Contesting Horses: 
Borders and Shifting Social Meanings in Veterinary Medical Education

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Abstract
Within veterinary medical education, tracking systems exist that differentiate between “large” and “small” animal medicine. In a tracking system, students can focus primarily on their choice of animal medicine once they have completed the core curriculum. This article argues that these socially created categories are ever shifting; therefore, some species do not always “fit.” This generates new discourses surrounding emerging “border tracks”; these “tracks” focus on species whose social definitions change so that their placement in the tracking system of veterinary medical education is a site of contestation. Thus, animal medicine operates not solely on the basis of biology, but on the basis of social meaning as well. This analysis will use the equine concentration to demonstrate the ambiguity of borders, as well as their potential to serve as communicative sites for social change.

Keywords  
borders, boundaries, equine, human-animal relationships, veterinary students

Veterinary medical education in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom often uses a “tracking” system that separates “large animal” and “small animal” medicine (Willis et al., 2007; Hooper, 1994). Most large animals are used for food or other by-products. Small animals are companions. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association defines career tracking as the requirement of all students to complete core courses in the biomedical sciences for one or two years, with the last two or three years designated as “career tracks,” with different core courses for each track (Lavictoire, 2003). In the United States, students take courses such as anatomy, physiology, immunology, pharmacology, and pathology during the first two years. Then they may declare the small animal or large animal track and receive training specific to those species. This research focuses on an American veterinary
college; however, it is important to remember that tracking exists elsewhere in the world to varying degrees. The track usually influences, but does not determine, the practice a student will ultimately pursue.3

I argue that the categories represented by the tracks are socially created and ever shifting; therefore, there are some species that do not “fit.” This ambiguity generates new discourses surrounding what I call “border tracks.” In border tracks there are species whose social definitions change so their placement in veterinary medical education’s tracking system becomes inappropriate and a site of contestation. For example, horses currently occupy a border track. The equine “track,” neither large nor small, constitutes a border between the dominant areas of veterinary medicine. As with other metaphorical borders, there exists an ongoing struggle to define it.

Abundant research in the social sciences examines the concept of borders. Barbara J. Morehouse describes borderlands as “spaces where the everyday realities of boundaries are played out” and “where cultural identity, sheltered by the boundary, becomes blurred, mixed, creolized” (2004, p. 19). Work on geographies of exclusion examines the role of difference in the creation of boundaries and the production of knowledge (Sibley, 1995). A functionalist purpose of boundaries is to provide social organization to bodies of knowledge. Others expand this Foucauldian contribution of institutionalizing difference and further suggest that boundaries act as communication interfaces in the form of boundary objects (Bowker & Star, 1999; Star & Griesemer, 1989). Places on the margin “are never simply locations. Rather, they are sites for someone and of something” (Shields, 1991, p. 6). Equine medicine in veterinary education is a site where humans define horses.

The border metaphor also occurs within human-animal studies. Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel (1998) use the concept of the border to examine how “permeable border zones of metropolitan regions inhabited by both people and animals” represent “zones of potential coexistence” (p. xvii). As geographers, they “examine cases of negotiation/struggle over sharing space” (p. xvii). In their research, borders are physical places, whereas I situate borders in human cultural thought. Similar extensions of animal geography focus on the social definitions of animals and their additional placement in human imaginings (Philo & Wilbert, 2000). I use the perspective of border studies to describe a site where humans and animals interact that is muddled and oftentimes confusing. The equine border space emerges out of the difference between the bounded spaces of small and large animals. Here horses exist as boundary objects for human negotiation.

In this article, I first explain the social construction of species in society generally, and then describe how veterinary medical training uses that process.
Then, I provide a brief history of horses in veterinary medicine to illustrate their shifting status. Next, I describe my method for this research project. Drawing on interviews with veterinary students at various stages in their training, I examine how they create discourses around horses’ utility and related geography, medical practices regarding horses, the economics of maintaining a horse, and the U.S. horse slaughter ban. Finally, I discuss how these narratives demonstrate that equine medicine occupies a border space and that students are constantly attempting to make horses “fit” within their educational structure.

The Social Construction of Species

The designation “species” connotes not only a position in taxonomy, but also how humans regard the beings who occupy that position. To understand the shifting status of horses, it is helpful to understand how species are socially constructed and placed in a hierarchy. Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders (1996) termed this hierarchy “the sociozoologic scale.” While previous scholars (Singer, 1975) attributed placement in the hierarchy to consumption practices, Arluke and Sanders categorized animals into two groups: good and bad. Good animals fall just below humans on the sociozoologic scale. At the top of this group are the animals most present in human domestic life, namely companion animals (Bryant, 2007; Vitulli, 2006; Gardyn, 2001). Under good animals fall what are termed “tools.” These are animals with a clear purpose in the social order, although not as members of the family (Cassuto, 2007; Wilkie, 2005). They are either scientific data or food. To use them in these ways requires that they “be deanthropomorphized, becoming lesser beings or objects that think few thoughts, feel only the most primitive emotions, and experience little pain” (Arluke & Sanders, 1996, p. 173). This requires using language that designates the animals as tools—i.e., referring to them as supplies or assigning numbers instead of names (Dess & Chapman, 1998; Phillips, 1994). Some species make the transition from “good” to “bad,” and vice versa. For example, some protected “exotic” species previously were “dangerous” animals.

Veterinary training often has a classification system that mirrors but modifies the sociozoologic scale. Veterinary education and veterinary practice revolve mainly around animals in the good animal categories. Bad animals are not a major focus of medicine and care. Even though veterinary education focuses on good animals, these animals have differing social definitions because of further subdivisions; while their care is encouraged, the distribution of care
varies in accordance with the constructed meanings of “companion” and “tool.” Horses are on the border between them.

_Horses and Veterinary Medicine: A Coconstitutive Relationship_

Horses were the original focus of veterinary medicine. Joanna Swabe (1999) traces the origins and rise of veterinary medicine, noting that it all began with the treatment of horses. In ancient Greece and Rome, animal doctors treated horses because they were so important to the military. The first official veterinary college, established in 1762 in France, was devoted to more than just the study of horses, who had been the only focus of animal health for centuries. Indeed, the incorporation of animals other than horses is relatively recent. A cattle plague in Western Europe called attention to the need to treat other species. Then, with the invention of the internal combustion engine in the early twentieth century, the importance of horses in Europe rapidly declined. Technology replaced their role as work animals and transportation. Consequently, the veterinary profession altered accordingly, shifting its focus to animals used for food.

The history of horses and veterinary medicine in the United States followed a similar trajectory. According to Susan D. Jones (2003), horses were the most valuable animal when “animal doctoring” became a more established profession toward the latter part of the 19th century. Jones relates that animal doctors suffered a lowly beginning, falling near the bottom rung of the social status ladder. She writes that “[t]he duplicitous ‘cigar-chomping horse doctor’ and slovenly ‘cow leech,’ both stereotypes of animal healers, derived from the images of drunken grooms and vulgar farmhands” (Jones, 2003, p. 11). Later, veterinarians shed these disparaging stereotypes and developed a professional identity (Greene, 2010). Nevertheless, during the late 1800s in the United States, veterinary medicine was not valued. At this time, companion animals were seldom patients (Jones, 2003). Most veterinary patients were animals valued for their productive capacities, as workers or as food. It is important to note the significance of categorization regarding animal species. For instance, while companion animals now readily receive veterinary care, horses received it around the turn of the century because they were _not_ companion animals. As in European veterinary colleges, in American veterinary schools the curriculum focused on horses, as they were the most valuable animal of the time. Thus, graduates were primarily equine veterinarians. Again, when innovations like the automobile replaced horsepower, the value of horses fell. Consequently, veterinary services followed suit.

Jones (2003) explains that up until this technological advancement, horses were a marker of social status. Not only were they expensive animals to main-
tain, but they worked in many sectors. With the introduction of motor vehicles, however, horses became old-fashioned. This transition happened in cities, but also on farms (although more slowly) where horsepower was replaced with mechanical power. This period saw the increased popularity of horse slaughter. With decreased profitability, slaughter became a viable option for horse owners to recover money by turning their horses into glue, leather, and dog food. Jones states, “Throughout the 1920s more than 200,000 horses were killed yearly on farms and in packing plants” (2003, p. 47). In response, to salvage their usefulness, veterinarians urged Americans to eat horse meat—a cultural taboo—during the meat shortage of the early 1900s; consequently, the American horse population decreased by 40 percent between 1910 and 1930. With few working horses left, most were in recreational or companion roles. Obviously, this affected the veterinary profession; veterinarians feared it was a dying career. They tried to promote uses of horses and find them new niches in a motorized society. The profession began focusing on other species to broaden its services, thus redefining the role of veterinary medicine and shifting its focus to farm animals. Then, in the 1920s, companion animal practices emerged. Initially, companion animal medicine had the smallest patient base and was the least profitable; however, currently it is now the largest and most profitable area of veterinary medicine. Horses in Western society shifted from being the focus of veterinary medicine to struggling to find a place in veterinary medicine; their role changed from that of workhorses to companion animals, and from being abundant and necessary to being a limited luxury.

Method

This research focuses on a Western U.S. veterinary college that offers tracking for its students. I draw on interviews with 20 veterinary students at various levels of their training. I recruited interviewees through e-mails to their cohort listservs, through various veterinary club presidents’ e-mails on my behalf, and through posted advertisements around their campus. I recorded interviews with the participants’ consent and kept recordings and transcriptions confidential. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

The students came from diverse regions, mostly from the United States. Many planned to practice in other regions once they graduated. Ages of participants varied because some nontraditional students were pursuing veterinary medicine as a second career, but most participants were in their twenties and thirties. The majority of participants identified themselves as female, which is consistent with the demographics of veterinary medicine. The majority of
participants were white (N = 19), which also coincides with demographics. Among practicing veterinarians, an estimated 91 percent are white (Elmore, 2003). Of the participants, two had declared the small animal track, three (of whom all were focused on equine) had declared the large animal track, and four had declared the mixed track. Of the students in the first and second year of study, three were considering the small animal track, one was considering the large animal track, and seven were considering the mixed track.

At this particular college, students choose the small animal, large animal, or mixed/general track; they declare their track in their third year. The names of these tracks are misnomers, however. The small animal track focuses on generally smaller species, but the more defining characteristic is that most of these species are companion animals. In the small animal track, the animals most focused on are dogs and cats, but exotic animals are in its subfield “exotics and zoological medicine.” Examples of exotic animals include birds, reptiles, pocket pets (e.g., rabbits), fish, and ferrets, to name the most common. If a student is interested in working in exotics or zoological medicine, he or she may declare the interest but the official track is small animal.

The large animal track generally focuses on larger species (but not always so—some dog breeds can be just as large or larger than sheep or pigs): however, the more defining characteristic is that most of these species are in “production” (i.e., used for consumption or by-products). In the large animal track the species focused on are cattle, horses, sheep, goats, alpacas, llamas, both domestic and pet pigs, and wild ruminants. It is significant to note that the equine hospital at the college I observed advertises as distinct from the agricultural animal hospital. If a student is interested in working in equine medicine, he or she may declare the interest, but the official track is large animal. Finally, the mixed or general track allows students to take a variety of small and large animal classes of their choosing. When I describe my conversations with veterinary students, I interchangeably use the terms “small animal” and “companion animal” as well as “large animal” and “production animal.”

After I asked the year and track of participants, interviews followed a conversational style. We first discussed the history of their relationships with animals. Then I inquired about their experiences in veterinary school, with the tracking system as the guiding topic. I encouraged the respondents to speak on the experiences that were the most important or salient to them. Overall, all the students seemed willing and even eager to talk to me—several pointing out that the topics we discussed were interesting and sometimes even a learning experience for them. I conducted all the interviews and personally transcribed and coded them, using emergent inductive techniques of the
grounded theory method (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Charmaz, 1983; Becker & Geer, 1960).

Constructing Horses as a Border Species

Four areas emerged as significant border sites for humans negotiating social institutions around horses: utility and geography, medical practices, economics, and the horse slaughter ban.

Utility and Geography

This section examines the “what” and the “where”—“what” definition horses have, and “where” they reside. The context in which we place horses affects how we think about and discuss them, since horses exist in numerous settings within our cultural thought. Jessica, a first-year student considering tracking large animal, says:

> When we talk about small animals, we talk about them in a cute way. When we talk about large animals, we don’t talk about them in the same sense. Horses are on the fence; you kind of talk about them in the context that you think about them.

The utility of horses varies; they may be pets, such as companion animals, or income, such as production animals. Alexis, a first-year student considering tracking mixed, explains, “There are some people that just have pet horses and there are some people where the horses are a means of income for showing or breeding or whatnot.” Katie, a third-year large animal student focusing on equine, reminds us that, “Even in the 70s I would say, even in the last 30 years, horses were, their value was strictly production-oriented.” Yet now, Abby, a second-year student considering tracking small animal focusing on exotics, comments that, “Horses can be just as much a part of the family as a dog and a cat can.”

One noticeable change contributing to this shift is the geographic space that horses now occupy. Horses were present in cities in early American history as work animals, but with technological advancement they largely exited the urban scene and existed primarily in rural settings. Now, however, with horses kept as pets, farms are not their only homes. Katie recognizes that, “The equine people are from a scattered background because horses can be an urban thing now [once again].” She refers to the tendency for veterinary students to stick with what they know—many students see the trend of small animal
students coming from urban backgrounds and large animal students coming from rural backgrounds. Equine students are a mixed bag in this regard. Because horses now reside in most geographic spaces, students interested in them come from all over.

Furthermore, regional perspectives differ regarding horses. Jessica says:

I think it really depends a lot on where you come from too. Like on the east coast, they're pets. Then I moved out to Montana, and they're looked at much more like livestock. You have to look at people's priorities and realities, and they're very different for some people.

There are horses who exist on farms and ranches in a production-based capacity, there are horses who exist in suburban areas still used for economic return but also as companions in the areas of showing or racing, and there are horses in individuals' own backyards as companion animals. Social space matters too. "[Horses are] sort of like an extended family, but I think the real big difference is they don't live in a house. So they're removed from where you and your family are," notes Sarah, a second-year student considering tracking small animal. Therefore, geography is significant not just in the rural versus urban distinction, but in regional space, as well as social space (e.g., living in your home or in your barn). Utility and geography go hand in hand, since “how” one is defined influences “where” one is found, and vice versa.

**Medical Practices**

After students spoke repeatedly of horses’ inappropriate placement in the large animal track, I asked why they were still lumped into that category. Katie explains:

Especially now we don’t even have that many ranches so it’s not like everywhere there’s a horse, there’s cattle. There are a lot of places where there’s little urban farms and a lot of horses, but no cattle. I think just historically they’ve been linked.

For her, the past association with horses and cattle, both as production animals, left a residual connection. Jenna, a first-year student considering tracking mixed, points out a difference in the medicine:

I do have to take a step back and tell you that I think that equine medicine I look at just a little bit differently from large animal. And that is considered a large animal. There are some real specialties starting to evolve in equine as well. You can be an equine surgeon, specifically for equine.
For them, the medicine surrounding equine is no longer appropriate in the area of production.

Yet the historic ties of equine and production animals continue to bind them. Katie admits:

There are expectations that you do know how to work on ruminants. If I want to go to Lexington and work in an equine practice, they don’t give a crap if I don’t know how to test a cow or handle a cow, um… [To which I asked, “But your average farmer…”] Yeah, like you might have to see a cow every now and again. They might ask you, I think there’s just an expectation out there. “What, you’re a horse vet? You don’t know what a cow is?”

The very concept of horse has become problematic. Katie describes, “And that’s where the horse thing is a problem. Because the horse thing is now more individual, there are not many herds of horses.” This shift from collective to individual mentality surrounding horses has led to horses being associated less with production animals, where there is a collective herd health approach, and more with companion animals, where animals are individuals. “Equine is definitely making that transition. So they’re still dealing with a herd issue, but equine is the mix between the large animals and the small animals,” explains Nathan, a fourth-year small animal student. According to the sociozoologic scale, horses are rising in the ranks as more individualized companions. Anna, a first-year student considering tracking mixed, confirms, “I think that the general public has the strongest ties to dogs, followed by cats, and then horses.”

Economics

The fact that horses now possess a status close to companion animals affects the economics surrounding them. Horses were the most economically productive species at the beginning of the veterinary medical profession. Now that they have transitioned from primarily being work animals to being pleasure animals, their economic value has changed. Alexis has horses of her own and states, “Anyone with horses will tell you they are not economical to have. You spend way too much money, and they do way too little for you.” Travel back a hundred years, and this quote would be humorous—but not in the way Alexis meant it. For horses then were completely economical to have; in fact, they were a staple of any profitable business. This is not the case today. Today they are an unnecessary expense, as Jessica succinctly describes: “Cows, food. Horses, luxury. Dogs and cats, pets.”
However, what is profitable is becoming an equine veterinarian. Even though horses’ production value has declined, their social value has increased. This reflects their rising companion animal status. Anna explains: “Horses are companion animals too, and that’s why there’s more money if you do large animal equine versus production animal.” Katie agrees: “I think equine medicine is actually more like small animal medicine now, and people are willing to spend a lot on individual horses because they have this human-animal bond.” Seeing horses as individual animals with whom humans can bond has led to a consequential increase in their worth—based not on their productivity, but on their social status as companions.

Yet a cultural lag exists regarding the value of horses (Ogburn, 1957). Katie points out the different equine sectors and the different human-animal relationships within those areas. “I would say there’s some human-animal bond in showing. There is some in racing, but it’s less so. I think it’s more economics.” While seeing horses as pets is more and more common, they still exist as work animals or investment animals. Katie later notes:

The horse thing is so crazy because you can have the owner who doesn’t want to spend any money on the horse and wants you to put it down right then as if it were a food animal or just a totally dispensable creature; you can have another one that wants to go spend 300 grand or more.

This wide range of feelings toward horses shows their border status—they straddle the line between production animals and companion animals, and the economics surrounding them reflects this. Joanne, a second-year student considering tracking mixed, states, “They’re more of a commodity than a companion, for some people. And then [for] others, they’re more of a companion.” What this border status means is that horses are “in between companion animal, in between cows to slaughter,” according to Sarah. That is quite the border to straddle.

The Horse Slaughter Ban

Legislation also reflects the shift in cultural conceptions of horses. The veterinary students with whom I spoke mentioned the recent horse slaughter ban in the United States (Becker, 2010). They often debated this topic in their classes. One might assume that students involved in animal care, particularly those invested in studying equine medicine, would be against horse slaughter. However, these students overwhelmingly described being in favor of it. Some of them noted how it led to a decrease in horse abuse and neglect. For instance,
Alexis explained, “Well, we had a discussion in one of our classes last semester about horse slaughter, and overwhelmingly horse people are for it because since it stopped there’s been an increase in horse neglect and whatnot.” Other students who considered the decisions they will make in their future practice also brought up the ethical dilemmas around horse slaughter. For instance, Angie, a fourth-year large animal student focusing on equine, grappled with the idea of performing “convenience euthanasias” when she commented:

I’ll have a hard time with it, and I think I’d try to encourage the owner to explore other options, but if that’s what they want to do, I’d do it because it’s better than having them then decide to stop feeding the horse or something like that and have it be neglected.

For many students, this was a complex issue, and they felt that the public was uninformed. Amy, a fourth-year mixed student, thinks:

Most people made that decision [to end slaughter] based on an uninformed opinion of “Oh, I don’t want to see horses go for food. That sounds horrible, like a horrible end for a horse.” However, because there is not that option to send a horse to slaughter in this country anymore, they’re either being sent to Mexico to be slaughtered or turned loose to starve or just neglected and abused.

Their reasoning behind the link between the end of horse slaughter and the rise in horse abuse and neglect is largely economic. Anna predicts the ban will not last:

Horse slaughter is illegal, although we used to have horse slaughter, and we probably will again because it’s not in the American budget to be able to maintain that many wild mustangs and burros, not to mention the families who can’t feed that extra mouth and are just turning them out. The American economy is not going to be able to support the horse slaughter ban.

While horses are becoming more individualized companion animals instead of production animals, they still exist in the production world on farms that require them to provide an income. This creates a complicated situation where horse owners, by necessity, are unable to maintain these animals without horse slaughter. When horses aged and were no longer viable workers on the farm, slaughter was a means to dispose of the body and provide additional income for the farm. Euthanizing horses entails a greater cost than euthanizing small animals due to their size and the equipment needed to bury the body. Nathan explains this process:
There are no more horse slaughter plants in the states, so you have all these people with these old, decrepit horses that you can’t do anything with. I mean, if you use [the] euthanasia solution, you just can’t leave them out there because that’s a toxin that wildlife will get into and that will start a cascade of death. And burying it, it’s more than six feet down to have it be contained, so now with that it’s more troublesome to do euthanasia so, I mean there’s still humane ways to go about it. And... a bullet to the head under the proper supervision, I mean you can’t just go out there and aim and shoot, there’s a specific location that you look for so there’s no pain involved. It’s quick, it’s easy, it’s as painless as it can be, because it’s instant—is the goal. So that’s with equine. With cattle, it’s along the same lines. It’s a little easier with cattle because you have the slaughter plants that are humanely run, hopefully.

With the option of horse slaughter taken away, and the inability of horse owners to maintain their aging horses, horse abuse and neglect has followed. Michael, a first-year student considering tracking mixed, explains, “Basically it comes down to some of these are working horses, and if they have one that doesn’t need to be alive anymore, and they can’t take that horse and get some money out of it...”

For these veterinary students, a cared-for life ending in slaughter is a better scenario than a neglected life saved from the slaughterhouse. They consider themselves as having a larger perspective on this particular issue of animal welfare. Katie notes, “You have to look at the issue on a big scale. Like a big, big scale. You can’t just say, ‘Slaughter is bad, therefore no slaughter plants.’ And have all these neglected horses.” The students often pointed out that those in favor of the ban were typically small animal students and that this debate is a dividing line between large animal, including equine, students and small animal students. Alexis experienced one such heated debate: “Most small animal people are against it because it’s slaughtering horses that are beautiful animals. We had that discussion and hell broke out—it was horrible.” This idea of horses as beautiful individual animals reflects the shift toward small animal status. Michael notes how the public internalizes this shift:

One of our teachers explained that from what the general public, who voted for [the horse slaughter ban], what they saw were these commercials of these majestic horses running and ‘do you really want to kill them?’ and all that stuff, and media is just not fair sometimes.

For him, and many who support horse slaughter, the small animal ideology of becoming more and more attached to horses is what got the ban passed—a perspective that misses that bigger picture that large animal ideology understands.
Conclusion

While boundaries separate the small and large animal tracks, made clearer by the equine border track, this border also serves as a space for communication across concentrations. It can be divisive as well as connecting. The idea of an animal as a companion who lives out in the barnyard is something that horses represent—a boundary object that bridges the small and large animal fields. They simultaneously maintain boundaries and help break down the barriers to communication (Bowker & Star, 1999; Star & Griesemer, 1989).

Many applaud the tracking system in veterinary medical education for its efficiency in training students for particular areas of veterinary medicine (Willis & et al., 2007). However, an examination of its role in producing boundaries between species, which results in differential treatment, is absent. Horses illustrate that not all species fit into these bounded areas, so we place them in border spaces. More inquiry is needed to determine the consequences of these boundaries and consequent borderlands. Instead of being a geographical place or mixed cultural site, here the border space centers on an animal. Animals as potential boundary objects can contribute to a new area of research for human-animal scholars, along with expanding the knowledge of boundaries and borders (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

Author’s Note

In 2006, Congress banned federal funding for inspections of horse slaughter in the United States, consequently “banning” horse slaughter entirely. I began my research in 2009, and, after hearing so much from veterinary students about the horse slaughter ban, I focused on the “border” position that horses occupy. I completed this article in 2011, and the ban on horse slaughter was lifted later that year. This was not at all surprising to me. Rather, the legislation reflects the complexity of a species that is in transition and that presents as a puzzling case for veterinary students.

Notes

1. “Tracking” is the term used by the veterinary profession and the participants in this study to indicate species specialization. The majority of American and Canadian schools use full or partial tracking, but many schools do not.

2. I choose to use the term animal for the sake of simplicity when describing nonhuman animals; however, I would like to bring attention to the complex issues that arise in using common language such as this. For instance, humans are animals as well; thus, by contrasting human and animal as separate and distinct reifies their difference and the consequent superior status of
humans. Further, the word animal homogenizes a vast array of species into one category, which is also problematic when trying to understand what the term means.

3. The categories represented by the tracking system relate to a much broader system of agricultural governance that goes beyond and influences veterinary education.

4. Veterinary medicine has undergone dramatic feminization, in the sense of its sex composition and not necessarily in its gendered ideology (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010). In 2010, women constituted 52 percent of practicing veterinarians (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2010).

5. I do this consciously to stress the drastically different constructions of these animals and to illustrate their socially defined roles. I want to address that in using “production animal” as opposed to “animals used in production,” I am aware of the criticism of reifying these constructed categories. I choose these terms 1) to eliminate wordiness in my descriptions, 2) to reflect the discourse that veterinarians and veterinary students actually use in talking about these animals, and 3) to avoid more politically correct terms (e.g., agricultural animals) that do not exactly portray their lived experience.

6. Horses are physically large animals, and their living in the barn instead of the house is obviously in part a result of this fact. However, this participant is talking about the associated social meanings of the home, and not simply a physical structure. Therefore, whether or not size is the causal factor, horses are in a particular social space.

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