horse to work with you too.

I THINK about how their eyes light up. About the warmth in their voices. The softness. The humility. I think about the horses that DO something. The intra-action with the horses. Which shapes. Reshapes. Becoming with the horses. Becoming horseboy.

Eric: Ok, so I've never played soccer. I'm allergic to balls (*giggles*), but a horse is definitely not a ball that you kick around and then put back in the cupboard when you're done. Or buy a new one if it breaks. It's more like a family member.

Bobby: Yeah, my old horse, Bilbo, he had SO many feelings, he was like a human. He taught me that you can't just hop onto the horse and ride. You have to build a relationship first. And at the same time, that's what makes it so hard if a horse has to be sold or gets hurt or has to be put down. It's so damn hard.

Filip: It's awful. I don't know if you've seen that movie War Horse? I saw it the other day and cried my eyes out. It portrays the relationship between a horse and a human in such a beautiful way. Just the way it is, you pour in your whole soul, and when you see your old horse again and you recognise each other, that feeling, it never goes away...

Daniel: I think that's the reason I stopped riding for a while. I didn't have the energy to start again. But then I found a horse that was neglected, not my type at all actually, and too small also. But I couldn't just leave it there, so I bought it even though I didn't even have a place in a stable for it! I worked my ass off just to make it work. I mean, that shows what kind of commitment it's about.

Carl: But all that time that you spend on the horses, I think it teaches you a lot too. Being responsible for another being, making sure that it's well and has everything it needs. You always have this animal that needs food at certain times and that needs to be ridden and taken care of, you can't just ignore that.

Daniel: And maybe a horse suddenly gets colic and you have to walk with it for four hours. Then you can't just put it back after an hour and say that it's fine because you have to go home and do something else. You'll just have to change your plans.

I THINK about all the emotions. About the care. And sorrow. I think about the horses that DO something. The intra-action with the horses. Which shapes. Reshapes. Becoming with the horses. Becoming horseboy.

Me: It's interesting to listen to your conversation in relation to some studies that I've read. Because in those I've read that these aspects, caring for the horses, grooming them and cuddling with them, is something that mostly girls and women appreciate and spend

time on. But I see you light up, and there's such warmth and passion in your voices when you talk about your relationship with the horses, and your closeness to them. What do you think about that?

Carl: Ok, well, it's like this. The interaction with the horses is amazing. There's nothing that can beat the feeling when you and the horse really find each other. The freedom when you ride. But when I was young I didn't enjoy hanging out in the stable at all. I mean, brushing the horse until it shines and competing in grooming competitions, what guy likes that? But then you have to take care of the horse in order for it to feel good and not chafe and stuff like that, but that's different.

Eric: But I love taking care of the horses and cuddling with them! (*blushes*) AND competing in grooming competitions. The first thing I do when I get to the stable is to go to the horse that I'm the carer for and give him some extra attention, check how he's doing and stuff like that.

Carl: Ok (*nervous laughter*). Yeah, maybe I shouldn't speak on behalf of all guys. But honestly, I think MOST guys would agree with me.

Adam: Damn, you're brave Erik. I wouldn't have dared to say that when I was 14 years old. Even if I felt the same way. And still do.

Bobby: For me it depends. I mean, of course I cuddle with them, but I think that if you want to get something done, then it's all about serious training. But when you get to the paddock in the morning and they're all sleeping, and their bellies are their highest point, then you just want to go out and sit with them and cuddle. It's super cosy.

Daniel: One thing doesn't have to exclude the other, does it? But also, horses are big animals. I mean, it takes a certain psyche to handle a 600 kg horse. But it's a really powerful feeling when you feel that you can handle a stallion at Flyinge, that you can lead it back and forth to the stallion pen.

Bobby: In that way it's a bit weird that equestrian sport is seen as a girl's sport. Handling horses is hard work, and it's a tough and pretty dangerous sport.

Carl: Yeah, I've broken both arms and legs, and my nose (*laughter*). I've definitely gotten more injuries riding than playing soccer or ice-hockey, that's for sure.

Eric: Also, if you look at pictures from the First World War for example, then the only people who were riding were men, and it was very 'macho'. Imagine... it was these big sweaty soldiers who were grooming the horses and scraping their hooves.

Filip: I mean, yeah, sure you have to be determined and strong. But at the same time, you need empathy to deal with animals. You have to be able to relate to how the animal acts and feels, otherwise you can't cooperate. And empathy isn't usually associated with masculinity and high levels of testosterone (*laughter*). In some way I think that matters, that you need to be responsive and take the horse into consideration, you can't just steamroll over it.

Daniel: And you also have to be able to let go of some control. Otherwise there's no interplay. Maybe you don't have to 'surrender to the animal' like some people say, but you have to be able to let go, release some control. I think some guys are a bit afraid of that.

Carl: Speaking of control, weren't we supposed to have a coffee break at 10? It's five minutes past now and I'm really craving for coffee.

I THINK about norms. About gender norms. I think about the horses that DO something. The interaction with the horses. And the norms. Which shape. Reshape. Becoming with the horses. And discourses. Becoming horseboy.

A reading

A common thread running through the dialogue is that the boys/men relate to dominant gender discourses. They know that equestrian sport is considered a 'girls sport' and that as boys/men,

they are expected to be strong, brave, controlled, rational, competitive, and attracted to girls/women. Another, and entangled, thread is the close, mutual and intensely physical human-horse partnership that has evolved over the years they have engaged in horse care, riding and training. To speak with Birke et al. (2004), what characterises the human-horse relationships is that both horse and human must learn how to participate in a co-joint world where neither horse nor human emerges as a pre-existing category but as something produced by their co-joint actions. Thus, to explore how gender is performed in equiscapes one must include the actions of the horse. Humans and horses are engaged in a kind of choreography in which gender becomes an accomplishment of both horse and human. In this paper, which is based on interviews, I focus on the becoming of boys/men in intra-action with horses. However, it would be equally interesting to explore the (gendered) becoming of horses in intra-actions with humans.

Taking a closer look at some of the intra-actions, focusing on what the horses do, the boys/men in the dialogue describe that engaging with horses, when riding and when on the ground, allow, encourage, influence and render possible a set of human actions. On the one hand, they have to be(come) tough, capable and determined, features that are usually associated with masculinity. On the other hand, and perhaps above all, they have to be(come) communicative, sensitive, responsive, emphatic and caring, features that are more associated with femininity. For the boys/men figuring in the dialogue horses are both soulmates and bodymates, and as Filip puts it, such emotional and emphatic relations are not directly associated with 'high levels of testosterone'. To explore this intra-action further, the practices of training, learning to ride, riding with and being in the company of horses comprises a form of embodied mutuality where non-verbal forms of communication are at the centre. When handling horses on the ground, body language and touch are essential parts of the human-horse communication. To speak with Sedgewick 'touch ramifies and shapes accountability. Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having to truck with each other'. Furthermore, touch increases the level of oxytocin (a hormone connected to a sense of calm, decreased anxiety, protection against stress, increased trust, and empathy) in both humans and other animals (Kuchinkas, 2009). The two bodies of human and horse are thus, through touch, intra-acting down to the level of molecules.

Moving on to riding, body-to-body communication is at the heart of interaction (Dashper, 2017, p. 31). As Adam points out, riding is a process that requires extreme sensitivity on the part of both rider and horse. Game (2001) describes the mutually transformative process of riding as 'embodying the centaur' and Dashper (2017, pp. 70–90) employs the notion of 'feel' to explore the shared sensorial communication that shapes and reshapes both horse and rider. Here I want to chime in that I view the human-horse relation as mutual, but not equal. I thus agree on the importance of paying attention to the unequal power structures structuring the human-horse relation (as well as relations between humans). However, I also believe that highlighting the agency of the horse, and to turn from dualism to intra-action, is an affirmative way of questioning the same power differences.

I argue that the dialogue illustrates that becoming horseboy is a process of material-discursive intra-activity where engaging materially with horses allow and encourage boys/men to be less constrained by dominant gender discourses. In other words, by transcending the human-animal divide, the boys/men simultaneously transcend the idea of a female-male or masculine-feminine divide. Others have shown that the same could be said for girls and women. Since horse care, training and riding allow and require girls/women to be tough, competent, strong, capable and not mind getting dirty it creates and provides opportunities for them to challenge normative gender ideals too (Birke & Brandt, 2009; Dashper, 2016; Finkel & Danby, 2018).

Scene 2: intersectionality as intra-action

We've fetched coffee and sit down by one of the round tables in the lobby outside the conference room. The intimate atmosphere that arose when we talked about the horses suddenly feels far away.

The conversation is slow now that there aren't any specific questions to talk about. I decide that it's time to start with the next area of questions.

Me: But what's it been like to be a guy in such a predominantly female sport?

Eric: Very positive (*smiles*). I mean, people are always so happy when there's a guy, since there's so few of us. I get a lot of extra attention in the stables, and maybe some extra perks too (*laughs*). And since I'm not socially afraid, I get a lot of cool opportunities.

I see that several of the others nod in agreement

Carl: Now, I'm a very competitive person, but I think that the fact that I got a lot of positive feedback in the beginning also had an impact. I had a really good riding instructor who appreciated that there were guys and gave some extra support.

Bobby: As a guy you automatically become that red piece of paper in a pile of white papers. That's definitely an advantage. I mean, if you win all the time maybe it doesn't matter, then people know who you are no matter if you're a guy or a girl. But otherwise you pay a bit more attention to that guy in the field, since he's one out of thirty. I definitely think that I've gotten the opportunity to ride as many horses as I have because I'm a guy. People have heard of you, seen you in competitions, and then they come up and talk to you...

Me: So, WITHIN equestrian sports it's mainly positive to be a guy? Or are there any negative aspects?

Filip: Well, it can add pressure too. To be that red piece of paper that Bobby talked about. If you screw up too many times you become a neon-colored paper, and that's just uncomfortable to watch. (*laughter*)

Adam: I think you can get TOO much attention. The instructors that I had in the beginning gave me more feedback during the lessons than they gave to the girls in the group, which made the girls sad and annoyed. In the end I had to tell them that I didn't want any special treatment.

Daniel: The only negative thing I can think of is that I got a bit put down by the girls in the stables sometimes. They were on me and said I wasn't doing things right when I was grooming and stuff... But on the other hand, that became an incentive when I started competing. I wanted to prove that I was good at something. Generally, I think that if you're a guy and you show that you're talented, you get noticed for that. At least if you are into dressage or show jumping, which is most common. In other disciplines, like in racing, it might be different...

I think about norms. Gender norms. I think about the fact that horsegirls and horseboys BECOME different. Are made different. In intra-actions with people and horses. Becoming with discourses. And horses. Becoming horseboy(s).

Me: What's it been like outside the sport? In school and other contexts?

Daniel: In school it wasn't exactly great. I was pretty bullied. Especially in elementary school and junior high.

Adam: I'm from a small town and have always attended schools with a lot of 'sports divas', soccer guys, and they're the worst. The only thing that got me through it was the fact that I knew that the shit would end at two or three in the afternoon. When I went to the stables. To the horses and my friends there.

Me: So, what could people say to you in school?

Adam: For example, they used to neigh when I walked past, or ask where I had my riding pants. And they used to call me things like 'horseboy', 'girl' and 'horse fag'. Stuff like that.

Everyone except Eric nods in agreement. He looks surprised.

- Adam:** When I started high school, I didn't tell anyone I did horse riding until after a whole year. I just couldn't handle it. And then they were like, 'but you're a normal person!'. They got to see that you could be into horses and still be a normal guy.
- Me:** And what's a normal guy like?
- Adam:** Wow, I sounded really prejudiced when I said that. Well... eh... not gay then. That's what people think, I mean. That guys who do horse riding are gay.
- Filip:** Yeah, I got called fag when I was just eight years old. But I didn't become one until I was a teenager.
- Eric:** I've almost never been teased because I do horse riding. My classmates think it's cool. At least as far as I know.
- Bobby:** It's like that for me too. NOWDAYS. But I got harassed and teased all the time until people found out that I'd won the national championships. That was sometime in junior high school I think. Then it was like the guys suddenly realised that I wasn't just doing something silly. Now I almost think they're a bit jealous of me. Especially since I get to hang out with so many good-looking girls (*blushes*).
- Carl:** Hey, if your classmates think it's cool Eric, I congratulate you. But I wonder what kind of school you actually go to? (*rolls his eyes and smiles*) For me it didn't change until my twenties. Then all of a sudden, a lot of people were like 'Damn, that's cool. I wish I would have tried that'. But before that you'd pretty much have to hold a gun to my head to get me to confess to doing horse riding, even though I was competing successfully from the age of 15. I grew up in Biskopsgården² and if you told people there that you did horse riding, maybe especially if you're black, you'd get your ass kicked. I even stopped riding for two years when I was 12 because I didn't want to be a geek.
- Filip:** Yeah, something happens when you get older. If that's any comfort. I was at a party last weekend, with a bunch of new people, and they couldn't stop talking about horses (*laugher*). They were SO interested and fascinated. Both the guys and the girls.

I THINK about Eric's well-fitting shirt and briefcase. About his self-evident way of taking place, talk and move. 14 years old and SO self-evident. I think about Carl smiling ironically and rolling his eyes when asking what kind of school Eric goes to. I think about Carl's macho-manners. How he stresses that boys and girls are different and how he downplays what is 'girly'. I think about class, skin-color, and ethnicity. I think about age, gender, and sexuality. I think about intersectionality as intra-action.

- Me:** The fact that you get called gay, why do think that is?
- Adam:** I think it's because a lot of people think that horse riding is a girl's sport, and if you're a guy who does horse riding then you must be a bit girly, and therefore gay. Or very rich. So, either gay or a snob.
- Carl:** But it's also not completely wrong. There are quite a lot of gay guys in equestrian sports. I'm not sure why. In a way it's a very tolerant and open sport. At least I've never heard that anyone cares that there are a lot of gay people.
- Adam:** I think it's easier to be open since there are so many girls. It's not a macho-sport, like soccer or hockey.
- Daniel:** I don't think I'd known as many gay people if I hadn't been a riding instructor. But this thing that people think you're gay if you do horse riding, I mean since I'm... No, never mind, I'm just making it complicated.
- Me:** No, go on, since you...?
- Daniel:** Well, since I'm not gay myself I've always had this kind of uncomfortable feeling that people are going to treat me like something I'm not (*draws breath*)... I mean like I'm gay. And that's kind of stuck with me. I think it's a bit uncomfortable to see stuff on TV about gay people and stuff like that.

Carl: Wow, for me it's the complete opposite. I think I would've had more prejudices if I hadn't done horse riding. Also, it's a really good environment for us who don't swing that way, because of all the girls (*laughter*).

Filip: I don't agree that it's easy to be openly gay in equestrian sports. I only felt that I could be completely open when I wasn't competing on an elite level anymore. Now, I haven't got anything to lose anymore. I don't need anyone's approval. But I still have the feeling that people think my openness is provocative. On the other hand, that's hard to know because no one says anything to your face. And I've actually thought a lot about this. Why is it hard to be open in a sport that's seen as a gay-sport? And Daniel, I don't think you're the only one who feels like you do. Unfortunately. And that's kind of the thing. Since people think that if you're a guy who does horse riding, you're gay, it becomes extra important to show that you're not. And that's really sad. Cause what does that say about what you think about gay men.

I THINK about gender and sexuality norms. About how they intra-act with each other and Other. Norms. I think about the word or. About Adam saying that if you are a gay who do horseriding people think you are either gay or snob. Imagining that you could be both seems too difficult. I think about intersectionality as intra-action. And about becoming(s). With horses and discourses.

A reading

For me, to think intersectionality is to momentarily disentangle a complex knot of intertwined power relations and social categories. Since different power relations and social categories are actualised in different situations, the boys/men figuring in the dialogue are responding to a meshwork of intra-acting discourses – as well as to the horses. Starting off in the entanglement of gender and sexuality discourses, the boys and men figuring in the dialogue enact that engaging in a leisure activity considered feminine or girly, you run the risk of getting your (hetero)sexuality questioned. One way of handling this is to emphasise masculinity – especially heterosexuality – to show that you, after all, are a normal guy. As Filip, who lives openly as gay, puts it: *Since people think that if you're a guy who does horse riding, you're gay, it becomes extra important to show that you're not.* In my reading the fag becomes a border agent – a stereotype that both restricts and allows (after all, he offers a thinkable position to inhabit), but above all makes visible a heteronormative order in which gender and sexuality norms are deeply intertwined.

Gender and sexuality were the categories I, inspired by feminist poststructuralist and queer theory, focused on in the initial study; a theoretical siting that may, in turn, have been chosen because of my intersectional location as a white, middle-class woman living as a lesbian. This is not to say that exploring the entanglement of gender and sexuality is not relevant. In kinship with Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005), I argue that having partial knowledge is still knowing. However, adopting an analytical multi-sensitivity, taking into account that people, including myself, come from localisation also marked by race/ethnicity, class and age, extends the analysis, make it more complex. To speak with Davis (2008., p. 77) 'with new intersections, new connections emerge, and previously hidden exclusions come to light'.

Returning to the dialogue and the resistance the boys/men have met outside equestrianism, because of them engaging in a 'girly' or 'gay' sport, their experiences differ somewhat. For example, Eric, whose clothes and manners signal upper-class, stand out by saying that his classmates have never teased him, but rather think it is cool that he is doing horse riding, while Carl, who is black and has grown up in a socio-economically deprived area, just could not confess he was doing horse riding since it was the same as getting your ass kicked. For Adam, who lives in a small town and has gone to school with a lot of 'sport divas' it was tough in school, although he found a resting place among the girls and horses in the stable. Thinking about these differences through an intersectional lens, I argue that they enact how class, race/ethnicity and context intra-

act with gender (and sexuality) norms. The expectations on how to live and act as a boy/man differ depending on your intersectional location. Due to the historical connections between equestrian sports and the upper-class (Dashper, 2017, p. 7), it is probably more accepted (and sometimes even expected) to engage in horse riding if you are a boy born and bred in an upper-class environment. This could help explain Eric's unilaterally positive experiences. I also read Carl's ironic smile and the rolling of his eyes when asking what kind of school Eric goes to, as a hint towards this upper-class background. In turn, Adam's and Carl's statements could be read as expressions of their upbringing in sporting and working-class environments. These are contexts that often are characterised by a hegemonic masculinity ideal, where approaching female-coded practices are heavily sanctioned (Messner, 1995; Willis, 1977). Also, Berggren (2013) illustrates that in male resistance against racialisation, stereotypical discourses on gender and sexuality are often drawn on. While combating racism, the norm that masculinity consists of heterosexuality, distancing from the feminine and none cowardness is reproduced and reinforced. Thus, a possible reading of Carl's macho-manners and downplaying of grooming and cuddling with horses is that it has to do with his intersectional location as a black man brought up in a deprived area engaged in horse riding. However, apart from Carl quickly mentioning that he is black, race or skin-colour is not, unlike, for example, gender and sexuality, explicitly discussed in the dialogues (neither by me nor the boys/men). This is a silence that enacts how whiteness is taken for granted and how the absence of bodies of colour does not give rise to feelings loss or lack in white contexts (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983).

The boys/men in the dialogue also enact that gender intra-acts with age. Doing horse riding is problematic for boys in their teens, but as they grow older and gender expectations change, it rather gives them appreciation. Furthermore, I argue that thinking through an intersectional lens, it is also important to take the local context into account. Regardless of your position in an intersectional web, you can be privileged in one local context and disadvantaged in another. For example, the boys/men in the dialogue describe that they have met a lot of resistance *outside* equestrian sports. However, *within* equestrianism, they have mainly had a privileged position.

My reading of the dialogue thus illustrates the importance of studying gender, not as a separate or primary category of privilege or inequality, but as one that is entangled with race, class, sexuality, age and local context – and other animals. These categories cannot be added or subtracted from each other at will but are mutually constitutive.

Discussion

Leisure studies have given scant regard to human-animal relations and intersectionality. By exploring human-horse relations and intersectionality in leisure *as intra-action* this paper brings insights into the co-constitution of humans and animals and various other power relations and social categories. In the paper, I illustrate how human-horse engagements are meshworks; complex interweaved series of intra-action that shapes and reshapes both humans and horses. The shift from interaction to intra-action accomplish a move from states of being where subjects and things are discrete with given essences to movement, relations and processes where subjectivities are not fixed, but develop and take shape through multispecies and multicategorical encounters. The notion of intra-activity is thus a way of challenging the separation of humans from animals, nature from culture, material from discursive, male from female, researcher from researched and theory from method; dualisms that from a posthumanist onto-epistemological stance is a remnant from anthropocentric Enlightenment ideas (Barad, 2003). As the dialogues in this paper enact, becoming horseboy(s) is a complex, multispecies and intersectional process in which a transcendence of the human-animal divide simultaneously allows and encourages a transcendence of the female-male/masculine-feminine divide.

I also argue, that bringing horses (as well as discourses) into discussions of gender performativity in leisure offers a productive site for elaborating the much-debated question, posed by

feminist posthumanists, of the agency of matter (see, for example, Barad, 2003, 2007; Grosz, 1994; Haraway, 1991). As Barad puts it, ‘any robust theory of the materialization of bodies would necessarily take account of how the body’s materiality – for example, its anatomy and physiology – and other material forces actively matter to the processes of materialization’ (2003, p. 809). In kinship with Birke et al. (2004), I argue that since animals are less easily discarded than human bodies and non-living matter as agents in their own right, they might offer a productive entrance into the discussions about how matter matters – or rather how matter and meaning are always already co-constituted.

Notes

1. Finkel and Danby (2018) describe equiscapes as a horse-focused leisure landscape where interconnectedness, emotional exchange and cross-species communication are encouraged. Hence, boundaries between human bodies and horses become blurred and entangled.
2. Biskopsgården is a socio-economically deprived area in Gothenburg.

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