



TURNING HORSEPOWER INTO GIRL POWER

A study of how women utilize leadership skills
learned at the stable

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Abstract

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Keyword: Stereotype, gender, gender barriers, leadership, navigation, agency, stereotype threat

Purpose: This study aims to explore how equestrian experience influence women in leading and management positions in organizational settings. As well as studying if leadership training at a young age at the stable be linked to how women navigate their careers.

Theory: The theoretical framework for this study is based on the following theoretical concepts. Firstly “doing gender” is used to show how gender is rather undone at the stable, secondly the “undoing” of gender gives rise to agency that helps women challenge gender stereotypes and overcome stereotype threat. Lastly social navigation is used to show how women navigate their careers by defying the female stereotype.

Method: The study has been conducted by using qualitative research design with semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Result: Results confirm that the process of undoing gender, previously studied by (Forsberg, 2012) happens at stable where girls shed the typical female stereotype that display communal leadership behaviour and take on a role as the “horse girl” The “horse girl” stereotype is empowering and encourages taking the lead and being direct in a way that creates self-efficiency and a sense of competence, which are trait typically associated as male characteristics. By having agency identity safety is created and can in turn be a tool when defying stereotype threats as well as navigating career wise. Girls in the stable come in contact with leadership as well as the art of navigation at an early age and this study shows that the skills are brought forth in to their careers.

Foreword

I would like to thank all of my respondents for taking their time to enthusiastically share their experiences from the stable as well as their careers, without you it would not have been possible to complete this study. I would also like to thank my supervisor Nanna Gillberg for valuable input, advice and support. Lastly, I would like to thank my family for supporting me through endless hours of reading and writing.

Thank you all!

Table of content

Introduction	1
Disposition.....	2
Background.....	2
Female leaders in the Swedish Labour Market.....	2
Equestrian sport in Sweden.....	4
Previous research	5
Theory	9
Doing Gender.....	9
Agency	10
Stereotype.....	11
Stereotype Threat	12
Career Navigation	14
Method	16
Rationale.....	16
Participant Selection.....	16
Data Collection	17
Interview Process	18
Interview Guide	18
Data Interpretation	19
Data Quality Concerns	19
Trustworthiness.....	19
Limitations.....	20
Ethical Considerations.....	20
Empirical findings and Analysis.....	21
Gender creation at the stable.....	21
Getting familiar with a hierarchy.....	23
Creating agency - The horse girl.....	25
Stereotype.....	27
Stereotype threat - how to beat it	30
Navigating career wise	33
Discussion	35
Limitations.....	36
Suggestions for Further Research	36
Recommendations.....	37
Conclusion.....	38

Reference list 39
Appendix 42
 Appendix A 42
 Appendix B 43

Introduction

Although there has been a considerable progress for women in the workplace in the past 50 years, gender inequalities in the workplace persists and studies point to a main contributor being gender discrimination. Although we see progress, women are still excluded more frequently from leadership positions than men (Eagly & Carli, 2003). As men and women share more responsibilities at home and women partake in the labour market to a greater extent, the way we see male and female leaders is beginning to blend. However, there is still inequality between the sexes (Eagly & Carli, 2003) There is also a perception that women are not suitable for what are considered to be male positions, for example in management.

The idea for this thesis comes from a dissertation paper I recently came across “Manegen är Krattad”, written by Lena Forsberg (2012) where the “aim was to investigate the stable as a possible leadership/entrepreneurship school and also investigate how this setting could challenge gender stereotypes in relation to leadership and entrepreneurship” (Forsberg, 2012). The topic “how gender is made” is also addressed, with “the aim to explore how young women construct leadership with the experience from a stable environment from a gender perspective” (Forsberg, 2012). The results suggest that women that have spent time in a stable environment have partaken in a cultural practice where women are performing traditionally male as well as female tasks. This has an effect on the perception of being driven and competent. Through the woman's experience at the stable they can more easily rid themselves of the outside cultures expectations on femininity and find a collective way of being different where taking action, having courage and being powerful is promoted. However, even though they find a way of being different they cannot entirely rid themselves of the structures that act as barriers for women to advance in their working life (Forsberg, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge about how women’s leadership skills are affected by having a background and upbringing in a stable environment. The aim is to explore and describe how the interviewed women use leadership skills learned in a stable environment in their work life as managers on different levels.

My aim is to explore how women use skills that have been obtained at the stable in an organizational environment.

Based on Forsberg's (2012) dissertation the assumption is made that having a background at the stable does have an effect on women's leadership, however this will also be verified in the study based on the doing gender theory. Further, as suggested by Forsberg (2012) it would be interesting to see if the leadership skills from a stable environment can be linked to how women use leadership skills in working life many years after leaving adolescents leading to the following research questions:

- How does equestrian experience influence women in leading and management positions in organizational settings?
- Can leadership training at a young age at the stable be linked to how women navigate their careers?

Disposition

The first part of this thesis will provide a background of what the labour market in Sweden looks like for women, as well as a background of the equestrian sport. Following, previous research will be presented on gender in general, as well as gender in the specific context of the stable environment. The next section presents the theoretical framework upon which the analysis is developed, looking specifically at the theoretical concepts of *Doing Gender*, *Agency*, *Stereotype*, *Stereotype Threat* and finally *Navigation*. Further, the research methodology will be illustrated, explaining the reasoning behind the chosen method, participation selection, interview process and interview guide, data analysis, limitations and ethical issues. The empirical finding along with the analysis follows. Lastly, the findings are summarised in the last chapter, along with limitations and suggestions for future research.

Background

Female leaders in the Swedish Labour Market

This study explores how women are taught leadership at an early age and use those skills in a work life setting to help break barriers and navigate their careers. I will therefore provide a background of what the labour market in Sweden looks like for female leaders today as well as

a background of the stable environment that all of the interviewees have been in close contact with growing up.

Compared to most countries Sweden is considered to be equal when it comes to gender differences, despite this, women are still underrepresented in top positions as well as the amount of responsibility they are given as well as salary wise (Wahl et al., 2014). In 2013, Swedish company boards consisted of eighty percent men and twenty percent women, top management positions were slightly better with twenty-seven percent women and seventy-three percent men (SCB, 2013). This is despite the fact that Sweden has a welfare system that makes it possible for both men and women to work and have a family (Wahl et al., 2014).

Studies done in Sweden show that men still have the perception that women to some degree are different and inadequate as leaders and that women disregard their careers when they decide to have children and take responsibility for the home. Compared to men, women are then viewed as less fitting for a management position (Wahl, et al., 2014) This is a culture of homosociality, where men look for something to identify with and are drawn to those who have power in order to be accepted, men will be drawn to men seeing that they are the ones in power positions in organizations (Kanter, 1977) and therefore the power structures remain.

To get an idea of how Swedish women perceive gender discrimination there is a Swedish study performed with women working in private and public sector in organizations varying in size with the purpose of looking at how men's dominance affects women's possibilities career wise (Wahl, et al., 2014). The women described gender as playing a role both in a positive and a negative way, where more than half of the women had experienced direct discrimination based on their gender by a male manager, male colleague or contacts outside of the organization. There was also indirect discrimination reported by half of the women. In order not to be perceived as troublemaking or difficult the most common reaction to discrimination is to ignore it. By ignoring it the structures of male dominance are sustained and men remain unaware and unaffected of the discrimination, as it is hidden in the culture of the organization (Wahl, et al., 2014).

Equestrian sport in Sweden

Looking at the equestrian sport in Sweden, it is the second largest sport for youth between the ages of seven and twenty-five and the sixth largest sport when looking at total participants, as well as being the sport with the highest share of women, all of 90 percent (Svenska Ridsportförbundet, 2017). Collins dictionary (2018) defines equestrian as being “connected with the activity of riding horses” and “a person skilled in riding and horsemanship”.

Looking back at history the horse was used as a working tool for transportation and in agriculture, when the industrialisation came along the use of the horses shifted to be used more for sport and recreation. The horse has shifted from being the man’s domain to the woman’s which creates an interesting gender aspect (Forsberg, 2012). The stable environment provided women with values of leisure and manual labour that they previously had not been exposed to, which in turn encouraged self-efficacy and a possibility of taking the lead (Forsberg, 2012). The women that have partaken in this study have spent a substantial amount of time at the stable growing up which has meant that a fairly small amount of time has been spent on the riding itself. Time beyond the riding has been spent on activities aimed at caring for the horse; cleaning stables, loading hay, feeding horses, fencing, helping younger participants at the riding school as well as part taking in social activities.

Previous research

The definition of gender and sex has been debated since the 1970's and the concept of gender tended to be used only in conjunction with sex. However, today it is more common to separate the biological sex from the socially and culturally constructed gender (Hirdman, 2001). Gender has a dynamic definition and relates to the psychosocial part of the biological sex as well as a broader aspect where gender role identity, stereotypes, gender-role traits as well as attitudes and values are included (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). According to Hirdman (2001) gender can be understood as changeable both for male and female and that biological differences are exploited in order to create social norms and conceptions of what is male and female (Hirdman, 2001). By being an attributed status characteristic "gender is both a hierarchical structure of opportunity and oppression as well as an affective structure of identity and cohesion". (Ayman & Korabik, 2010) The social status of men grants them greater access to power, resources and privilege. (Ayman & Korabik, 2010)

When searching for a professional identity, individuals adapt to new roles by experimenting with temporary selves as shown in a study by Herminia Ibarra (1999). Data collected show that there are three undertakings involved in adaption to higher positions within an organization, "(1) observing role models to identify potential identities, (2) experimenting with provisional selves, and (3) evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback" (Ibarra, 1999). The undertakings are driven by a developing repertory that includes self-perception and the kind of professional the individual might become, in order to construct a professional identity, styles, mind-sets, skills and practices are explored (Ibarra, 1999). West & Zimmerman (1987) argue that individuals in interaction shape activities to reproduce the general thought of certain gender characteristics in order to express gender.

When it comes to leadership males are often rated more positively than females, even when they have objectively displayed the same behaviour (Butler, 1999). When women fail to respond to the needs of others they are more harshly rated than men that exhibit the same behaviour (Kolb, 1997). Kolb (1997) has found that stereotypical masculine behaviour as well as characteristics have a positive relationship with leader emergence. Even though masculine behaviour appears to have a strong relationship with leader emergence there is also a possible relation between androgyny and leader emergence. This suggesting that female characteristics in combination with male characteristics could be significant when studying leadership. (Kolb,

1997) Employees are less likely to identify with female leaders that are not androgynous, and they are more likely to be punished than men that are not androgynous. (Kark et al., 2012)

Acker (2006) claims that within all organizations there are inequality regimes that uphold power structures when it comes to class, gender and ethnicity. Inequality regimes are systems where the differences between people, when it comes to power and control over resources, results and goals are maintained. It can also pertain as how to organize work, possibilities to promotion and benefits. (Acker, 2006)

Strength, aggressiveness and competitiveness are characteristics that are perceived both of a successful organization as well as prominent leaders. Flat organizational structures provide women with more equal opportunities than hierarchal organization with the precondition that the women behave like men. In environments where women see the culture as being masculine with characteristics like aggressiveness, competitiveness and a high degree of self-promotion they have ways of coping. However, they still feel like outsiders who don't belong. (Acker, 2006) Acker has been criticised for dividing male and female as contradictions leading to an enhancement of the polarization of men and women (Forsberg, 2012).

Nina Nikku (2005) questions the image that often surrounds girls and women with an interest in equestrianism, that the equestrian culture is based mainly on characteristics such as care taking and acts as a preparation for adult life where the women should care for and adapt to the man. Nikku (2005) argues that that view is far too one-sided and should be seen in contrast to the power, control and strength that is needed in order to handle a horse. Rather it's a combination of the two that create what Nikku (2005) calls girl power. Looking back in time when riding was male dominated the stable culture was characterized as being physically demanding and dangerous but over time the sport has been redefined as it has become female dominated, and today the perception of the sport is that of pastel coloured toy horses and girls brushing the horse's long mane. However, the inside perception of the "horse girl" is a complex system that consist of not only the soft aspects but also power, physical efforts, getting dirty, caring for the horse and fellowship. (Nikku, 2005)

According to Koren and Traeen (2003) an important prerequisite to be able to take the lead and make decisions is to have a self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is developed through having a sense of security, confidence and a sense of responsibility which are all qualities they demonstrate that

riders acquire in the stable. One argument presented by Forsberg (2012) as being the reason that girls accept the, at times, tough working conditions at the stable is the path to gaining professional skills. In order to take on work and responsibility there is a demand for action, by learning to take action the girls in turn learn to control the situations around them (Forsberg, 2012).

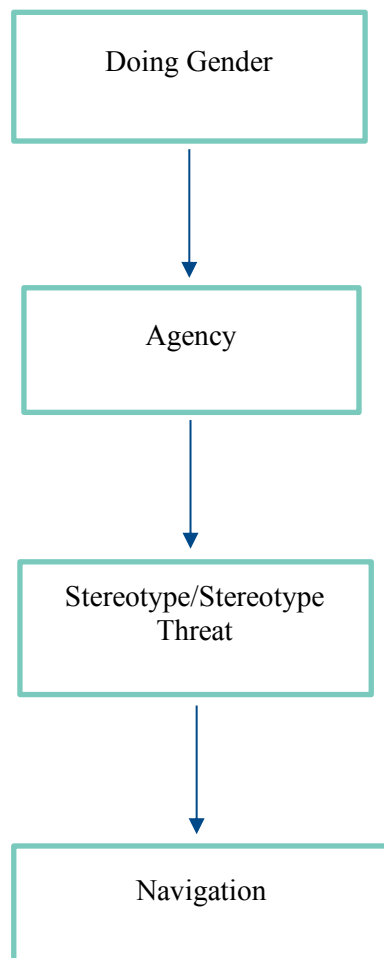
Even though women find a way of being different they can't entirely rid themselves of the structures that act as barriers to advance in working life. The dissertation "Manegen är Krattad" is built on four articles where I have chosen to follow up on the third; *The horse stable as a leadership school for girls* (Forsberg, 2012). The focus of the study is on the women that go to riding schools and compete at club level where the women competing at elite level serve as role models. A group of women have been interviewed over time to see how the leisure context has affected them later in life. Some of the theories discussed are of social constructionist character when it comes to leadership and gender. Forsberg (2012) has also taken inspiration from Kanter's (1977) theories on "understanding how the job creates the person in work organizations" (Forsberg, 2012).

One of the main question in the Forsberg's (2012) dissertation is "how is gender made in relation to leader- and entrepreneurship?" One conclusion is that the stable environment has an impact on women's self-perception of being competent leaders as an outcome from the environment. Situations that arise in the stable are of demanding character that when forced to deal with, is good training in leadership skills at an early age. (Forsberg, 2012) The women in the study have the opinion about themselves that they have the capability of getting things done which according to Forsberg (2012) signals independence and autonomy. They are also of the opinion that when in a critical situation they are not afraid to use direct leadership and take command in form of delegation, according to Forsberg (2012) this type of body- and verbal language are traits that we typically see as masculinity rather than traits recognised in women. The girls described themselves as being different from other girls their age in distancing themselves from the idea of the typical girl as being fragile and girlish, rather their self-view is that they are tough, bold and capable in the stable as well as outside. Butler (2004) stresses the importance of doing research in social systems where traditional gender configurations are disputed by researchers that have the view that gender is a social construction which Forsberg's (2012) study confirms the stable to be.

In this particular area there are few studies and Forsberg (2012) suggest looking further into this subject. This is relevant from both an equality perspective as well as a leadership perspective. This study suggests that our social environment and the situations we are exposed to at a young age has an impact on self-perception as women and leaders. However, it is important to be aware that there may be other factors that can serve as alternate explanations. Previous studies have shown that social class is correlated to having leadership positions. Gaining leadership positions has a positive connection to having high self-confidence and that having high self-confidence and a feeling of self-control is to some extent shaped by an individual's social class and environment (Martin et al., 2017).

Theory

The theoretical framework was chosen in order to show the progression and process from gender creation to a professional identity and how this in turn can create agency. To further explore gendered stereotypes as well as stereotype threats and how they can be moderated. Lastly the theory of navigation is presented. The theories are to be thought of as a logical chain of events that show the progression from youth to a professional career.



Doing Gender

Doing gender is the construction of gendered identities, and thereby the enhancement of differences between women and men. It's the enhancement of differences that are not biological

or essential but rather socially constructed. In social settings physical features are often used to express the differences between genders. (West & Zimmerman, 1987)

Goffman (1967) states that sports are one arena of an institutionalised framework that is used to express masculinity where traits such as competitiveness, strength and endurance are celebrated as typically masculine traits.

In previous research of doing gender it is clear that already at a very young age, children become aware of gender identity and early on develop a behavioural commitment to a certain identity. It is in this way that young members of society become involved in a self-regulating process where both their own and others behaviour is observed with regards to gender. (West & Zimmerman, 1987)

According to Forsberg (2012), the stable is a place where the social system of gender patterns is challenged which, arguably one of the reasons being that it is a sport where the majority of the participants are female. This is especially interesting seeing that the history of the sport in Sweden derives from the military and cavalry, and therefore has a history of being seen as masculine. The history has passed down male characteristics that are still current features in stable environments such as hierarchy, discipline and organization. The stable provides a platform where girls can develop both “masculine” as well as “feminine” traits (Forsberg, 2012). The importance of doing research in environments where gender can be “undone” is stressed by Butler (2004) in order to understand how gender is created. By finding environments where gender can be questioned it can also be socially changed. Wahl (2018) and Eriksson-Zetterqvist (2008) have noted in their studies that women’s identification with leadership is stronger when the role models are female and that higher numbers of female leaders in organizations influence the work.

Agency

It is important to define what this study refers to when it comes to agency as there are various definitions. In a sociological approach agency means the individual power people express through thoughts and action. It is the power an individual exercise in order to shape their path and experiences (Cole, 2019). According to Martin Hewson (2010) there are three types of agency; Individual agency, Proxy agency and Collective agency. In this study I will solely focus

on individual agency, which entail individuals acting on a micro level (with a local perspective) or on a macro (more public actions) and is the most basic form of agency.

According to Hewson (2010) there are three bases to human agency, in other words assets that create agency. The first basis of agency is that of intentionality, doing things on purpose with a set goal to create a better life for example. Waiting for things to happen or doing things unintentionally and allowing things to be happen to you is having a lack of agency. A second source of agency is power which can be acquired both in the form of resources and capabilities (Hewson, 2010; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The third and last basis of agency is rationality, and the assumption that humans act rationally with effect and purpose in order to create agency. In order to create agency through rationality it is essential to reflect and to monitor the ongoing process, to be able to calculate and act with purpose (Hewson, 2010).

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that human agency theory needs to be drastically remodelled due to the fact that neither of the existing perspectives provide a satisfactory understanding of the importance of agency theory. Further they claim that in order to understand agency in a richer and more dynamic way more attention needs to be paid to individuals past, present and future due to the fact that actors constantly are adjusting their temporalities of their being to one another, as well as their circumstances in what they call “relational pragmatics”. Individuals are constantly engaging patterns from their past in order to find ways to move forward in the present and future. At times individuals are more focused on the past, and at times focus lies more on the present or future. By having this perspective on agency actors can reflexively transform by using their orientations to take action and mediate structures (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Stereotype

Among many of the explanations as to why women have a more difficult time reaching top positions as leaders than men are various stereotype theories. Gender stereotypes are the preconceived conceptions about the attributes that men and women have. Both in the sense of the traits they actually have as well as the traits that stereotypes trigger us to believe that they should or should not have (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015).

When looking at leadership from a stereotype angle it affects the way we look at leadership and the qualities needed to obtain it. A gender-based theory comparing what is necessary from a leader and traits necessary to succeed creates a lack of fit for women due to the fact that traits associated with leaders are agentic and women are thought to display more communal traits (Eagly et al., 2011; Heilman & Cale, 2018). Agentic qualities are related to more masculine behaviours and specifically traits as being driven, assertive and powerful, whereas the communal behaviour is seen as feminine and include traits such as being accommodating, caring for others, and being expressive (Gerber, 1988). Women are often aware, that how they are perceived as leaders is much dependent on their gender and are put in arduous situations; women that are highly agentic are criticised for not fulfilling the female stereotype and women that are communal receive criticism for not fulfilling the leadership stereotype (Eagly et al., 2011). The qualities used to describe effective leaders lie close to the qualities used to describe men, resulting in men being thought to be better suited and fit to hold leadership positions than women (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015).

Stereotypes based on gender affect who people see as fitting the predetermined image of a leader, not only does it affect who we view as a leader type, but it also affects the women seeking to become a leader (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015). Women in leadership tend to experience “social identity contingencies” which is the treatment received based on one's social identity in the form of stereotypes or judgement (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015).

Stereotype Threat

For individuals being assessed through negative stereotypes it can create a negative spiral that undermines their actual achievements. In a study by Steele (1997) it was demonstrated that stereotype threat can impair intellectual performance when aware of negative stereotypes. There is large quantity of research that confirm the findings that stereotype threat impairs stigmatized individuals' ability to perform and achieve their goals (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015; Steele, 1997).

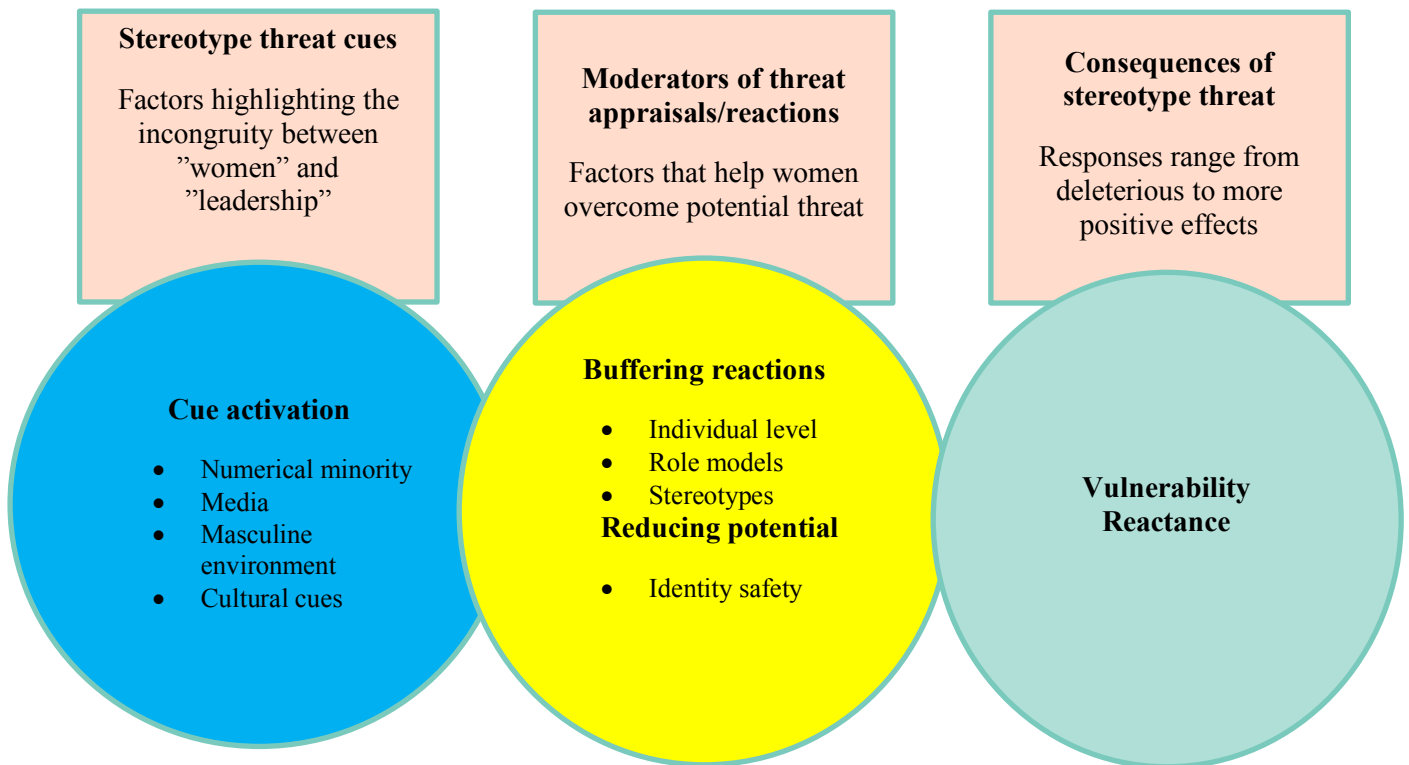
How women react to stereotype threat is highly individual, research has shown that women that displayed decreased performance when facing stereotype threat also rated themselves low on traits associated with leadership such as decisiveness, self-determination and aspiration. On the

other hand, women that believe that they have what it takes to be a leader can use this as a way of counteracting stereotype threat. Individual differences that support women's belief that they have the power and effectiveness of becoming a successful leader can therefore act as a cushion from detrimental threats. When facing explicit gender stereotypes women have responded with "positive, I'll show you responses". The presumption here is that they have adequate power and self-efficacy. (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015)

Women with high levels of leadership self-efficacy, which indicates high confidence in their own leadership ability, responds more positively when put in positions that require them to disconfirm gender-leadership stereotypes as shown in testing by Hoyt & Blascovich., (2007, 2010) where women were required to advise and motivate employees on a simulated hiring committee. Women with high levels of leadership self-efficacy showed higher levels of psychological welfare, identified more with leadership domains as well as performed better. (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015)

Additionally, mind-set can be a determinant of the way people react when their identity is under threat, in this context, meaning that one can believe that human characteristics are thought to be either malleable or stable. One way women can break through the barriers of stereotype threat is by having both high levels of leadership efficacy and a growth mind-set of leadership, growth mind-set being the belief that leadership skills are something that can be developed. (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015)

For those individuals that identify strongly with a stereotype, stereotype threat tends to have to most damaging effect. As an example, women that feel a strong identification with their gender and were highly aware of the stigma associated with the category "woman" were at greater risk of experiencing stereotype threat than women who were less conscious of the stigma. (Schmader, 2002; Brown & Pinel, 2003)



(Hoyt & Murphy, 2015)

Career Navigation

To socially navigate is a concept that alludes to the process and behaviour that individuals use in order to move upward and free themselves of pre-existing structures. The concept has become increasingly popular when analysing human and social interaction and can according to (Vigh, 2009) when defined in the correct terms contribute to understanding the way people act in their domains. (Vigh, 2009)

In social sciences navigation is used to analyse how agents act under uncertain circumstances and how they move in order to break through barriers that exist as structures (Vigh, 2009). Arguably gender structures are an example of such barriers on the labour market (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

To navigate comes from the Latin word *Navigare* which means to sail, it refers to a movement over changeable matter that is in constant motion. It makes it possible to see the interactivity of

the movement of social formations and change over time. It adds an interesting aspect of looking at the intersection of agency, social force and change (Vigh, 2009).

Individuals tend to organize themselves in order to be able to meet social forces and barriers that surround them. Social navigation can be defined as being “the practice of moving within a moving environment” (Vigh, 2009), it relates to the present as well as the future and takes in to consideration both immediate and future goals. According to Bourdieu (1998) navigation is a useful tool when describing attempts connecting agency, social forces and a volatile environment. In the act of navigating, attention is directed at social flows and changes in relation to how they influence positions and options (Vigh, 2009).

The structures that exist within social fields and affect the outcome of navigation are not constructions that are consciously created or prearranged, however they need to be recognised and defined as isolated social spaces where there are a set of rules and players to take in to account. (Bourdieu & Wacuant, 2001). In this paper that refers to the labour market and the gender barriers that exist within. When seeing different social spaces in the form of landscapes it creates a greater depth in the analysis process (Vigh, 2009).

Method

Rationale

I have chosen to use a qualitative research design in order to capture and explore how women use their background experience with horses to develop and use leadership skills. Qualitative studies have the advantage of providing a complete picture and enhancing the knowledge of social processes. This choice of method provides the possibility of capturing the perspectives, situation and thoughts of the individual. However, one disadvantage is the difficulty to ensure that the information collected is transferable to other studies (Holmne & Solvang, 1991). I recognize the challenge of generalizing qualitative studies, but I argue that it was necessary in order to grasp how/if women have furthered their careers due to their stable background. I argue that interviews are necessary in order to get enough depth in the study, it would be challenging to get exhaustive enough answers in a quantitative study.

An abductive approach was used, which is neither inductive or deductive, it is a pragmatic approach and attempt of finding the most logical and simple explanations. (Lorino, 2018)

Participant Selection

In order to be able to answer the research question, qualitative data has been collected in the form of interviews with women that hold leadership positions in a variation of organizations. A few participants work in organizations that are related to horses, however the majority have moved away from the “horse world” to work in organizations that are not connected to horses. Participants were contacted via email or telephone. The letter of contact can be found in Appendix B.

The target population of the study are women in leadership positions in organizations within municipality and private organizations. The women of the target population have spent a substantial amount of time in a stable environment from youth in to early adulthood. In many cases the women interviewed have spent time in the stable nearly every day in their teens. In this case the age of having had the first contact with horses is from the age three to six years. All participants had experience of having no less than five employees reporting directly to them. Tenure is of relevance in order to have adequate management experience to be able to make the connections between background and leadership, therefore the criteria was that the participants

had a minimum of two years' experience of leading and managing. Age was not a selection criterion; however, gender was, the participants are one hundred percent women for obvious reasons. The participants are spread out through a vast variety of industries: business administration, marketing, private and public school, consumer goods, communication, property, juvenile detention, and veterinary care.

Twelve women participated in this study. I argue that this study was not in need of further participation but rather directing the focus on having a high quality in the interviews. Quality being created by preparing and analysing data in a thorough manner. To respect and protect the participants anonymity I have given them each an alias using popular Swedish names. The names are of no further relevance to the study.

Name	Position
Alice	Chief financial executive
Maja	Retail Manager
Lilly	Team Leader
Ella	Head of School
Wilma	Marketing Manager
Ebba	Head of Institution
Olivia	Purchase Manager
Astrid	Operations Manager
Alma	Team Leader
Elsa	Principle
Saga	Communication Director
Freja	Stable Manager

Data Collection

The primary data has been collected in interviews. Seeing that the aim was to get in depth answers regarding women's attitudes of their leadership skills in relation to having a background in the stable, performing interviews was the most appropriate choice for this study. The majority of time spent on this study has been focused on the collection of data, finding relevant theories and previous research to be able to formulate an interview guide, as well as

performing an adequate analysis of the empirical findings. Theories and previous research have also been used to explain and understand the results of the study. During the data collection I was open to the fact that the results could both confirm and/or challenge previous research and theory.

Within the area of leadership and gender there is a wide array of material to partake, however when it comes to research of stable environments and the effect interaction with horses have on young women there is a limited amount of research available.

Interview Process

The interview design was of semi-structured character which provides a combination of structure and freedom to elaborate when needed (Hakim, 2009). Seeing that the participants were spread out geographically the interviews were conducted with one respondent at the time in different locations, such as the participants place of work, in their home, or over the phone. The interviews were conducted in privacy with minimum risk of disturbance and took on average one hour. The interview started by giving the respondent a background of the study and the fact that it is based on Lena Forsberg's (2011) dissertation "Managen är Krattad" as well as them being providing information about the set-up of the interview. All of the interviews were conducted in Swedish and took place during the months of February and March 2019.

Interview Guide

The interview guide was created to encourage a free conversation with open questions. The questions were divided to cover three different areas of interest; stable background, career background and leadership. The interview began with the women speaking freely about their background both at the stable and in relation to their career, once an overview was provided about their background more specific questions were asked. The respondents were asked to reflect over situations throughout their careers as well as reflecting over their background in line with Bryman (2012). The follow up questions were only asked if the respondent had not already spoken about the subject, as recommended by Gillham (2001) but were used to help control the interview when needed. The same interview guide was used for all of the

respondents in order to enable comparability and to facilitate the analysis. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

Data Interpretation

All of the interviews were recorded, to be able to process the material and preserve the information in the best way possible. The interviews were held in Swedish and due to time restrictions only the citations have been translated to English. All of the interviews were transcribed and coded in order to be able to interpret and compare the material. Based on the research question, aim and the interview guide, themes and sub-themes were identified and sorted in to larger categories (Bryman, 2012). The results were reproduced in form of a vastly edited text that was hypothesized in accordance with the theoretical framework (Hammersley, 2013) To add credibility to the study it has been vital to ensure consistency between the collected data and the written results.

Data Quality Concerns

Trustworthiness

Bryman and Bell (2019) highlight the subject of trustworthiness out of four different aspects; conformability, transferability, dependability and credibility. The difficulty in reproducing and generalizing is a challenge that qualitative research faces. To ensure credibility it is important to continuously make sure that there is a dependability between the study's observations and its results. Recording and transcribing interviews as well as coding the data in a proper manner strengthens the credibility. The dependability is reliant on the transferability and credibility where the transferability of the study is difficult seeing that this is a study was performed in a small sample and a limited context. The conformability is connected to what extent the researcher is successful in being objective. This can be strengthened by presenting and analysing the results as well as acknowledging the studies limitations (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

Limitations

The participants were chosen based on having a background in the stable as well as having a leadership position. The study was therefore performed with women from various organizations. The aim was to explore if equestrian experience has influenced women in organizational settings and how if there are any links between their background and the navigation of their careers, therefore I would argue that it is a strength to look into different organizations and positions. However, this does also present a limitation as the study does not take into account how different organizations could impact the respondents. Due to lack of time and a conscious decision to focus on quality analysis and preparation there was an additional limitation in the sample size of the study.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about their right to be anonymous and that the information provided be confidential, they were informed about this both in the first contact letter as well as at the time of the interview. The women were further informed of the topic and purpose of the study and that they could choose to not answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with or discontinue the interview at any time. It was taken into account that discussions of gender can to some be a sensitive subject. Interviews were recorded with the consent of all respondents. The interviews were transcribed and the respondents that had requested a copy received it via email.

Another issue to be raised in the study is the fact that I (the author) have a considerable amount of insight in the equestrian sport, which can be a strength. However, with that in consideration I have been very aware to avoid making assumptions or reading in to the respondent's answers in order to represent their view in a correct manner that is separate from my own opinions.

Empirical findings and Analysis

In the following chapter the results will be presented as well as an analysis of the data collected. The empirical data is based on 12 interviews and their transcriptions and has been divided into five different sections. The first section looks at the formation of gender in the stable and is a confirmation of previous research done by Forsberg (2012), it will take a closer look at the cultural and social aspects of spending time in a stable environment as a young girl. In the second section the practice of navigation at an early age is explored leading in to the third section of agency, followed by the fourth section of stereotype and finally the last section of career navigation. In order to understand the perspectives of the respondents, quotations are used as examples.

It's important to note that this thesis looks at how the interviewees perceive their own background and the impact of it on their leadership as well as how they have become leaders, it says nothing about how others perceive them as leaders. I argue that, in this thesis, the relevant fact is how the interviewees interpret themselves as leader and how this has helped them navigate gender barriers and defy stereotypes in order to get to a leadership position.

Gender creation at the stable

In accordance with Butlers (2004) recommendations to research environments that undo gender the majority of the interviewed women tell a story of a culture and environment at the stable that rather than doing gender is "undoing gender". The results when it comes to the stable being an environment that promotes the undoing of gender is in line with Forsberg's (2012) results of the dissertation "Manegen är Krattad" in the sense that girls and women are exposed to situations where they have to make decisions, being decisive is promoted as well as being self-efficient and perhaps most of all a strong drive and sense of responsibility. The interviewed describe an environment that is physically strenuous with activities such as cleaning out stables, feeding horses, as well as handling horses that are far bigger than a young girl. All of the women describe a strong will to be with the horse, the drive to do the work based on the reward of getting to spend time with the horse. When handling horses, that are flight animals, there needs to be extra attention paid to safety aspects, which was also stressed in the data as one of the reasons for direct communication and structure that occurs in a stable environment and is also a part of the military history (Forsberg, 2012).

“It was a good education in taking responsibility. If I don’t do the work, it won’t get done.”
(Saga)

The above quote represents the mind-set of the interviewed women in taking on responsibility and not depending on others to do the work, which can explain the development of decision-making skills.

The interviewed women come from varying backgrounds and opportunities. Some owned their own horses and had support from parents, whereas others had to start at the bottom and work their way up, for example, at the riding school with the goal of one day owning their own horse. The data in this study disproves the theory of girls with an interest in equestrianism coming from a high social status, and therefore perhaps being granted agency through their social status (Martin et al., 2017). The majority of the women did not come from a high social class environment. All of the women witness to the fact that being in a stable environment demands hard work and a strong will. A majority of the women did not have parents that were involved and therefore had to get themselves to and from the stable every day which could mean riding a bike many kilometres independent of time of year and weather. The quotes below show that independent of owning a horse or not there was a strong drive and will to care for the horse and do the work demanded.

“There was some kind of drive and will. I wasn’t served with my own horse so for me there was a huge drive to ride or just get to brush a horse.” (Astrid)

“Mom used to help us before school. But when we came home from school my sister and I we’re responsible for taking care of the horses, got them in from the field, feed them and rode them. We took care of the manual labour around the stable”. (Ella)

Independently of what background the women come from the results show that they have been exposed to and made aware of a hierarchy and environment that demands hard work. All of the interviewed women stress the fact that being at the stable demands hard work, however it is not

seen as something negative, but rather something that has to be done and is natural in the environment. Goffman (1967) expressed that the arena of sports has traditionally been an arena to express masculine traits such as competitiveness, strength and endurance, which is in line with the description of the stable environment. The environment itself is described as being safe and filled with comradery, a place where they as girls spent a considerable amount of their free time. As West & Zimmerman (1987) demonstrate children become aware of their gender identity at a young age and develop a commitment to a certain identity. I argue that the women in this study have early on committed to the identity of a leader, a hard worker and someone who is not afraid to take on responsibility.

“I was at the stable every day, I worked at the riding school as well. Nothing ever felt like hard work it was only fun.” (Astrid)

“At the stable you see it as an honour when you get a challenging task.” (Alice)

In line with previous study by Nikku (2005) the results show that the image of girls with an equine interest as being only caretakers is misleading. But it is rather a combination of the relationship with the horse, the hard work and leadership that has created the feeling of being competent and having personal strength for the interviewed women.

Getting familiar with a hierarchy

The practice of navigation starts at an early age at the stable. The interviewed women report that there is a strong hierarchy that starts at the riding school where caring for the horse is the main goal and is followed by getting to interact with horses, perhaps owned by older girls, where the top of the hierarchy is owning a horse and competing.

“There were older girls that we looked up to, we were two girls who were self-confident, and we had our own horses so sometimes we were allowed to hang out with them.” (Saga)

“It was incredibly hierarchic.” (Olivia)

There is an awareness raised at an early age in the stable that promotes the act of constantly moving forward, the knowledge of the fact that there is a hierarchy in combination with a will to climb the ranks. This is in line with what Vigh (2009) writes about social flows and that changes in relations can influence where an individual is positioned. Much like the younger girls working their way in with the older girls would raise their status at the stable and create more opportunities to spend time with the horses as well as achieving a higher social status. One way of getting a head was to be a skill full rider or own your own horse, being forward and fearless was also one way to move up in the hierarchy.

“I was allowed to be part of the group, I was pretty forward so even though I was younger I was able to compete and ride at the same level as the other girls which helped me be a part of the group” (Ella)

“There was a hierarchy mostly of older girls and those who had their own horses, I looked up to them.....You climbed the ladder if you had your own horse.” (Elsa)

One respondent explained that at many riding schools there are organized care taking systems for children to learn responsibility and to care for the horse. These are usually systems where the individual can rise in the ranks and take on more responsibility as well as become a leader for other caretakers. They learn that in order to move up they have to work hard and show a great deal of interest for the horse as well as attend courses where they are taught leadership, hosting, comradery and knowledge about the horse. I would argue that this is a dynamic environment for young girls to spend time in the sense of becoming aware of what leadership is as well as being told that they are capable of being leaders. At an early age the girls learn what it takes to navigate to reach a higher position as well as setting future goals (Vigh, 2009).

The interviewees describe a striking resemblance of experience no matter where in the hierarchy they were positioned growing up. Despite the fact that the interviewees have found themselves in different ends of the ladder they display a very similar picture. Some of the girls describe themselves as the role model, whereas others describe themselves as looking up to the older girls

“There were some girls that were very respected. One girl had almost a fourth of the stable, she had lots of horses and competed. I never heard of her after that, but she competed at a fairly high level so that was huge, if she said something everyone paid attention.” (Ella)

The women that in fact had their own horses or had parents that were part of the sport were aware that they were looked up to and that they perhaps didn't need to position themselves in the same sense as some of the other girls. They were already established in the structure, one woman described it through the following quote:

“I had my spot because my dad was a great rider, I never had to worry about not being a part of the group and I wasn't interested in positioning myself either. I had a natural place in the stable, I didn't have to use a certain tone or assert myself, I was born in to the horse life.” (Lilly)

Creating agency - The horse girl

All of the interviewed women are fully aware of the “Horse Girl” stereotype (how horse girls are viewed from the inside of the sport) and describe her in a similar way; someone that is highly driven, has grit, takes on responsibility and is tough, not afraid to do the hard work as well as being direct and outspoken when needed. All but one of the women identified herself with this stereotype. Hewson (2010) speaks about using individual agency in a local perspective which the women have practiced and made use of in the stable.

“The horse girl is super driven, just like riding our bikes to the stable many times a day and the work that was done, cleaning stables, lifting hay, sweeping the ails and getting horses in and out from the field. There was a strong drive.” (Astrid)

I argue that by identifying with the stereotype of the “horse girl” the women have created agency for themselves. They have taken on the role of the stereotype in a positive manner where they know that they are capable because they have practiced these skills and attitudes since they were very young. They don't view women as being less capable arguably due to the fact that

they have taken on task that are of more male character in a culture where that type of behaviour is promoted. Several of the women describe using the leadership and social skills they have learned at the stable implicitly in their work life, it's a part of who they are. Several of the women had previously reflected over the connection.

"I'm driven and know what I want. I'm stubborn and I've definitely become pretty hardy."
(Freja)

In the quote below one of the participants described her view of "horse girls" and the benefits that come with being one. This was confirmed with several of the other women in the study as well.

"I've definitely benefited from the stable and I see it in other people as well, you can tell straight away, it's someone who looks in to things and does the work. They don't stand around and hesitate. It's someone who takes initiative." (Saga)

The stable can be seen as a resource when creating agency for women. Agency is not limited to use on a micro level, locally at the stable, but as confirmed by the interviewees it can be transferred to macro level, into organizational settings (Hewson, 2010). Although, not all of the women identified with the stereotype of being a horse girl all of them confirm that they have taken the agency from their youth in the stable with them in to their career which has been an aid in shaping them into who they are as individuals and leaders today. The data showed that having agency from the stable is a good starting point to a leadership career. The leadership skills also tend to continue developing within an organizational setting. Much like Emir & Mische (1998) advocate, depending on situation, agency from the past or present can be used to navigate structures. The women describe situations where skills and values from other parts of their life also come to use in their leadership, for example values from a home setting with strong parental role models. It is no doubt a mix of skills that become useful when entering an organization, however the agency created at the stable is confirmed by the interviewees to be strong.

Stereotype

Despite the interviewed women describing themselves as different personality types there are a few common factors when it comes to leadership characteristics that stick out. All of the interviewed women speak about not being afraid to take on responsibility and hard work as well as being very straight forward. Being straight forward in their leadership is expressed in both the sense of showing clearly what is expected of others as well as taking no “bullshit”. They tend not to worry so much about being liked, but the emphasize is on getting the work done. There is a fearlessness and boldness that is exuded by the interviewed. Using direct leadership and taking command, speaking up and not being afraid to show power are typically traits that are seen as masculine when looking at leadership qualities (Forsberg, 2012; Eagly et.al, 2011; Gerber, 1998). However, it is also important to note that the participants value the wellbeing of their employees to a high degree.

“I have a hard time with asking for permission for everything. I know what I want and how to get there. I have a clear picture of how I want things managed. I’m sure I’ve been a real pain as a manager at times. But I’ve always cared for my employees” (Wilma)

These characteristics are also mentioned in relation to the horse and fellow girls at the stable. The horse as well as the stable environment demands a leader and clear directions, where maybe and later is not an option.

“You become very direct, that’s how it is with animals. I had a stallion, when handling a stallion, it’s yes or no, not something in between. I’m like that in my leadership as well. I’m straight forward and direct. You never have to make things a conflict, but it’s important to be humble.” (Saga)

All of the women stress the relevance of taking responsibility in a stable environment and that is one of the main characteristics that they have gained at the stable and taken with them into their careers. There is no hesitation of “stepping up to the plate” and getting things done.

“Just solve it. Some people look for solutions to get out of fixing things instead of just fixing it. That’s the way it is at work as well, you just have to do it.” (Maja)

“I’ve thought a lot about it, the way I’ve grown up has made me who I am.....at the stable I did my thing..... I went there by myself and did what I needed, I set my own routines..... I’m not antisocial but not social either, I don’t spend half of the afternoon talking to colleagues, I grab a coffee and get back to work.” (Ella)

When asked to describe the characteristics of their leadership, the interviewees described themselves as being; willing to take the lead, structured, goal setting, nice but decisive, direct in their communication, as having a strong work ethic and being open to learning new things, to name a few. Most of the above characteristics would be coded as masculine, agentic qualities (Eagly, 2011). Another important characteristic, that is also male coded, that a majority of the women identify themselves with, is that they are strong and tough. They express an expectation on both themselves and others to be successful and to work hard. The following quotes describe how the women viewed work, they clearly describe the toughness and the will to take on responsibility as well as highlighting the aspect of getting the work done.

“If I compare myself to people at work I think I’m perceived as pretty tough, some find everything a little bit difficult. I have a hard time understanding that, sure you have to see everyone as an individual but sometimes people are a bit mawkish.” (Astrid)

“I’ve always seen to it that things get done even when it’s been difficult for example in organizational changes and other hard things, I’ve never been afraid to engage myself or work hard. I have that as well from the horses.” (Elsa)

“To take on responsibility and not be afraid to do the hard work and to be humble, if something needs to be done do it straight away.” (Freja)

However, at the same time as the communication is very direct both with horses and in the stable environment the interviewees have a great deal of compassion for the animal, for most of them it is the main reason for spending time at the stable is to connect with the horse. In the

same way the majority of the women described the relationships with their employees, they described it as a need for mutual respect, compassion and open communication. The data also showed that for the women it was important that the group was thriving as well as the individuals in it. These characteristics describe the more feminine, communal characteristics of leadership, that fit the female stereotype of being the caretaker as well as being communicative and caring about the softer values (Gerber, 1988; Eagly et al., 2011). Below are two quotes that describe the softer values of leadership and having a sense of how the other part is feeling as described by the interviewees;

“The wordless communication, and the whole idea that I’m the leader over you, I’m above you in rank, that clearness but still you have to be very responsive, humble and kind. The riding is also about communication, making the details work in the interplay. It’s fantastic. When that happens it’s fantastic. That is a feeling that really stuck with me that I strive for at work as well.....”(Lilly)

“Stability, structure and organizational skills, and the ability of getting a quick overview. It’s enough to look at the horses to know how they are feeling, it’s the same when you get to the office and see your employees. You can sense if someone is having a bad day.” (Wilma)

Some of the women reflected over the history of equestrian sport originating from the military as one of the factors that has shaped leadership at the stable. The reason for the structural remains from the military are to some extent safety aspects, as handling horses can become dangerous if mismanaged (Nikku, 2005). Many of the women talked about the military history of the sport as a reason for the hierarchy and structure of the environment and that individuals that spend a substantial amount of time at the stable adopt that way of working, the ones that don’t never become, in their opinion, real “horse girls”. Only one woman reflected over the hierarchy creating a harmful environment for young girls whereas others saw it as fostering. One woman described the rigid aspect that has come from the military history of the sport not always being received well in an organizational setting due to it being too direct.

“For sure a part of the leadership comes from military history in the sport. It has to do with safety, everything has to be fairly square. It is sometimes a collision in a work setting for us that have the military education from the stable.....Being extremely accountable, standing up

straight no matter what. Work or horses come before everything else. Responsibility, coming on time and doing your very best, good enough doesn't exist, you always give a hundred percent.” (Wilma)

Stereotype threat - how to beat it

The data shows that the women interviewed, with the exception of one person, have encountered barriers that they believe are linked to their gender. The most common way this has been expressed have been the experience of predominantly older men looking down on them with a belittling attitude. However, in contrast to the descriptions of Steel & Aronson (1995) the women have not allowed gender barriers to affect their performance or will to achieve their goals, they have chosen to not take on the negative gender stereotype of being a woman. Instead facing the threats head on with a “can do attitude” and also making the conscious decision of not allowing the threat to take up their time or energy. The quotes below demonstrate two of the women’s reactions to discriminating treatment.

“They haven't had much for it, because I've gotten angry instead of sad. You don't behave like that, I have thick skin. But if I hadn't it could have been tough. I've also chosen not to take things as hard as I could have.” (Astrid)

“Sometimes you almost got a pat on the head “oh, my little friend” very degrading. But in situations like that I'm not easy to deal with, I didn't say much in the moment but thought to myself “I'll show you”. And I did, I got a lot of credit for delivering good results.” (Elsa)

According to Hoyt & Murphy (2015) it is highly individual how women take on stereotype threat and, in the data, collected for this study all of the interviewed women display a high level of confidence in their leadership abilities, decisiveness and self-efficiency.

“Sometimes it's been difficult to convince, especially older men. But I haven't really seen that as a barrier but rather a challenge “I'm going to show them” (Wilma)

The women have the perception of themselves that they have the competence it takes to be a leader yet also the self-awareness that they don't know everything. Their attitude towards knowledge is that if they don't have it they will go out and get it, and/or surround themselves with people that know more than they do. A majority of the women highlighted the importance of being humble and not afraid to let others provide the knowledge you lack and not be threatened by employees that have more knowledge but rather allow them to grow.

When looking at factors that cue stereotype threat (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015) and highlights the dissonance between women and the leadership role, the data in this study shows that it can be such things as a masculine environment, where there are few female managers. Another factor the data revealed that cue stereotype threat was age or being new in the workplace. A majority of the women reported having experienced resistance to their leadership due to being young women in a leadership position or being new in the workplace. The resistance, or stereotype threat, has mainly come from older men holding leadership positions as well as male employees but also female employees that have held a longer tenure than the interviewees as demonstrated by the quote below.

“There were many that had been there longer and thought “you shouldn't come here and think that you know anything or have anything to contribute, cause around here we do it this way.” It's a form of social manipulation and I recognize that when looking back, had I not been so secure in myself I probably would have gotten scared, but I didn't.” (Lilly)

When looking at the moderators of threat which can help women overcome stereotype threat (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015) one is having a high level of identity safety. The women in the study all exude confidence in their leadership ability and the competence they have. The attitude they have towards men is not that of a threat, they also do not see themselves as victims. The threat has not caused them to feel fear or back down, on the contrary the reaction has been to fight harder when faced with resistance. One attitude of several of the women was that they do what needs to be done and perhaps everyone will not like them, but they can live with that.

“Everyone doesn't have to like me” (Ella)

I argue that they do not identify themselves with the gendered stereotype of a typical female leader which could be part of the explanation that the women do not seem extremely conscious or concerned with gender barriers. For individuals that identify strongly with a negative stereotype it can have a damaging effect where they feel highly stigmatized by being a woman for instance (Schmader, 2002; Brown & Pinel, 2003) whereas I would argue that the interviewed have a high degree of identity safety that moderate the threat. They are also not afraid to face the threat as demonstrated below;

“There have been plenty of barriers because I’m a woman, seeing that I have a profession that involves machines and such, I got to hear a lot of “what do you know about these things?”....I just thought to myself; what I don’t know I will learn” (Wilma)

“There have definitely been older men and sometimes women in the way, they are usually afraid of change. I don’t function when that happens, sometimes I wonder why I’m always the one to speak up in those situations.” (Saga)

Some of the interviewees describe scenarios where they have reflected over being too direct or tough in their leadership. One of the women reflected over the fact that she early in her career had been perceived as having a commanding leadership style and felt the need to tone down the way she leads in order to build trustful teams. Being perceived as tough and forceful is a problem that female leaders experience that rarely happen to male leaders. This is a sign of social identity contingencies (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015) that tends to happen to female leaders that do not fill the gender stereotype of having mainly communal characteristics. This experience was shared by several of the interviewees. There are two possible explanations to the fact that some of the interviewees have reflected over their leadership as being too direct. Firstly, it could be because their employees or managers, indeed have forced them to tone down the agentic characteristics in order to fit the social identity contingency of what a female leader should be. Secondly, it could be that they actually have a commanding leadership style. The explanation from the interviewees is more along with the later:

“I’m a much better leader today, I got a lot more done before..... now I have a harder time being that direct, but my reputation lingers so I rarely need to be.” (Wilma)

“I tend to become a bit to resolute at times, too direct. Perhaps not always attentive enough, if I’ve decided something I go for it, but at the same time it’s been a good thing when we’ve faced tough times, I’m a pretty brave leader....I can make uncomfortable decisions and live everyone not liking me.” (Ebba)

However, I speculate that part of the explanation is that barriers are hidden in the gendered structure of organizations pushing down on the women when they become commanding and direct in their leadership, except the women in this study have not taken on the female stereotype and have thus remain unaware of the threat.

Since they do not feel vulnerable by the threat, the consequence does not become noticeable or damaging. I argue that in this study, mind-set is an asset to the respondents breaking barriers and diminishing the damage of stereotype threat. They display both high levels of leadership efficacy as well as a growth mind-set (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015) Some of the women highlighted their interest and the importance of always seeking knowledge displaying their attitude of having a growth mind-set.

“With horses it’s really true, the more you learn, the more you realize you don’t know anything. That’s a good thing to take with you in your career as well, always try to be open to new ideas.” (Alice)

Navigating career wise

A majority of the interviewees describe a career path that has been fairly straight forward, where insecurity has been meet with a greater will to succeed and that backing down even at harder times is not an option. There is a sense of belonging in leadership that is expressed and that can be represented by the following quotes:

“I always felt like I belonged in the stable, it’s a lifestyle. In the same way I have always felt safe in my roles, leadership has followed me since I was younger. I feel the same today, I feel very secure with taking the lead, it’s never been a question for me. I have the courage to stand for what I think.” (Lilly)

“I would say that I’ve had a fairly easy way to where I am today, I’ve worked for it, but I’ve had the luck and possibility to be able to take one step at a time and try things at a pace that has worked for me.” (Ella)

Data collection reveals that there is a combination of agentic and communal behaviour in the interviewees leadership. There is a use of direct leadership and drive in combination with compassion and care for the well-being of employees. As Kolb (1997) suggest there could be a significance of looking at the use of female characteristics in combination with male characteristics when studying leadership emergence, and that combination can be found in the characteristics described by the women in this study. One could speculate that they are excepted as leaders due to having a combination of agentic and communal traits.

There are certain aspects of the stable that all of the women report having been exposed to when growing up. All report of hard work, a high degree of responsibility, drive and decisiveness as well as having been exposed to a hierarchy with role models that are perceived to have a higher degree of knowledge than one self. All of these qualities can be linked to creating a professional identity and mind-set that develops over time.

I argue that the interviewees have from an early age been exposed to hierarchy and strong leadership in a safe environment, with a strong sense of belonging. That is the experience and attitude they take with them into an organizational setting and use of when navigating their careers. By not identifying with the stereotype that that the barriers are targeting they, to a high degree, navigate the structural barriers and influence their positions and options (Vigh, 2009).

Discussion

The objective of this study has been to contribute to research regarding a socially constructed view on gender and how women can break the barriers in order to facilitate a straighter road to leadership positions. Looking at women with their background in a stable environment was of particular interest, as it has, in previous studies been shown that girls that spend time in the stable practice leadership that gives them the confidence to use leadership skills also outside of that environment (Forsberg, 2012). Thus, this study has aimed at exploring how women have been able to navigate their careers with the help of their background.

It is noteworthy that the results confirm previous studies (Forsberg, 2012; Nikku, 2005) when looking at women being empowered and develop a “can do” attitude at the stable. It is the combination of the relationship with the horse and the environment that creates a drive and a sense of responsibility that comes from the will to be with the horse as well as fitting in with the expectations of the environment. There is a hierarchy with strong role models that show that it is possible, and that hard work pays off, overall there is a strong awareness of the role model, the “horse girl”.

The findings also demonstrate that the female managers of this study are secure in their leadership, they do not doubt their own abilities. Structural barriers that have been encountered have not had the effect of pushing them back, rather push forward harder. Previous studies (Wahl, et al., 2014) illustrate that women tend to not protest against inequality in order to not stick out and cause problems. In this study the opposite could be argued, the women who have experienced gender discrimination have been direct in their communication and faced inequalities consciously.

By using an abductive methodological approach, a logical chain of theoretical concept emerged from the empirical data starting with the theory of doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). From a young age, girls in the stable are exposed to an environment that promotes and demands a certain level of leadership in order to handle horses and the activities that surround them. The results show that taking responsibility, being straight forward and taking charge is promoted and encouraged as well as being prestige less and willing to take in new knowledge. By being exposed to this form of empowerment at young age the girls create agency for themselves in

the form of the “horse girl” persona. The “horse girl” stereotype is a girl that is strong, responsible and driven, someone that gets the work done. All of the women are aware of the stereotype and a majority identify with it. When facing barriers outside of the stable environment the women are able to take the agency created in the stable and reproduce it in other environments thus having the agency assist in creating a career path.

The data revealed that the female managers do not perceive themselves as actively having to navigate in order to break through barriers. Breaking in to the labour market and further getting in to a managerial position were described as fairly uncomplicated, as well as achieving other career goals, very much aligning with Hoyt and Murphy’s (2015) theory of stereotype threat. Since the women don’t fully identify with the assigned stereotype, the barriers become less visible and loose the effect of holding them back career wise.

The women have through their experiences adopted behaviours and strategies that fit a masculine stereotype with a high level of self-efficacy and power where gender barriers are not paid much attention. The stable environment has impacted the women’s careers in a positive way by giving them tools, such as power, self-efficiency and confidence to be able to break barriers and reach leadership positions.

Limitations

I acknowledge that there are limitations to this study. The two main limitations identified are; the sample size and the Swedish context making the results difficult to reproduce and generalize. I am open to further critique and testing of the presented concepts. I would like this to be a starting point for further research of female leadership developed from leisure settings.

Suggestions for Further Research

My suggestion for future research includes looking at other leisure activities in order to see if they also shape and provide women with skills that are a resource when navigating a professional career. As well as perhaps comparing team sports with individual in order to see if they shape women’s mind sets in different ways. Additionally, a study mapping female leaders backgrounds to see how influential leisure activities are in becoming an organizational

leader would be welcomed. Further it would be of interest to do an international study to see if female leaders stemming from the stable is a Swedish phenomenon or if it looks the same across borders.

Recommendations

My recommendations, that are sprung from the results of this study, are directed at organizations and recruiters looking for talent rather than directly at women. I recommend recruiters to look at broader aspects than that of formal degrees and previous experience, but rather try to tap in to the more implicit qualities that applicants bring to the work place, perhaps providing a possibility of creating a more diverse work force and being able to utilize and encourage the use of implicit knowledge to a greater extent. Additionally, specialist within HRM should be educated about the barriers and structures that silently exist to be able to create environments where women are empowered and have agency.

Conclusion

The study was successful in providing a deeper understanding of how women are influenced and navigate their careers with the help of their background in the stable. In conclusion, the answer to the research questions can be summed up as follows: Women with equestrian background are exposed to what is socially considered male tasks at a young age. By being exposed to that type of environment the women become empowered, self-sufficient as well as having their power, decisiveness and drive be encouraged rather than prevented. Additionally, they practice leadership at a young age. The women are able to take this experience and mindset with them in to the work place and utilize the skills in environments outside of the stable. The women see themselves as leaders and are therefore not greatly affected by the stereotypes surrounding female leaders, aware yes, but not highly affected.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Intervjuguide

Ålder:

År som chef:

Position/titel

Antal anställda:

Bransch:

Utbildning:

Arbetsbeskrivning:

Bakgrund

1. Hur ser din bakgrund med hästar ut? I vilken kontext har du varit i kontakt med hästar? (Disciplin, egen häst, ridskola)
2. Hur mycket tid spenderade du i stallet?
3. Hur såg gruppammansättningen ut i stallet? (Hierarkiskt, åldersindelad, konsensus) Hur förändrades det över tid?
4. Var gruppen självreglerande (ett oskrivet regelverk som gruppmedlemmarna följer, reprimander inom gruppen om det inte efterföljs) Kan vara att hästarna ska släppas ut prick en viss tid etc.
5. Har det förekommit konflikter i stallet? Vad har de haft sin grund i? Hur har de hanterats?
6. Hur skulle du beskriva en typisk stalltjej? Skulle du beskriva dig själv som en typisk stalltjej?
7. Fanns det äldre tjejer som du såg upp till? På vilket sätt i så fall?
8. Var du delaktig i styrelse/ungdomssektion eller liknande?
9. Vilka fördelar har du fått från din stalluppväxt?

Karriär

1. Hur har du kommit dit du är idag? (Utbildning, jobb osv.)
2. Hur skulle du beskriva dig själv som ledare?
3. Vilka hinder har du stött på? Har du upplevt några hinder på grund av att du är kvinna?
4. Finns det något sätt du anser att du särskiljer dig från andra kvinnor i ledarposition?

Stall + Karriär

1. Vilka ledarskapsegenskaper skulle du beskriva som nödvändiga för att hantera hästar?
2. Har du några av dessa egenskaper?
3. Har du lärt dig/utvecklat dessa egenskaper i stallet?
4. Använder du några av dessa egenskaper i ditt ledarskap på jobbet?
5. Hur har din bakgrund i stallet hjälpt dig i karriären?
6. Vad är de viktigaste lärdomar du har med dig från stallet?

Appendix B

Hej!

Jag heter Caroline Kjellman, jag läser en masterutbildning, Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations, vid Göteborgs Universitet.

Just nu skriver jag en masteruppsats på temat kvinnligt ledarskap. Syftet med studien är att undersöka om kvinnor har lärt sig ledarskap i stallet som unga och om de senare använder egenskaperna i sitt arbete.

Jag är intresserad av att intervjua dig i egenskap av hästtjej i kombination med att du är chef. Intervjun tar ca. 1 timme och kan utföras i person eller via Skype/telefon. Hela intervjun kommer att spelas in på band. Intervjuerna kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt samt avidentifieras. Din medverkan är frivillig och kan när som helst avbrytas.

Om du accepterar att delta i studien kommer du kontaktas via telefon för att bestämma tid för att genomföra intervjun.

Vänliga Hälsningar

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