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As members of the Master's Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by
Natalie M. Kimble, titled The Influence of Gender Inequities Experienced by Women Veterinary
Students on their Intended Career Pathways and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the
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Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the
final copies of the thesis to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this thesis prepared under my direction and recommend that it be
accepted as fulfilling the Master's requirement.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................... 4  
Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 4  
Literature Review .......................................................................................................................... 6  
Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................. 9  
Methods........................................................................................................................................ 12  
  Design and Case Setting ............................................................................................................ 12  
  Participant Sample ...................................................................................................................... 13  
  Data Collection and Analysis .................................................................................................... 14  
  Trustworthiness ....................................................................................................................... 16  
Findings.......................................................................................................................................... 17  
  Progressive structure and Environment ................................................................................. 17  
  A Misogynistic and Sexist Foundation ................................................................................. 19  
Discussion .................................................................................................................................... 23  
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 27  
References ..................................................................................................................................... 30
Abstract

This study is focused on women veterinary medicine students and how misogyny and sexism have influenced their career pathways. The concept of rapid feminization of veterinary medicine was assessed as the effects can be seen industry-wide (i.e.- a downward trend in salaries, loss of large animal veterinarians, and loss of rural veterinarians). The gender inequities that women veterinary medicine students face were explored in order to determine why these trends could exist. Women students at Southwestern University College of Veterinary Medicine were interviewed and the findings revealed a double-sided coin of misogyny and sexism. On the surface, there is a fairly progressive environment being created as the students continuously felt as though their gender did not play a role in their education, creating a relatively agendered experience. However, the school was replicating a misogynistic cycle of pushing a women-majority class into women-majority fields (i.e.- small animal medicine or general medicine) through a disproportionate curriculum.

Introduction

Misogyny and sexism continue to characterize organizations, professional fields, and larger institutions, affecting women and their careers. Veterinary medicine has experienced a remarkable gender shift in the workforce with gender proportions changing from 98% male in 1960 to 55% female in 2017 (DVM360, 2020; Wuest, 2019). Despite this gender shift, signs of institutionalized misogyny and sexism are still present (Girvan, 2019). The limited literature on the effects of rapid feminization in veterinary medicine has shown the shift of majority men to majority women has resulted in little change in prominent gender disparities (Girvan, 2019;
Adams (2010) succinctly defined the feminization of a professional field as “the movement of women into occupations where they were formally under-represented” (p. 455). The feminization of the veterinary field has involved several persistent and overlapping issues. Specialties such as those that are focused on treating large animals and serving rural communities are having difficulties finding qualified practitioners with most women entering the veterinary profession opting for small animal specialties (e.g., companion animal treatment) (Smith, 2006). In turn, the lack of veterinarians in rural areas and large animal medicine is causing larger-scale problems such as an absence of care for entire populations of animals (Radke, 2021). Consequently, there is a lack of adequate care for livestock, which can have devastating effects on businesses, surrounding economies, and agro-food supply chain economies (Radke, 2021).

Concurrently, there are large pay gaps with women veterinarian salaries in the top-earning quartile making on average $100,000 less annually than their men counterparts (Cordova, 2021). Despite entrepreneurial interests and intentions across all genders, men still make up an unbalanced majority of private practice owners (Lofstedt, 2003). Though, in 2019, 40% of practice owners were women – a number that is projected to grow within the next decade, with women eventually expected to surpass men as the majority of practice owners (Nolen, 2020).

Despite the aforementioned discrepancies and trends, there is relatively little research on the feminization of the veterinary field (e.g., Liu, et al., 2021; Lofstedt, 2003) and that which does exist has overlooked the pre-career influences of misogyny and sexism on aspiring women.
veterinarians (Liu, et al., 2021). To help fill this scholarly gap, the current study explored the effects of misogyny and sexism on women veterinary medicine students and their intended career pathways. Specifically, I asked the following two questions:

- What gender inequities do women veterinary medicine students experience?
- How do these gender inequities influence their intended career paths?

**Literature Review**

Patriarchy is an institutional element of Western society and continues to have lasting effects through institutionalized gender disparities (Kandiyoti, 1988). Since the 1970s, when Title IV was enacted in the United States, there has been a noticeable feminization of many organizational fields due to women being given equal access to higher education (Lincoln, 2010). In 1950, approximately 75% of American undergraduate college students were men, while in 2021 women made up 59.5% of enrolled college students (Belkin, 2021). Despite this demographic shift, there has been little change systemically to reflect a field with gender equality. Specific to the current study, half or more of applicants to veterinary medicine programs in 2003 identified as women with women composing up to 80% of enrollments across American and Canadian veterinary medicine programs (Lofstedt, 2003). In 2017, the American Veterinary Medical Association indicated that 55% of practicing veterinarians identified as being a woman (Wuest, 2019). Lofstedt (2003) identified several reasons for the increases in women who both apply and are subsequently accepted into veterinary school including, for example, reductions in gender discrimination during the application process, improvements in chemical restraints for large animals, increases in the number of role models for women, and enhanced portrayals of the caring and nurturing aspects of the profession. In the same study, Lofstedt explored why men are applying at lower rates, dropping from 44% of the applicant pool in 1985
to 28% in 1999. Reasons included the unwillingness to enter careers with low and/or stagnant incomes, lack of autonomy, and a perceived decline in prestige due to the feminization of the profession. Further, the feminization of veterinary medicine has been attributed to downward salary and promotion trends and growing scarcities of practitioners in certain specialties (e.g., large animal and rural practices) as women opt (or are tracked) into small-animal medicine (Lincoln, 2010; Lofstedt, 2003).

Looking further into the enduring effects of the institutional patriarchy, Irvine and Vermilya (2010) examined how women practitioners may contribute to the perpetuation of masculine culture and gender bias in veterinary medicine. Interestingly, women were found to have the tendency to blame other women for continuous gender inequities within the veterinary field. For instance, women blamed themselves and others for their lower incomes due to their willingness to accept inadequate salaries and for not more assertively pursuing promotions and/or workplace accommodations. According to Smith (2006), women often indicate that they work harder for the same amount of money as men, and men often rate themselves higher for the same achievement as compared to their women counterparts. In other words, women consistently undervalue themselves and their work while men tend to over-value themselves and their work. In the current study, I explored how, if at all, women are being socialized as veterinary students to undervalue themselves and their work as emerging veterinarians (to include eliminating the possibility of certain specialty pathways).

Specialties in human medicine show gender biases like those observed in veterinary medicine. Obstetrics, gynecology, and pediatrics are human medical specialties that have experienced drastic gender shifts alongside notable decreases in average salary levels since the 1970s (Pelley & Carnes, 2020). As seen in veterinary medicine, decreases in average salary
levels have occurred in parallel to increases in women entering these specialties. Beyond declines in average salaries, the feminization of human medical specialties has been associated with widening pay gaps between genders and the espousing of perceived deficiencies – e.g., there is “lower productivity among female physicians… [due to] limiting patient access to care” (Phillips & Austin, 2009, p. 863). In short, the institutional conditions and factors that created and now perpetuate these trends and inequitable effects, whether in human or veterinary medicine, warrant further interrogation.

Education is a vital part of any medical profession. Educational experiences can reveal insights into why doctors chose certain specialties. Robnett (2015) examined the experiences and perspectives of women pursuing STEM degrees, the launching pads into veterinary school, and discovered that 61% of the respondents had encountered gender bias within their programs of study. Further, the study indicated that women in math-intensive undergraduate programs were the most likely to experience gender bias compared to those in life sciences (Robnett, 2015). Although these women students did not inherently change their intended career paths due to gendered experiences, insights into what women in STEM-focused pathways must endure were revealed.

The literature just presented demonstrates that despite a clear movement of women into veterinary (and human) medicine, the effects of institutionalized patriarchy on both medical education and professions persist. Veterinary medicine was created by men and has changed very little in response to notable increases of women participants in the field. Consequently, women have had to incessantly prove themselves to be equal to men – often doing so without adequate recognition and equitable compensation. Indeed, structural inequities and field-wide gender-based norms have created persistent issues such as disappearing specialties and wage and daily
workplace inequities. In the current study, my aim was to qualitatively explore how institutionalized patriarchy continues to affect women veterinary medicine students and their intended career pathways.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study was framed using a set of constructs pulled from Devaluation Theory (Magnusson, 2008) and Acker’s (1990) Theory of Gendered Organizations. Devaluation Theory explains that women are devalued by society and therefore any work or task they perform is valued less, both economically and socio-culturally, as compared to men counterparts (Magnusson, 2008). This devaluation of work and tasks between genders is institutionalized in the pay structure of most organizations. There are two types of discrimination described by the theory: a) majority-female organizations that have pay levels lower than majority-male organizations, assuming the working conditions and requirements are equivalent, and b) feminine tasks such as service-based responsibilities being socio-culturally undervalued based on gendered perceptions (Magnusson, 2008). Economically, devaluation is thought to occur based on the perception that jobs and tasks performed predominantly by women require lower skill levels, involve less intensive working conditions, and are in high supply with lower overall demand (Cohen & Huffman, 2003). Socio-culturally, the devaluation of feminine tasks results in discrimination and/or harassment and reinforces the preceding economic disparities. These two discrimination types were used to identify and evaluate any gender-based biases and challenges that confronted women veterinary medicine students and the likely influence of early-stage devaluation on their career path choices.

The second theory that framed the current study was Acker’s (2012) Theory of Gendered Organizations. The conceptual premise of this theory is that all organizations, even those thought
to be gender-neutral, are in various ways and degrees inherently replicating gender-based norms, stereotypes, and inequalities (Acker, 1990). Prior to the development of this theory, feminist scholars rarely discussed the effects of organizational structures on gender inequities (Acker, 1990). Acker identified the following ‘gendered substructures’ as factors within organizations that foster and sustain gender-based roles and biases: organizing processes, organizational culture, interactions on the job, and gendered identities (Acker, 2012) (see Figure 1). These four sub-structures were used to identify and analyze the gender inequities experienced by women veterinary students and the gendered orientation of their veterinary medical schools as conveyed through public communication devices (e.g., websites, branding materials).

Figure 1. Acker’s Gendered Organization Substructure Dynamic

Organizing process is the concept that inequities are built into the “job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the workplace, and rules” (Acker, 2012, p. 215).

Illustrations of gendered organizing processes in veterinary medicine include most practitioners being women; yet the top quarter of women earners still earning $100,000 less annually than their men counterparts (Cordova, 2021). Similarly, women are only 40% of private practice owners despite expressing equal interest as men in ownership (Lofstedt, 2003).

Organizational culture is prominent when persistent, yet largely unexamined norms, values, and beliefs regarding gender differences are allowed to shape the environments within organizations and across fields (Acker, 2012). This concept permeates veterinary medicine when
looking at why veterinarians often perceive and act, whether consciously or subconsciously, as though women are not of equal value as men in the field. For instance, and as previously described, women veterinarians are often blamed for accepting lower-income positions and not asking for higher promotions or more work accommodations by other women veterinarians thus maintaining the masculine cycle within veterinary medicine (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010). This can also be seen as women are pushed into small animal and general practice medicine as it is seen as a more nurturing or feminine field in comparison to large animal medicine (Lofstedt, 2003).

*Interactions* “on the job” reinforce gender inequities as collegial dynamics and group exchanges subtly and/or overtly work to continually demean and marginalize women (Acker, 2012). A study conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association found that 31% of veterinary medicine faculty respondents who identified as women had experienced field-based sexual harassment of some form (Wogan, 2018). Unfortunately, the full prevalence of sexual harassment in veterinary medicine remains unknown due to a lack of reporting. However, a poll in October 2018 found that 54% of all women in the United States experienced some form of unwanted advances in the workplace (Wogan, 2018). Given the counter-productive effects of the feminization of veterinary medicine, this general finding is likely relevant to the veterinary workplaces.

The final substructure is *gendered identities*, which explains how an individual’s gender identity is influenced by the gendered nature of organizations (Acker, 2012). As discussed previously, women are commonly blamed for their lack of professional assertiveness and/or wage disparities (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010). When put into positions of power, women can be pressured to ‘manage like a man,’ which can in turn influence how they express their gender identities as women leaders and how they treat other women (Acker, 2012). In summary,
Acker’s (2012) four sub-structures of gendered organizations, along with the underlying principles of Devaluation Theory (Magnusson, 2008), guided this qualitative exploration of the organizational nature and academic and/or professional consequences of institutional patriarchy as experienced by a sample of women veterinary students.

**Methods**

**Design and Case Setting**

I conducted this study using a single embedded qualitative case design with the case being a veterinary medicine program at a public land grant university located in Southwestern United States (Gerring, 2007). Consistent with human subjects protection protocols, the University is referred to using the pseudonym Southwestern University (SU). Based on the selected design, individual study participants are treated as embedded units, or micro-cases, that together inform the overarching case (Yin, 2014). By analyzing each participant as a micro-level case, my capacity to uncover and explore the intricacies and nuances within a specific organizational setting, such as veterinary medicine, was enhanced.

The overarching case is informed by the individual experiences and perspectives of women students enrolled in the SU College of Veterinary Medicine (SUCVM). The SUCVM is a three-year program, which, unlike the typical four-year doctorate program, operates year-round. The first inaugural class of students, now in their third and final year, is comprised of 110 students, only 18 of which identify as male (Gardner, 2020). The three-year curriculum ensures that the students have a diverse range of experiences that vary by programmatic specialties (e.g., small versus large animal). Each student is required to have some form of pre-admission veterinary experience. This requirement is met in a wide range of ways that vary according to each person’s unique background, bringing greater diversity to the perspectives and experiences
of SUCVM students. The feminized composition and profile diversity of the student body profile made SUCVM an appropriate site for this study.

Recalling that the study is in part guided by Acker’s (2012) Theory of Gendered Organizations, it was important to contextualize the organizational environment of SUCVM through a gendered lens. I determined this context using a netnographic approach. Netnography is an anthropological method involving the systematic analysis of the human contexts and understandings that are represented, conveyed, and perpetuated through technological devices, platforms, and repositories (e.g., internet sites, social media pages) (Kozinets, 2010). Unlike other forms of online ethnographies, netnographic methods rely on a mix of data gathered from both online sources and through “live” engagement with those individuals who participate in and/or are influenced by relevant virtual environments and contexts (Kozinets, 2015; Morais, Santos, & Gonçalves, 2020).

**Participant Sample**

The participant sample is composed of six women SUCVM students (i.e., “mini-cases”) with representation across the available academic years of the program which are years 1 and 2 since the school accepted its first class of students two years ago (see Table 1). Obtaining representation of each academic year of the program in the sample allowed me to explore how duration in the program influences the gendered experiences of women veterinary students. These students all have varying levels of outside experience, however, academically, the first-year students were just beginning their classes. The second-year students were continuing their coursework along with having gained further experience in specific areas. According to the SUCVM website, third-year students enter their clinical rotations which consist of 13 blocks (e.g., shelter/primary care, general practice, specialty/referral, and elective).
A purposive, theoretical sampling strategy (Gerring, 2008; Patton, 2002) was used to select the interview participants. The two selection criteria included: 1) identify as a woman and 2) be actively enrolled in SUCVM. The participants were recruited through an open invitation sent over the SUCVM student listserv. Chain (or snowball) sampling was also used to expand the sample, which involved participants referring me to other potential participants within their own networks (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). There is no universal threshold when it comes to sample size (Boddy, 2016; Guest, et al., 2006). Given the importance of depth and richness over quantity to both embedded case study design and netnography (Gerring, 2007; Morais, Santos, & Gonçalves, 2020), the current sample size was determined to be appropriate. To ensure anonymity, the participants were randomly assigned pseudonyms per the institutionally approved human subjects protocol.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected from the SUCVM website and through one-on-one semi-structured interviews over the Zoom virtual platform. (Miles, et al., 2013). Website links and pages were captured and analyzed through screenshots and recurrent “real-time” revisits to specific links and pages. The main website for the SUCVM consisted of one main home page with a variety of links to other pages about the school. The main page showed multiple women presenting, those who appear to be women, students in several different animal care scenarios to reflect what

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mariah</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiley</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
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<td>Miley</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
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students may learn at the school, ranging from large animal and small animal care, as well as men presenting, those who appear to be men, staff and faculty. The linked pages included basic information on admissions, amenities offered to students, research being conducted by the school, and news. There was also a page on the diversity of the student population and the inclusive environment that SUCVM advertises. Items included in the netnographic dataset ranged from online program descriptions and faculty profiles to marketing materials and promotional videos to resources available to students. The interviews were recorded in an audio-visual format and then transcribed verbatim in preparation for analysis and ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 10 minutes. The interview protocol was informed by the previously mentioned gendered organization and devaluation constructs (Acker, 2012; Magnusson, 2008). More specifically, the items composing the protocol were designed to discover and describe the gendered experiences by each interviewee within the organizational context of the SUCVM and explore the possible effects of such experiences on their intended career pathways.

The data were primarily analyzed using a deductive coding framework composed of the preceding devaluation and gendered organization constructs. Acker’s (2012) four substructures were used to categorize and analyze the gendered elements of the SUCVM organizational environment and student experiences and perspectives. The two categories of devaluation theory (compensation inequities, undervalued jobs, and tasks) (Magnusson, 2008) were used to categorize and analyze the field-level influences on these four gendered substructures. Analysis was conducted through an initial round of axial coding to identify inter-code relationships that were then developed into working themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1991). These initial themes were narrowed and refined into the findings through several rounds of nomothetic and ideographic analysis. Nomothetic and ideographic analysis involved analyzing each interview transcript
individually (down) and then collectively (across) to further reveal, more deeply understand, and ultimately refine emergent patterns and themes into the final set of findings (Gelo, Braakmann, & Benetka, 2008). I also openly coded the data at the conclusion of each round of analysis to reveal any insights or patterns relevant to my research questions, but not likely to be deductively uncovered using the structured coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of this study was enhanced through strategies aimed at bringing credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability to the analysis and findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Throughout the analytical process, the data were individually coded, then discussed collectively between the additional researcher and I, with the findings being agreed upon only once consensus was reached – i.e., researcher triangulation (Merriam, 2017). Data triangulation between the netnographic and interview data reinforced and verified the findings according to intersecting insights and observations (Creswell, 2007). Memo writing was employed throughout the analytical stages to enable further the identification and tracking of specific themes and concepts that emerge from the data and analysis (Birks, et al., 2008). Member checking was used to ensure that the participants were being represented correctly and that I did not apply any meaning to quotes that were not their own (Tracy, 2010). I also practiced reflectivity by continually reflecting on my own positionality and its threat to the objectivity of my analysis and the overall findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have a bachelor’s degree in veterinary science from SU and have spent a large amount of time in the veterinary field in several capacities. Even though I am a cis-gendered woman, I am also capable of implementing gender inequities. By reflecting on my positionalities, I was better able to reduce bias throughout
the study (Tracy, 2010). Lastly, rich descriptions were used throughout the study to increase transferability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Findings**

Two major themes emerged from the data, that in metaphorical terms, are two sides of the same coin. First, SUCVM is notably progressive and does not, despite the persistence of some misogynistic and sexist underpinning, reflect the outwardly gendered conditions and structures that otherwise characterize veterinary medicine education and the industry as a whole (see Serpell, 2005). Second, the agendered environment of SUCVM does not fully reflect the experiences women students will likely encounter as practitioners. Further, the College’s formal leadership curricula and non-formal mentoring models have not been refined to better prepare women students to overcome and change the gendered barriers and challenges that await them as soon-to-be professionals. In general, the SUCVM program was found to be a progressive environment, yet organizationally structured in ways that compromise the capacities of future practitioners to be change agents. The complexity of this progressive, yet at the same time complicit dynamic is presented next according to Acker’s (2012) four sub-structures of gendered organizations and the two principles of devaluation theory (Magnusson, 2008).

**Progressive Structure and Environment**

The interviewees consistently described the SUCVM structure and environment as being different than other educational experiences with little evidence of gender bias in the ways curricula were delivered and experiences were facilitated. Miley, a first-year student at SU stated:

> When I was an undergrad… the equine veterinarians… were all males and they would always just kind of make weird comments or say… it’s hard for women to do this because they care too much about the animals… and a lot of people telling me you have
to be really tough… because you’re going to be around all that… referring to the fact that all women are dainty or they can’t do difficult things.

When asked if she had witnessed any of those same behaviors at SUCVM Miley stated, “No. The equine veterinarians… really want to teach us… and I’ve never heard them say anything like that [gender bias].” All but one of the other interviewees shared similar insights and experiences.

The interviewees routinely expressed appreciation for the majority of SUCVM faculty being women. This common observation was confirmed through a review of the SUCVM website, which also revealed a heavy representation of women on the senior leadership team (including the CVM Dean). Anecdotes from the students described these women faculty and leaders as influential mentors. More specifically, the women faculty routinely shared stories of the misogyny and sexism that they themselves had faced, as well as gave advice and guidance to those women students with goals of entering non-feminized specialties (e.g., large animal specialties and practices).

Not surprisingly, SUCVM is not without incidents of misogyny and sexism. Only one such incident involved faculty. Riley, a second-year student stated,

One specific instructor said things that were a little misogynistic… he was just telling a story that he’s had on [surgery] a horse… and one of his final comments was… “And I can’t believe a woman did this” … because he was surprised that she was able to come through with the procedure.

Riley went on to discuss how she felt it was not malicious, but nonetheless troubling. All other incidents of misogyny and sexism, albeit infrequent, stemmed from other students. Interviewees provided multiple examples of men classmates, despite being the overwhelming minority, dominating class and group conversations and engaging in misogynistic and sexist discourse.

The interviewees reported that SUCVM was actively working against blatant issues involving bias and indicators of inequities. Their confidence in senior leadership to respond to
such issues constructively and supportively was depicted by one interviewee who believed that if she reported a hypothetical situation, it was likely to be taken seriously. This perspective was reflected by the robustness of the diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies outlined on the SUCVM website and an extensive amount of personnel and other college resources allocated to associated initiatives. Nevertheless, other interviewees expressed concern over subtle, yet persistent issues of bias being commonplace to include men counterparts dominating their class time, receiving more credit and praise for sharing correct answers, and “safer” faculty responses when offering incorrect answers.

The interviewees remarked on the differences between their experiences at SUCVM and those had in other educational environments and in professional veterinary medical environments (e.g., industry and practices). In particular, the students discussed multiple experiences of misogyny and sexism in large animal medicine and how such instances skewed them away from men-dominated specialties and settings. Kaiya, a second-year student, described her reasoning for no longer wanting to own her own clinic as follows: “I don’t want to do economic. I do think that unfortunately, some of that misogyny… those people’s voices are still in the back of my head, and I can’t say that they didn’t play a role in it.” The “voices” she is referring to are men veterinarians with whom she has had previous misogynistic incidents. In general, women students are entering SUCVM from misogynistic and sexist environments and then experiencing, in comparison, a fairly progressive environment that appears to be committed to improving and maintaining that progressive status.

**A Misogynistic and Sexist Foundation**

As previously mentioned, the experiences of the women students at SUCVM are that of a metaphorical two-sided coin. There is an opposite side to the relatively progressive environment
of SUCVM that operates in parallel with rather than in opposition to the gendered realities of conventional veterinary medicine. In short, the agendered experience that the students are receiving is not reflective of the environments they will encounter as practicing clinicians, nor are they being prepared to be change agents in their futures professions and fields. Also, the SUCVM curriculum is not inclusive to those who are interested in going into fields such as large animal medicine, zoo animal medicine, behavior, nutrition, or other less popular fields. Instead, the majority of SUCVM students, and especially those who identify as women, are being prepared as small animal general practitioners – i.e., an already majority women trajectory.

Looking at the curriculum for the class of 2023 and 2024, there is only a total of 7 weeks throughout the first two years (the time when students take classes before rotations) that is dedicated to large animal, the rest of the time the classes are split into systems (i.e., musculoskeletal, vital circuitry, gastrointestinal), meaning that all species are taught during these courses (Vetmed, 2021). This reality runs counter to the many images of large animals and masculinized settings that populate the SUCVM website.

In reference to the school not preparing its students to be proper change agents, the students are being given the tools to be socially aware professionals. Miley, a first-year student, describes the Professional Skills course when stating,

We work a lot on how we speak to clients and how we present ourselves… talking to clients like they’re actual people instead of just talking down to them… which I feel like a lot of older veterinary medicine is like that. And so, in this class, we talk a lot about like, we really need to consider the way people are feeling and… making sure that they’re comfortable… using proper pronouns.

The skills course is highly progressive, as described, in comparison to how the field currently operates and focuses on being socially competent. For example, Kaiya, a second-year student, stated,
I don't think that a lot of other schools have done this kind of training. So, I feel like we're kind of the first wave out... They're expanding on our knowledge of showing regard for people in difficult situations... I think that's great. I also think that that's a huge thing out there right now... It's hard to be the person to make a difference in the culture of the clinic when it's one versus however many people are there... But if we could teach other people the same skills then, I mean, making a difference in it is the whole point.

Teaching students how to properly interact with clients and colleagues has created not only a sense of interpersonal awareness and emotional intelligence, but also apprehension among the students. Understanding SUCVM to be a leader in veterinary medicine education when it comes to progressive social and professionalism tactics, the graduating classes are challenged to apply their advanced skills and knowledge across a highly traditional and persistently gendered professional landscape. As they enter new environments as freshly minted veterinarians, the status difference could create barriers between the skills and knowledge they gained and their ability to change (or even transform) their professional environments.

The interviewees expressed common interests in several different types of medicine when they first entered the SUCVM program. Several were interested in zoo medicine, behavior, emergency medicine, and other specialties. Some of these students have re-directed their intentions. For example, Angela, a second-year student, switched her interest from emergency medicine to shelter medicine. This switch was attributed to environmental factors in the shelter medicine specialty, such as its fast-paced environment and the lack of human interaction that she otherwise favored. However, students such as Riley, a previously referenced second-year student, whose interest in behavior dwindled due to SUCVM not being fully inclusive to other specialties outside of general practice and small animal medicine. When asked if she felt that her program was fostering an educational and social environment conducive to her interests, Riley responded:
No. If anything, they are pushing us all into general practice… I think if you're going to try to apply to do a residency or an internship, having research as your background is huge. And the only way to do research in this program is if you give up doing your selectives… So because research wasn't an option, that's another reason why I think they’re pushing us into GP. Another reason is most schools graduate in May and then after May they all go into their internships for the school we graduate in August… three or four months past the time when they're accepting interns. So many clinics would be like “Why would I accept you as my intern if you're going to start three and a half months later.” And a lot of the time when you want to be a specialist, you have to go straight into an internship for that specialty.

Riley proceeded to discuss her current intentions to enter general practice upon graduation.

Overall, the interviewees perceived a discrepancy between the amount of large animal, horse and livestock, and small animal (e.g., cat and dog) curricula that they were receiving. They also identified a strong leaning in the curriculum and socialization practices that favored general practice and smaller specialties. Angela, a second year student, described the amount of hands-on experience she received in regard to large animals,

> it's interesting how much we're not allowed to do as a [farm]. So we get exposed to the horses. We're allowed to practice physical exams. We get exposed to the sheep and practice physical exams. Very little exposure to cows. We did have some, but very little in comparison. And then even to seek extra time on the campus to have exposure to those large animals, it's really jumping through a lot of red tape, a tremendous amount of red tape. And so that is a huge hindrance for a school that had intentions of producing a lot of large animal veterinarians. Here we have the [farm] right in our backyard, but as students, we're not getting exposed to high volume of application.

Angela is describing a location that is advertised on the main website as a facility used by students, and she is describing how difficult it has been to receive hands-on experience and application at this location, dedicated to large animal learning. Allison, a second-year student, began her SUCVM program wanting to pursue zoo medicine, but later switched her interests to large animal medicine. When asked if she ever felt like she was being pushed into a certain specialty at the program, Allison stated,

> Yes, 100%. I think I probably got pushed in a small animal because at least when our programs started, they're very small animal focused… We had some equine stuff, but we
didn't have anything regarding large animals until last summer. And that's when I decided I thought I wanted to do something with food animal medicine.

The interviewees that were in their second year of the program reported having gained little experience with large animals prior to their second year and even thereafter it remained limited in comparison to the small animal curriculum. Similarly, students such as Riley who were interested in more niche specialties like behavior encountered an environment that was misaligned or inadequately equipped to support specialized interests and intentions, which most often compromised/detoured their intended career pathways. Mariah, a second-year student, discussed how she was interested in an exotics course when it came to choosing selectives, and was not given that option.

I thought during because we started our selectives this summer, and I thought that that would be kind of the time to explore maybe an exotics course or something like that, and we do not have one. So that was a little bit upset. I figured it wouldn't be a big part of our curriculum, but I did figure in the selectives that they would offer something regarding like zoo or exotic medicine. But so yeah, that was a little bit disappointing for me because I definitely thought there would be something offered

These niche, less popular specialties are not included in the curriculum and the students who are interested in them then must choose a different route, at least while in school, since they are not given the choice. Telescoping out, by women students not being prepared to be large animal veterinarians, SUCVM is structurally perpetuating a misogynistic cycle of pushing a majority women class toward small animal and general practice medicine and away from men-dominated animal veterinary specialties.

Discussion

Using Acker’s (2012) Theory of Gendered Organizations as a framework, SUCVM was found to be surprisingly agendered in the organizational presentation via the virtual narratives conveyed through online materials and overt organizational structures (e.g., faculty and
administrative compositions). This could be a result of SUCVM making a purposeful attempt to create an environment where women feel not only equal to their men peers but rather that gender is a nonfactor in the educational environment. Devaluation Theory (Magnusson, 2008) is seen in the underlying, deeper-rooted issues as SUCVM appears to be creating, whether intentionally or otherwise, a curriculum that is perpetuating the cycle of tracking women into the women-dominated specialty of small animal medicine or general practice over those that are men-dominated (e.g., large animal foci).

Perpetuating misogynistic and sexist cycles, albeit in somewhat subtle and obscure ways, contribute to SUCVM insidiously sustaining the longstanding gendered structure of the veterinarian profession. In particular, the curricular realities of the SUCVM align with (rather than counter) field-wide issues such the widening pay gap between men and women veterinarians, the shortage of women veterinary entrepreneurs, and the lack of women veterinarians in certain specialties, such as the large animal industry (Lincoln, 2010; Lofstedt, 2003). Accordingly, the SUCVM curricula lacks the proper tools to prepare women veterinarians in niche specialties or large animal specialties – thereby reproducing a misogynistic and sexist cycle that tracks cohorts composed of mostly of women students into the women-dominated areas of small animal and general practice (Lofstedt, 2003). Through the continuation of this cycle, there is a creation of a cooling-out function where women veterinary students are not being provided with the proper intellectual resources to achieve their academic and professional goals. The primary consequence in the continuation of career tracking in women-dominated (and thereby structurally marginalized) areas. Cooling out is the institutional process by which conventionally marginalized student populations, such as women veterinary medicine students, are covertly tracked into socio-economic pathways that support rather than reverse deeply
embedded professional and societal inequities (Clark, 1960). The institutional practice of covertly encouraging students to lower their educational expectations and consequently “cool out” their professional aspirations was observed as SUCVM academically tracked women students into small animal and general medicine practice (Vaughan, 1980). While the cooling-out function is well researched in the context of undergraduate higher education (and especially community colleges) (e.g., Anderson, et al., 2006; Broton, 2019), to the author’s knowledge this is the first application of the theoretical premise to veterinary medicine.

Several interviewees expressed that SUCVM lacked the curricular resources and faculty expertise to properly prepare them to pursue large animal interests. Students with such interests and aspirations were dependent on the school to eventually hire (if at all) the required faculty and open the necessary facilities. Considering that most of the interviewees agreed that the school had advertised itself as one meant to create large animal veterinarians, not having those resources available to them for at least a year during a three-year program represented a continuation of a cycle that pushes women into small animal and general medical practices. This consistent cycle is evidence of the Devaluation Theory with the perpetuation of a higher education environment in which women students are continually tracked into feminized and thereby socially and economically marginalized sub-fields (e.g., small animal and general medicine). The professional consequences of such tracking and cooling out in part include the ongoing widening of gendered pay gaps and the growing scarcity of large animal veterinarians, especially in rural areas (Lincoln, 2010; Lofstedt, 2003). The Devaluation Theory consists of two components: a) majority-female organizations that have pay levels lower than majority-male organizations, assuming the working conditions and requirements are equivalent, and b) feminine tasks such as service-based responsibilities being socio-culturally undervalued based on gendered norms and
perceptions (Magnusson, 2008). As the cycle of pressuring students into certain specialties continues, both of these constructs are maintained, and the cooling-out function of higher education more generally is continued.

Nevertheless, SUCVM is a progressive environment as compared to the overarching veterinary medicine industry. The interviewees consistently mentioned the absence of misogyny and sexism at SUCVM, typically in comparison to other educational or industry experiences. This educational environment is outwardly progressive and appears to be unique in that sense, which could be attributed to the age of the program as it only began accepting students in 2020. The program having been curated and opened so recently could have led to this progressive environment as the outside socio-political environment that it was built in was and is continuing to be relatively progressive. This is a leap in veterinary medicine as an environment of equality amongst genders is a new frontier. This could be some cause for concern as the students are being socialized differently than other veterinary medicine students, which risks creating a disconnect between perceptions within the academy and realities within the external profession.

The overall progressive environment is a large step in veterinary medicine as there are several gender-related issues that can be attributed to women not being treated equally. However, being treated as equal to their men classmates, although a step in the right direction, should be standard. Despite this forward-moving environment and consistency with Acker’s (2012) theoretical view of gendered organizations, the tracking of a majority women class into general practice or small animal medicine via unbalanced curricula perpetuates a longstanding field-wide misogynistic cycle. Thus, SUCVM is subtly conforming to Acker’s (2012) substructures in an otherwise overtly presented agendered educational context and consequently preserving rather than reversing the devaluation of women veterinarians.
Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to contribute new insights into the ramifications of the rapid feminization of veterinary medicine through an exploration of how women students are being prepared and socialized within an educational environment. The findings concluded that women students at SUCVM are being mostly treated as equal to their men peers and are experiencing an environment of progressiveness that is ahead of veterinary medicine. Yet, SUCVM’s curricular structure was found to be maintaining a misogynistic cycle by tracking majority women cohorts into the women-majority fields of small animal medicine and general practice. This is creating a ‘cooling-out function’ as women are not being provided the resources and being given the proper education to enter large animal specialties and sub-fields of practice (Clark, 1960). There is also a misogynistic precedent as the reasoning for women not having equitable access to large animal medicine is due to them being thought of as ‘dainty’ and/or unable to work with large animals either physically or emotionally (Lofstedt, 2003; Vaughan, 1980).

There are steps that can be taken to minimize the perpetuation of misogynistic tracking and increase the impact that SUCVM is having on the leveling up (rather than the cooling out) of veterinary medicine. The largest of which is providing sufficient staffing and curricular opportunities for women students that are interested in large animal fields. SUCVM espouses to have the proper facilities for such endeavors through their virtual presence and marketing materials. Put bluntly, there is a disconnect between saying and delivering. In order to effectively foster equity within the overarching veterinary medicine profession, seemingly progressive programs such as that at SUCVM must move beyond organizational theatre (see Bolman & Deal, 1997) to include comprehensive and transparent curricular transformation and structure
transformation (e.g., holistic curriculum and faculty expertise in the areas of large animal treatment). These resources provide the equal playing field for women veterinarians to enter the fields that they were advertised which would minimize if not break the misogynistic cycle of women students being driven into women-majority fields.

Also mentioned by students was that when they expressed interest in a less popular specialty (e.g. - behavior, zoo medicine, exotics), SUCVM did not have the proper resources to provide those students guidance or dismissed their interests altogether. Yet, it is the obligation of SUCVM to be able to properly equip these students with preparation and necessary resources to act on their academic interests and career aspirations. Whether these resources are provided internally by the university or externally (e.g. - internships, jobs opportunities, industry mentors), they should be available to students who are interested in more niche specialties that are not available via what was found to be a feminized curriculum. As previously mentioned, providing resources for a women-majority class to enter more niche or large animal fields can help minimize or overturn the effects that the feminization of veterinary medicine has had like the dwindling number of rural and large animal practitioners.

SUCVM has set a precedent for how women veterinary medical students should be prepared through the progressive environment they have outwardly espoused and at least preliminarily created. Implementing a curriculum that enacts this espoused structure and progressive vision is lagging. Ironically, SUCVM simultaneously provides both a model for progressive veterinary medical education and evidence of the insidious nature of gendered organizational structures and the devaluation of women via institutionalized misogyny. The “cooling-out function” of higher education as first introduced by Clark (1960) in the context of the rise of the American community college sector was offered as theoretical grounding for
further exploration of the insight revealed through the current case study. Future research that more deeply investigates the inputs to and implications of cooling out functions in veterinary medical education on women students as well as the continuation of research of the influence that the rapid feminization has had on the industry is warranted. Lastly, similar research should be conducted on more established veterinary schools where organizational history may further hinder the implementation of gender reforms both in terms of organizational structure and academic practices.


References


