



Essay

Elsa as Horse Whisperer in Disney's *Frozen 2*: Opportunity "Nokk"s to Quash Gender Stereotypes

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Abstract: *Frozen 2* (2019) provided Disney with the opportunity to move past discomfort about the confluence of women's sexuality and power in Queen Elsa portrayed in *Frozen* (2013). Yet in *Frozen 2*, Elsa remains romantically unattached, despite audience interest in her love life in the six years following the release of *Frozen*. In *Frozen 2*, Elsa forms a bond with a mythological male horse, a Nokk, whom she first battles, and then tames, showcasing her horse-whispering talents while building intimacy with the equine. The symbolism of Elsa's domestication of the willful Nokk relates to the gynocentric horse and pony genre that explores girls' desire for intimacy within a fictional world. In *Frozen 2*, however, substituting a male horse for a relationship with a human allows Disney to sidestep two potential controversies: (1) a queer love interest for Elsa, and (2) the portrayal of Elsa as wielding more power than a non-magically endowed male partner. In addition, Elsa's taming of the horse in *Frozen 2* places her in the realm of equestrianism, a woman-dominated sport where femininity is nevertheless devalued. As a result, her skills as a horse whisperer do not threaten men's ascendancy, reflecting real-life gender dynamics in equestrian sport. These themes show how Disney balked at modernizing Elsa, retreating to outdated conceptions of gender roles rather than depicting progressive gender dynamics and sexuality in Disney royalty.

Keywords: Frozen; Frozen 2; Elsa; Nokk; horse; equestrianism; horse whisperer; equestrian sport; gender stereotypes; gender roles; gender; pony literature; groom; sexuality; queer

1. Introduction

Frozen (2013) was a phenomenal box office success that earned Disney \$1.28 billion, an amount that *Frozen 2* exceeded (\$1.45 billion), with both films far outstripping their \$150 million production budgets (Kandell 2020). With its formidable performance, *Frozen 2* (2019) followed its predecessor in drawing audiences to theaters, with its reach enhanced through streaming and merchandise.¹ With six years in between the two *Frozen* films, Disney had ample opportunity to develop its lead characters, mindful of its ubiquitous presence and global influence (Anjirbag 2019; Boguszewicz-Kreft et al. 2019; Uppal 2019). Other concerns pertain to Disney's limited progress in moving away from gender-stereotypical heroines (Coyné et al. 2016; Dundes and Streiff 2016; Dundes et al. 2018; Golden and Jacoby 2018; Hains 2014; Hine et al. 2018a, 2018b; Macaluso 2018; Primo 2018; Streiff and Dundes 2017a, 2017b), including the relevance of gender stereotypes in Disney films that continue to apply to women in real life (Dundes et al. 2019).

The anticipated release of *Frozen 2* spawned speculation centered around the film's de facto star, Elsa, the Queen of the fictional Scandinavian Arendelle.² Fans speculated about how Disney would

¹ Marketing efforts included the placement of *Frozen 2* stickers on Dole bananas as part of Disney's #PoweringTheHeroWithin campaign (Shepard 2019).

² The name Arendelle reflects gynocentric rule with the suffix "elle", while without the word "queendom", the word "kingdom" linguistically reinforces patriarchy.

develop Elsa, with renown for her anthem “Let it Go”, a song that prompted discussions ranging from women’s empowerment to coming out (Fan 2019; Lynskey 2014). *Frozen* even spawned an online campaign for Disney to depart from heteronormativity in giving Elsa a woman partner (hashtag #GiveElsaAGirlfriend) (Farris 2020; Hackett 2020; Llompart and Brugué 2019; VanDerWerff 2019; Wong 2020). Yet with Disney prioritizing profit, Elsa’s sexuality was undoubtedly considered in terms of its monetary consequences, making an apolitical stance seem safest financially. Nevertheless, this interest in Elsa’s love life and audiences’ hopes to sway the outcome in the sequel suggest that *Frozen 2* had the potential to help reshape boundaries of what constitutes normal sexuality, remarkable influence for a fictional, animated film. This essay explores the semiotics of equestrianism to elucidate how Disney eschewed a societal shift to modernized gender roles.

2. Plot Summary

2.1. General Summary

Elsa hears a mysterious voice calling her, and feels compelled to investigate, leading her to an enchanted forest where she uncovers her grandfather’s treachery against indigenous Sámi. To break the spell and atone for her family’s perfidy, Anna breaks the dam that had adversely affected the Sámi but that protected the kingdom of Arendelle. Anna’s act unleashes a flood that only Elsa can divert, which she accomplishes with the indispensable help of her horse (the Nokk). Elsa then decides to preside over the Sámi living in the forest, after choosing to share power with her sister Anna, who becomes queen of Arendelle after accepting a proposal of marriage from Kristof, an iceman featured in *Frozen* (2013).

2.2. Plot Summary Pertaining to Elsa and the Nokk

When Elsa sets out to find the source of the voice calling her, she fights the ocean tide, using her powers to make an ice path. At one point, she plunges under water, where she encounters the Nokk, a mythological water horse (specifically a male in its portrayal in Norwegian mythology (Trondalen 2017)). The Nokk tries to drown Elsa by pushing her down with his hooves, submerging her deeper under water. When she manages to escape, he comes after her, as she turns water into ice to fend him off. The Nokk is undeterred and, with her hand lodged in his maw, he drags her along with him at the water’s surface (1:01:57). Elsa is finally able to magically conjure up a bridle and reins and loop them around the Nokk’s neck (1:02:05), allowing her to hoist herself astride the recalcitrant beast. He reacts by trying to throw her off. Elsa manages to stay on top of the Nokk that is thrashing like a bucking bronco, as she pulls on the reins to control his movements. The Nokk finally submits, after which she leans down to pat and rub his neck to reward his obedience. When Elsa dismounts upon reaching her destination, she and the Nokk exchange nods before the Nokk disappears into the water and Elsa goes forth to locate the voice.

During the film’s conclusion, when Elsa returns to Arendelle after the dam breaks, she falls through ice that flows into the deluge hurtling towards Arendelle. As she plunges under water, the Nokk sees Elsa sink (1:21:19). Seconds later, Elsa emerges from the water astride the Nokk but without a bridle or reins (1:21:48), and with his help, arrives ahead of the flood in time to divert it and save Arendelle. At the end, Elsa calls forth the Nokk, and after sharing an intimate moment, they ride off together into the sunset.

3. The Symbolism of the Nokk

3.1. The Relevance of Equestrianism

The Nokk merits analysis because the horse is a primary means by which Elsa showcases her bravery, skill and heroism in *Frozen 2*. And while equestrian sport is not portrayed in the film per se, Elsa’s interactions with the Nokk reflect gender patterns in the sport. For example, Elsa’s equestrian prowess is relevant to how equestrian sport is unique: it is the only Olympic-level sport not subject to

sex segregation; men and women compete against each other as individuals (as opposed to competition occurring in single-sex teams or mixed sex teams of paired men and women) (Dashper 2012a, 2012b). The sport is also unusual in that “openly gay men are present in relatively high numbers [making it an] unusually welcoming and accepting sporting environment for gay men” (Dashper 2012b, p. 1114). Diminished homophobia in the sport, however, has not erased the disparity between conceptions of masculinity and femininity, nor altered the valorization of masculinity (McCormack and Anderson 2010) even in a sport that does not attract heterosexual men in large numbers (Plymoth 2013). Outside of equestrianism, however, men that express an everyday interest in horses may be derided for their predilection (Jones 2015), while “male flight” has resulted in significantly more women than men in the sport (Braddick 2019; Dashper 2012b; Hedenborg and White 2012).³ This feminization of equestrianism may be partly because heterosexual men competing in equestrian events compete against women and gay men, detracting from their ability to gain status through feminizing a competitor that is deemed a worthy man (Dundes 1997).

Even within a sport attracting a disproportionate number of women, men in equestrianism (gay and straight) still devalue femininity as inferior to masculinity, which is constructed “in opposition to femininity on a symbolic level” (Dashper 2012b, p. 1120), an attitude contributing to men’s dominance in the sport at elite levels of competition (Dashper 2012a). This phenomenon applies to jockeys, likely related to the word jock, a macho man that is an athlete (Dundes 1978; Jock 2020). Despite the low weight requirement for jockeys, they are predominantly men, especially at the most competitive levels (e.g., Triple Crown) (Birke and Brandt 2009; Bjork-Billings 2012; Hedenborg 2015; Velija and Hughes 2019; Williams and Hall 2018). The fact that a related term, jock strap, applies to sports in general, specifically related to phallic protection, shows the connection between masculinity and horseback riding (Dundes 1978; Jock 2020), but notably within the context of competing in a race, *not* riding for pleasure.

Thus equestrianism, complete with a “glass escalator” for men, “promotes men and marginalizes women” (Dashper 2012a, pp. 218, 220) [gender inequality also noted in the increasingly feminized field of veterinary science (Irvine and Vermilya 2010; Knights and Clarke 2019)].⁴ These gender dynamics leave perceptions of men’s superiority intact and advantage men in the sport, despite the prevalence of women in the sport (Allen 2018).

The semiotics of equestrianism suggests that Elsa’s heroic actions fall within a category of sport in which she risks a subordinated position that does not threaten men’s hegemony. Her excellence as a horse whisperer, assessed through the lens of its status as a feminine activity, may also be a consequence of the natural horsemanship movement (that took off in the 1980s), as it promotes an ethic of care more associated with femininity (Birke 2007, 2008). Because of these gender implications, Elsa’s horse-taming prowess offers the “safe” choice of pairing her with the Nokk as a surrogate human man.

3.2. The Nokk as a Man Surrogate for Intimacy

A key part of the Nokk’s symbolism involves Elsa riding the beast astride and bareback, a position that is both “a potent image of female independence” (Sceats and Cunningham 2014, p. 69) and a means to permit physical and emotional intimacy (Dashper 2016). Horseback riding entails “inter corporeality and the shared sensorial processes” between a horse and its rider, “an embodied experience, felt and negotiated through *intimate* body-to-body communication” (Birke and Brandt 2009; Bjork-Billings 2012; Dashper 2016, p. 88, emphasis added; Killian 2011).

³ Equestrian sport had military origins as a male-only activity. In the mid-20th century, the sport permitted civilians, including women, who could compete against men (Bryant 2008).

⁴ Male advantage, or “penis points”, is well known in the world of equestrian sports (Allen 2018).

Historically, the sense of intimacy linked to women straddling horses had sexual connotations that required societal intervention.⁵ Specifically, because riding a horse astride was seen as a threat to a young woman's hymen (hence purity), sidesaddles were introduced for woman riders (Hofstetter 2009). Calls for proper feminine decorum extended to girls' play on various toys, like hobby horses, that involved straddling. Bicycles were also suspect, including saddle designs that allegedly facilitated women's sexual gratification (Garvey 1995). Like horseback riding, bicycles risked "unseemly" stimulation of female genitalia that helped fuel the moral panic over masturbation in the early 18th century (Ashman 2017; Foucault [1976] 1998). A vestige of such expectations for women's propriety applies to the recommended legs-crossed sitting position for women, contrasting with the open-legged posture that conveys power rather than sexual access among men (Davis and Weitz 1981; Jane 2017).

More overtly, Elsa's subduing and riding the Nokk astride places her in a dominant role, but one that could be undermined by its sexual connotations for women, given the well-known slang meaning of a woman riding a man. When a woman rides astride, the mounted horse occupies "a relatively subordinate position" (Dashper 2016, p. 91) that is conflated with the woman's sexual dominance. Thus, this latent symbolism is complicated for women as it has multiple meanings. In contrast, men's dominance over horses is often celebrated without ambiguity, as portrayed in manifold historical statues in which military heroes are memorialized atop a stallion on their literal (rather than metaphorical) "high horse".

The renowned woman equestrian and empress, Catherine the Great of Russia, illustrates this discomfort with woman equestrians' power. She overthrew her husband in 1762, went on to have many men as lovers, and as an adult, "always" rode a horse astride, ignoring concerns about the position's supposed implications for sexual propriety (and fertility) (Massie 2012, p. 154). According to a persistent urban legend, she was crushed to death while attempting sex with a stallion (Mikkelsen 1997). This rumor both detracted from her credibility and accomplishments, while at the same time reflected suspicions about whether powerful women can be satisfied by men and turn to horses as man substitutes. Similarly, even a seemingly kind but powerful woman, as Elsa is portrayed in *Frozen 2*, is apparently better off paired with a horse, because having magical powers would presumably extend to sexual activity, undermining men's control over the act.⁶

The view that power-usurping equestrian women can be disparaged by sexualizing their relationship with a horse reflects patriarchy. Another perspective is to see power and symbolic sexual dominance as mutually reinforcing, a notion supported by horse and pony literature in which horses serve as man replacements. This genre of literature provides an unambiguous but safe outlet for how women's power and sexuality intersect [see e.g., Birke and Brandt (2009)], even if academic literature has scant coverage of these themes (Dorré 2006). In one common literary trope, the young woman protagonist forms a bond with "a beautiful, powerful and independent creature which nevertheless requires female nurturing" (Sceats and Cunningham 2014, p. 69). These fictional portrayals depict women riders in possession and control of a horse that responds to their "every wish", a form of emotional intimacy "unobtainable in a man" (Sceats and Cunningham 2014, p. 75).

After Elsa is free of the curse that has frozen her immobile, she plunges underwater where the current pushes her into the deluge headed toward Arendelle. The Nokk intuitively senses Elsa's need for help and comes to her aid. After mounting him, she gallops ahead of the flood in order to perform her heroic rescue of the kingdom. Thus, even for a powerful woman, a male is key to success (consistent with the almost exclusively-male sidekick actors in the Disney Universe). In fact, Elsa's rescue by the

⁵ The trope of "powerful woman as castrating witch" engendered similar concerns about power-seizing witches that straddled their broomsticks as a supposed manifestation of penis envy, that relates to the portrayal of Elsa in *Frozen* (2013) (Dundes et al. 2018).

⁶ Male insecurities about sexual performance were a latent theme in Disney's *Moana*, with Maui's predominant concerns centering on his bone fishhook and ability to shapeshift (Streff and Dundes 2017b), while the Nokk as a male shapeshifter also reflects this male preoccupation.

Nokk supports his role as a surrogate knight in shining armor,⁷ especially given that Elsa's powers never hit the mark: the sage troll Pabbie originally described her magical gifts as "too much for this world", yet later felt it necessary to "pray that they're enough" (23:42).

4. The Horse as a Human Man Surrogate

4.1. Parallels in *Frozen 2* to the Horse and Pony Fiction Genre

The description of the pony-mad girl in literature has other parallels with Elsa in *Frozen 2*. Elsa tames and domesticates the wild Nokk, akin to horse and pony stories where woman protagonists rein in beasts chomping at the bit with "unbridled" energy.⁸ While Disney draws on Scandinavian mythology in its use of the Nokk, the beast is commonly depicted as a malevolent being, in contrast to its eventual role as Elsa's stallion or trusty steed (with steed etymologically related to stud). This permutation makes Elsa's taming of the creature consistent with the template of the horse and pony stories commonly featuring a girl's desire to personally groom and control a horse (a theme that will be expanded on later in Section 6 below).

The genre contains an interaction with a wild animal and explores the human needs it fulfills: "the pony-mad girl seems seduced by the proximity to the 'wild' side of the horse [and] its ability to take the place of a human while remaining animal" (Fudge 2008, p. 20). In other words, it is a safe fantasy sphere, where a young woman is allowed to exert control and dominance in a relationship with physical and emotional facets, yet without the risk of being a shrew (or any other noun used to disparage women seen as domineering, e.g., virago, dragon, termagant, or harridan, words that lack a masculine-coded equivalent). A relationship with a horse frees women from the psychosocial baggage of gender power dynamics, while at the same time provides a metaphysical space to sublimate libido.

Furthermore, the horse as a clichéd love interest surrogate enables young girls to "channel turbulent and often difficult emotions safely into their passion for ponies" (Haymonds 2000, 2004, p. 64; Pierson 2002; Sceats and Cunningham 2014). Elsa feels guilty because her parents died looking for answers about her magical powers (powers that required an explanation for her—as a woman). With the Nokk's assistance, she resolves this inner tumult by saving the kingdom that is her parents' legacy, a feat possible because of her special connection to the horse, in a way that departs from historical horse and master relationships, in which spurs and riding crops were used.

4.2. Gender, Power and Grooming Historically

Elsa's relationship with the Nokk is also important to assess in contradistinction to the former context of gender and horse grooming. In her role as horse groom, Elsa would be charged with care of the Nokk. In the English-speaking world, the original term for the marital groom, or bridegroom, incorporates a word that means to prepare or train (a horse or a person) for a particular purpose or activity, connoting that the groom's duty is to tame or domesticate the bride.⁹ So a horse groomer takes care of those equine that are in a submissive position relative to the groomer entrusted with their care. Thus, being groomed connotes being acted upon by the groom, a form of domination, while there is no parallel term "to be bridged". If a groom can mean both a man getting married or recently married, but also someone who cares for horses, then the relationship between a human and a horse is indirectly

⁷ Knights are closely associated with the horses they ride, as suggested by the knight chess piece, in which a horse substitutes for a human male, rather than a helmet or armor, etc.

⁸ The *My Little Pony* franchise, as well as an explosion of products that are a modified horse in the form of a unicorn, reveal the sustained appeal of this genre for young girls (Fisher 2017).

⁹ According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, the *first* definition of the noun groom is a person employed to take care of horses, while the second definition is a bridegroom (Groom 2020). The grooming of the bride likely had to do with the historical expectation to fulfill the mandate of matrimony (from the word mother) in terms of fertility and motherhood. In contrast, the word patriarchy (from the word father) relates to male power to the exclusion of women.

comparable to husband and wife historically, as horses are the presumed or default animal for the word groom.

5. Horses as a Way to Channel a Woman's Sexuality

Elsa's relationship with a horse, as its groomer in contemporary times, not only reinforces her power and independence, but also allows her to be nurturing and intimate—seemingly only possible with a horse and not a human (since her bond with the Nokk and lack of love interest in *Frozen 2* reflect societal difficulties of reconciling power and romance in a woman (Streiff and Dundes 2017a)).¹⁰ This very point reflects the “imaginative pull” of horse literature, that explores “the suggestive power of the horse in providing physical equality, domination and power, and substitute sexuality for women” (Sceats and Cunningham 2014, p. 75). This outlet, however, also reflects fears about women's sexuality: “The power of the animal and the woman's skillfulness in commanding that power often articulate the fantasy of irrepressible women's sexuality that, however titillating, must be culturally censured and controlled” (Dorré 2006, p. 162). At the end of *Frozen 2*, there are elements of this phenomenon: in the final moments of the film, Elsa and the Nokk, with eyes closed, share an intimate moment in which Elsa places her hands on each of the Nokk's cheeks, and presses her forehead against his nose, with a contented smile. During this moment of bonding, viewers may note that she is not in rugged sportswoman attire, but rather is somewhat bridal, with red lips, an off-the-shoulder long white gown with a white wedding train-like cape (1:30:32). Elsa tells the wind spirit Gayle about her plans with the Nokk, saying, “We're going for a ride”, not “I'm going for a ride”. The word “we” clarifies that the activity is for both her and the horse, and not simply her using the horse as transportation, consistent with a concern among horse enthusiasts that there be equality in the relationship (Birke and Hockenull 2015; Birke and Thompson 2017).

In practical terms, *Elsa*, and not the Nokk, is going for a ride since she will be sitting while the Nokk trots or gallops. Furthermore, the word “ride” applied to a living animal inherently means a joint activity, so Elsa saying, “I'm going for a ride” would automatically incorporate the Nokk (since the Nokk cannot go for a ride on his own). However, using the word “we” emphasizes their engaging in the activity together as partners, as a single unit. This view of a relationship with a horse is popular in modern equestrianism (Dashper 2016), including objections to seeing the relationship as “horse and master” hierarchy, with a preference for equality and cooperation, a trait that is more expected among women (Charness and Rustichini 2011; Cigarini et al. 2020; Jones et al. 2018).¹¹ These traits also characterize Elsa's decision to share power with her sister at the end, making her queen of Arendelle while she supervises the Sámi in the forest, showing Disney's comfort with women engaging in cooperative behavior with each other (Lester 2017)—but not with them presiding over a man partner whose masculinity would be threatened by a woman's superpowers (Macaluso 2018).

In support of this special relationship between Elsa and the Nokk, no one else rides the horse; in fact, doing so would seem like a breach of the intimacy between Elsa and her steed. Anecdotal evidence supports this type of strong connection, exemplified by how one longtime horsewoman describes her relationship with her horse: “You are one with it. You just feel the power underneath you. And that's part of the attraction” (Killian 2011).

¹⁰ Elsa's lack of love life in both *Frozen* films and Disney's unwillingness to address Elsa's sexuality were parodied in a skit by the show *Saturday Night Live* in February 2020. The spoof's dialogue included how “the Twitter storm rages on!” referring to the petitions for Elsa to have a woman love interest. In the skit, Elsa comments sardonically that she just played with snow for two movies while Anna had romance, adding sarcastically that the sisters' differing scenarios are “equally good”. Elsa subsequently interjects, with irony, “The lack of romantic interest doesn't bother me anyway” (Wong 2020).

¹¹ The word “master” that is inimical to natural “horsemanship” reflects power dynamics in the speech of male veterinary surgeons (Clarke and Knights 2019). There is also concern about how neither the word “being” nor “creature” is the *mot juste* for describing a horse-human relationship, while “animal” is considered too bestial, and suggests that horses are inferior to humans (Birke and Thompson 2017).

Disney portrays an overt sense of intimacy between Elsa and the Nokk at the film's conclusion. Aside from closing their eyes while standing head-to-head and Elsa's use of the word "we" to convey a sense of closeness, Elsa then sends snowy sparks through the Nokk in a kind of magical electro-kinetic connection (kinesics). She then mounts the horse and gallops off. This unexplained energy transfer visually conveys the intimacy between them.

In addition, very near the climax of the film, while atop the galloping Nokk, Elsa inhales deeply, and then exhales while fluttering her eyelids and emitting an audible euphoric sigh (1:31:12), a scene reminiscent of Marshmallow's symbolically significant post-credit moan in *Frozen 1* (Dundes et al. 2018). While there is arguably some ambiguity in Elsa's sigh, it is consistent with themes found in horse and pony literature, suggesting that this intimacy is a piece of the puzzle that clarifies how Disney reconciles women's sexuality and power.

In the very last scene of the movie, Elsa heads off into the sunset astride the Nokk (1:37:07), a moment with romantic overtones as sunset is a prelude to nightfall and a time of day associated with intimacy. While these intimations about sexuality are latent, the ending allows Elsa's virginity to remain intact, as her white dress implies, and in conformity with her father's instructions (in *Frozen*) to conceal and not feel (Streiff and Dundes 2017a). Yet within this relationship, she has more freedom to operate outside of traditional gender roles, in her role as horse groom, in which a woman rider has dominion over the male horse that she rides. Thus, a relationship with a horse can evolve free from societal expectations and judgments, replacing an idealized man for whom submissiveness and moxie would be incongruous. In the realm of horse and woman, however, a horse that can submit to its rider's commands can also retain its spark, neither aware of nor encumbered by gender roles.

6. Conclusions

The themes explored in this paper lie hidden, embedded in symbolic form, reflecting unconscious societal discomfort with how to reconcile the confluence of power and romance in a likeable heroine in a way that does not threaten men's dominance. Disney persists in its reluctance to have man–woman cooperative pairs of strong, capable, independent individuals such that one person's strength does not come at the expense of a partner's victory or power.¹² Nor was Disney yet prepared to feature a queer relationship in a lucrative franchise like *Frozen*.

The missed opportunity to portray Elsa as a new kind of hero in *Frozen 2* left some critics and fans deflated. Elsa remains confined by traditional parameters of women's gender roles, making her a sort of "hero lite" in which she excels in equestrianism, an area that attracts mostly women and gay men, except in upper echelons that she does not reach. In addition, because Disney opted for a horse in lieu of a love interest for Elsa, she was portrayed as conquering the object of her intimacy. As a result, the relationship involved her initially subjugating a male instead of a building a relationship gradually, based more on equality.

In *Frozen 2*, Disney missed the opportunity to promote acceptance of a woman in control. A progressive addition to the Disney princess realm would *not* have necessitated a woman inexplicably sharing power with her sister (that occurred after Anna reinforced the value of hegemonic heteronormative coupledom), nor the assistance of a male horse. Furthermore, Elsa has power at the expense of indigenous people (a form of neocolonialism that warrants further analysis). Thus, audiences still await a Disney princess or queen that is autonomous, unapologetically ambitious and competent, as well as emotionally stable and fulfilled.

While a role reversal in which a woman exerts dominance might be considered progress, it is important to note that Elsa takes control of a horse and not a human man in finding intimacy. Furthermore, having a woman follow a traditionally masculine template (of domination) is not

¹² This is a real-life dilemma portrayed in the popular Netflix historical drama *The Crown* (2016), in which the spouse of Queen Elizabeth II expresses a sense of emasculation as a prince (not a titular king) paired with a queen of higher status.

necessarily progress. The Nokk fulfills the same function as equestrian activities that offer women a means “to be less constrained by norms of femininity [and] transcend social boundaries”, even temporarily (Birke and Brandt 2009). However, this transcendence is still limited to the symbolic level so long as challenges to patriarchy threaten the security offered by the anachronistic refuge of long-standing, latent gender stereotypes, despite modernized perceptions of gender roles.

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