Clearing up the bullshit: Deconstructing ‘feminisation’, gender stereotypes and gender biases within UK veterinary surgery

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Abstract

This thesis explores ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) within the UK veterinary profession, including the ways in which gender stereotypes and biases also influence such discourses and experiences of working within the field. Drawing upon and combining a range of sociological, organisational and feminist theories such as Witz’s (1992) theory of gendered professional projects and Butler’s (1990) highly influential notion of performativity, I am able to contextualise and expand upon the ‘doing’ of the veterinary profession as well as being able to frame ‘feminisation’ discourses as paradoxes, potentially producing the effects they articulate.

My analysis is divided into two parts; the first deals with results of a 463 participant survey of veterinary workers regarding definitions, perceptions and observations of ‘feminisation’ and gender difference, highlighting the significance of this subject matter within their professional lives. The second part incorporates a deeper thematic analysis of particular everyday realities, emerging from four semi-structured interviews which also aimed to explore in greater detail individual perceptions and observations regarding ‘feminisation’ and gender biases and stereotypes, encouraging participants themselves to reflect upon their experiences. A number of conclusions emerged during the analysis, including an intriguing insight that those who tended to draw most strongly on gender stereotypes and biases to outline their perceptions and observations were paradoxically those who most vehemently believed gender was irrelevant.

Fundamentally however this study concludes that the concept of ‘feminisation’ is a fluid conceptualisation, a cultural process and not just empirical category of ‘empty rhetoric’ as commonly utilised and applied to the veterinary profession; as such it has the potential to be utilised extensively to progress the profession in terms of wider inclusiveness, equality, transformation, in offering reconceptualised ways of considering what it means to be part of a ‘profession’ not predicated on patriarchal structures, and to ultimately reperceive how gender can be (re/un)enacted in transformative ways alongside progressively rearticulated ‘feminisation’ discourses.

Keywords: feminisation, gender, veterinary, discourse, stereotypes, performativity, professional projects, boundary work, sociology
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Chapter One: Framing Motivations and Context

I. Introduction – A curious situation

‘Feminisation’? ‘The future [of veterinary surgery] is female’ (N. 248)¹
‘Feminisation’? ‘Men in charge, women employed’ (N. 141)
‘Feminisation’? ‘Equal opportunities’ (N. 113)

‘Feminisation’. Just a word, a discourse, an imposition? Does it matter? When a term gets bandied around as a potential signifier of a particular phenomenon, do we interrogate its meaning for those to whom it may apply? Such a thought flitted through my mind after another day of absorption in feminist enquiry when I met up with a veterinary friend who mentioned the benefits of having large breasts as a means of constraining cats whilst attempting to blood-sample them; the physicality of one’s body appeared to be the best ‘tool’ for this task in this particular workplace. Made half in jest, this comment dogged me and I tucked it alongside further partial observations that either I had discerned or had been imparted to me by willing veterinary professionals as a result of my vicarious interest in veterinary work over the last eight years (my partner is a veterinary surgeon). In a snapshot, some of these observations (within the context of the UK) include recognition of the rapid numerical ‘feminisation’ of the profession (Begeny & Ryan 2018; Castro & Armitage-Chan 2016), that the majority of veterinary students are female (over 70%), that practice ownership is currently dominated by men with a 75:25 split (FVE 2015: 15), that stereotypes and prejudices are still shaping relations across the profession, and that vociferous amounts of veterinary-related publications (i.e. Vet Times and Veterinary Record) include at least one article per issue discussing the ‘feminisation’ of the profession and/or ‘gender equality’. None of these aspects have remained untouched by ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) applied within the profession itself however the very meaning of ‘feminisation’ seems to slip and morph depending on its application. It is the very slipperiness of the term and its apparently haphazard application to material processes within the profession which has piqued my interest regarding its validity as a discursive tool. I began to wonder how gender intersects with other identarian markers in the contemporary veterinary profession, and whether this rise of women to a proportional majority leads to the accrual of benefits assumed by the ‘feminisation’ thesis as understood in some academia (Morley 2011). I decided to investigate. Even if the word ‘feminisation’ was not used particularly widely

¹All survey quotes are attributed to their respective participants i.e. N. 248 is participant number 248. Identity descriptors are utilised if considered relevant.
amongst individual veterinary professionals I thought it would be instructive to discover who had chanced upon it and what it might mean to them considering its extensive use within veterinary publications such as *Veterinary Times* to engage in dialogue about the veterinary profession. Would a homogenous definition prevail? The three responses highlighted at the beginning of this chapter evidence moments of disparity and urge me to examine ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) in greater detail.

I ask *is* the future of veterinary surgery truly ‘female’? Are numbers speaking louder than productive transformative? Are ‘feminisation’ discourses potentially upholding hegemonic masculinity within the profession? Perhaps boundaries within the profession are being reified by these discourses; by a process of horizontal and vertical segregation, leading some to perceive a de-professionalisation of the profession (Lofstedt 2003)? Whose interest(s) do ‘feminisation’ discourses serve? Do these discourses also highlight a lack of intersectional thinking by positing a unified, hegemonic image of the ‘female’ constructed along binary lines? So many questions arise but I embrace these as productive in allowing me to consider what is marked (in)visible by particular ‘feminisation’ discourses and their subsequent utility in explaining and directing the UK veterinary profession. I merge critical insights from my academic engagement with gender theory to some of the practicalities and topics veterinarians confront in their daily work, applying theory to praxis and welcoming a dialogic interaction between the two. This focus on the veterinary sector also allows me to draw from a rich and immediate resource and contact base due to my current social positioning alongside the profession.

At this early point I think it is important to add that I further approach this thesis as a white, state-school educated female with a background in social sciences who is married to a white, pro-feminist, publicly-schooled male with a background in (Western) physical and applied sciences. My insights have often productively jarred with those of my husband as we arrive from differing epistemological positions; my largely theoretical and activist based knowledges, imbued in partial objectivity challenge his scientific objectivity (Harding 1986) bolstered through years of a highly disciplined Western scientific approach to knowledge production, creating spaces for exploring differential perceptions of gender and/or knowledge and the importance of gender within a particular context by those situated within that context. In terms of this thesis, this has helped shape my analysis and engagement with veterinarians and their knowledges reinforcing the call for partial perspectives (Haraway 1988) when conceptualising
and exploring matters outwith my own immediate context i.e. the veterinary field. This has allowed me to reduce the distance between doing research as an outsider, evidently invested in discussions of ‘gender’ and ‘feminisation’, and engaging in dialogue with those within the profession who might otherwise view me as meddlesome and raising issues where none are perceived. Throughout I encourage open dialogue and interpretations of ‘feminisation’, gender and professionalism as being grounded in the context of participants everyday lives and beliefs. I hope this makes my work stronger.

II. Examining the impetus behind the veterinary ‘feminisation’ debate

Let us however step back for a moment and seriously consider some of the elements which appear to have spurred ‘feminisation’ discourses within the veterinary profession. Less than 5% of veterinary surgeons in the UK were identified as female in 1970; in 2017 this figure stood at 60.41% (Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons [RCVS] 2018a). The number of graduating female veterinary students is higher still, standing at 75.34% in the last published figures (RCVS 2018a). No specific affirmative action plans have been acknowledged as accounting for this trend over the last 49 years. It is these figures which have contributed to and consolidated the ‘feminisation’ debate’ within the profession however it would appear naïve to assume co-current changes to actual structure and organisation, more nuanced ways of performing gendered codes (Butler 1990); instead this debate, or indeed debates, may act as a defence mechanism by a traditionally masculine-dominated (read white, male, middle-class) profession. This is supported by online and paper-based literatures (blogs, online articles, daily newspapers), academic papers (Allen 2016) and veterinary publications (Vet Times, Veterinary Record) which explicitly invoke ‘feminisation’ and either directly or obliquely highlight problematic assumptions associated with the term and its multiple meanings i.e. reduced wages and falling entrepreneurship (Lofstedt 2003; Irvine and Vermilya 2010) as well as notions of de-professionalisation and elongated hierarchies (Ackroyd and Muzio 2007). This often appears to negate the ways in which many professionals wish to constructively deal with issues of in/exclusion and discrimination as well as the future paths of the profession (Vet Futures 2016). For a profession that appears to be undergoing something of a recruitment crises in the last couple of years (Whiting 2018) due in large part to the unknown implications of Brexit, future pathways for the profession need to be sensitively considered; a backlash against an increased perceived ‘feminisation’ of the profession is counterproductive. Furthermore
thoughts regarding the future of the profession as well as the implications of ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) also point to the need to resist urges to reify binary\textsuperscript{2} categorisations such as woman and man without a corresponding deconstruction of these essentialising and homogenising classifications.

Turning to thoughts of professionalism and ‘feminisation’, both highlight gendering processes which draw from, critique and constitute each other in various ways. Professionalism has been linked to a ‘persistent process of masculinisation as men monopolise senior positions and lucrative, high status specialisms’ (Muzio and Bolton 2006: 81) whilst ‘feminisation’ discourses have been viewed as embodying misogynistic impulses driving a moral panic about women, the other, ‘taking over’ (Leathwood and Read 2009; Morley 2011). My focus on ‘feminisation’ within the veterinary profession, one with a substantial ‘professional’ image, may also shed light on the seeming persistence of some gender stereotypes in defining and reifying the perceptions of certain veterinary roles as well as allowing me to explore repeated contentions that gender does not affect the profession and has no relevance in a work environment (evident within my survey responses as discussed in Chapter Four: Results and Analysis) – contrary to the conclusions and experiences discussed in literature within the field of gender and organisation studies (Acker 1990, 2012; Witz 1990).

Whilst the profession is numerically dominated by females overall, it is interesting to note that males dominate from the age of 46 onwards, reflective of the increase in female graduates and surgeons since the 1970s. As the demographics continue to change, reflecting the numerical balance of graduates vs retirees, this will likely alter in the coming years; it does not however necessarily result in more women moving into leadership or practice ownership roles. Muzio and Bolton (2006: 89 - 90) believe the profession remains male-coded and rather than witnessing processes of ‘feminisation’, ‘feminisation’ is instead viewed as a paradox whereby being a ‘professional’ continues to be aligned with the acceptance of a male cultural and behavioural paradigm. The inclusion of ‘more’ women does not make a profession feminised per se. The differing and contested responses regarding the definition of the term ‘feminisation’ as asked in my survey points to this fluidity of the concept and also highlights some of the problems with using a term which embodies different meanings for different people; not least

\textsuperscript{2} To make clear, whilst I am fully aware my thesis balances on ‘recognising’ binary categorisations, I do not posit this as my own or others’ worldview. Applying Spivak’s concept of ‘strategic essentialisms’ (1988) I employ the male/female (masculine/feminine) divisions as a theoretical strategy to help unpick and explore the potential impacts the ‘feminisation’ debate has on the working lives of veterinarians.
between those engaged in theory and/or praxis. It therefore appears apt to explore the term/discourse/concept as it is likely to have material and symbolic effects on the profession as a whole.

Consolidating my own analysis will be an underlying intersectional perspective which takes into consideration various power differentials, normativities and identities which co-produce and reify ‘feminisation’ discourses (Allen 2016; Lykke 2011; Acker 2012). This includes examining constructions of femininity and masculinity and how they are perpetuated within this discourse as well as in the profession in general. Repeated incidences of sexism have also been documented by those within the profession and stem from both clients and other veterinary professionals. Traditional role perceptions, as previously propagated by the profession and popular media may contribute to such incidences and it is therefore important to assess the extent to which inherent sexism is also linked to the ‘feminisation’ debate; in 2014 a female lecturer at Surrey University stated a male undergraduate who accompanied her in a consultation was asked for his veterinary opinion over hers despite her evident authority (Williams 2014). Further evidence of the complexity of understanding ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) is discernible in a study undertaken by Irvine and Vermilya (2010) who argue, based on in-depth interviews, that it is women in the profession who often sustain, justify and preserve hegemonic masculinity by associating ‘inferior traits’ with women before distancing themselves from them, stating traditional ‘masculine’ traits as the ones they embody. Expanding on such work and further literature, masculinity and femininity (and concurrent sex roles) are evidenced as artificial class based-constructs (Walters 2005; Sherif 1982), interweaving differing social norms, pointing to the potential obsoleteness of engaging in poorly defined ‘feminisation’ discourse(s).

III. Thesis outline

Having situated my investment in, and outlined some of the major concerns around discussing the ‘feminisation’ of the veterinary profession, the remainder of this thesis builds upon these foundations, drawing on various theoretical and conceptual tools. In the subsequent section I discuss ‘feminisation’ as a concept, both envisioned within academia and the veterinary profession more fully, before exploring previous research located within the profession concerning gender and ‘feminisation’. This culminates with my aims and objectives before progressing to Chapter Two: Theoretical Contexts, where I situate my research within and
between sociological and feminist frameworks of professions, gender and organisations, boundary work, performativity and critical masculinities, drawing these aspects together to offer a multifaceted and interlinked analysis of how ‘feminisation’ is conceived in the veterinary sector. This is followed by Chapter Three: Methodological Approaches and Analytical Tools which outlines my own position in relation to the research including ethical considerations, before outlining the methods and methodologies I adopt to analyse my data. Chapter Four: Results and Analysis is divided into two parts; Part One deals primarily with survey responses, locating these within broad themes which structure the survey’s open-ended questions, helping inform the subsequent interview discussions whilst Part Two is structured around a detailed thematic analysis of the interview responses, weaving back and forth between these and, where necessary, survey insights and supplementary contextualising data, creating a multi-layered dialogue across my research material. The thesis culminates with Chapter Five: Conclusion which explicitly addresses and summarises key insights pertaining to my research aims and objectives as well as positing areas for future consideration.

IV. ‘Feminisation’: sociological discourse(s) and complex understandings

Riska (2008) discusses the emergence of ‘feminisation’ discourse(s), in relation to medicine, in the early 2000s and the debates regarding its use since this time. When applied to any profession it appears to attract both discontents and proponents although both commonly appear to little understand (or define) it within absolute terms leading to multiple meanings and misunderstandings in its varied applicability (Riska 2008; Nordgren 2000). Perhaps its most obvious manifestation in the veterinary context, as highlighted above, is in its application to the numerical dominance of females within the profession through a statistical standpoint. This supports Abercrombie et al (2000) who simply describe it as involving the movement of women into an occupation/field, and Wylie (2000) and Sappleton (2009) who categorise high ‘feminisation’ levels as above 70% and medium levels between 50 – 69%. This may lead to the perception that by virtue of numbers alone, a numerical shift in top-level positions will also occur (Riska 2008). Another definition views it as a more fundamental transformation whereby women not only become more numerically dominant but the occupation itself may undergo fundamental shifts in a) sex-typing, coming to be seen as ‘women’s work’ (Jary & Jary 1995: 230) i.e. biological determinism assumes certain changes will come about due to an increased female presence, b) as a ‘culture’ associated with women (Griffiths 2006), or c) as transforming the ways in which relations are enacted i.e. through strategic increases substantially changing the professional identity and practice of the profession. These lead to a third definition which
identifies a largely pejorative use of the term in media and policy (Skelton 2002) epitomised in backlash politics. This connotation of the term ‘feminisation’ appears to suggest that when women enter high-status professions and approach a majority, the authority and prestige of the profession will decline resulting in ‘de-professionalisation’ (Levinson & Lurie 2004: 473). The ‘feminisation’ of a profession is here equated with femininity and powerlessness (Britton 2000: 420) and compensation is correlated with social status. Interlacings of these definitions are perhaps summarised in survey responses as explored in Chapter Four, some of which sum up the contradictory nature of the word and concept – in that it can denote a greater visibility of females within the field leading to positive transformations in ways of working, but consequently, due to perceived differences and inherent structural inequalities (Acker, 1990) also lead to decreased wages and so on. I hope to explore such contradictions with the aim of offering more nuanced readings of the ‘feminisation’ thesis within the specific context of veterinary work and for this purpose I will approach ‘feminisation’ in its various incarnations as defined above and with recourse to individual perceptions through my primary research.

Further variations to notions of ‘feminisation’ have also been conceptualised through Charles and Grusky’s (2004) notion of ‘ghettoization’ where the professional status of the profession remains intact but women and/or men are channelled to work in niche sections allowing the more prestigiously perceived work to remain in male hands, pointing to differential horizontal and vertical dynamics (2004: 15). In this version, also linked to notions of gendered professional projects as we shall see in Chapter Two, horizontal gender segregation may define women as more competent in service and social interaction than men whilst vertical segregation may be linked to more status-worthy positions of authority and domination (Chakrabarti 2017; 63). In terms of the veterinary profession this could be linked to the clustering of surgeons within different specialities where a sex divide is being perceived i.e. women specialising in small animal general practice and men in surgery. This highlights the need to recognise complex interactions of gender and what an analysis of ‘feminisation’ discourses can (un)mask; comments denying difference and gender divides are evidenced to be fallible in the context of the work above and seminal organisational/feminist research as discussed later in this thesis (Acker 1990; Witz 1990).

One further reading of ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) is offered by Morley (2011), Lipton (2017) and Leathwood and Read (2009) who observe female contributions to be judged against male norms, highlighting the problematics associated with meritocratic approaches to professional project creation and maintenance, which results in masking certain ideals as ‘gender-neutral’
when in fact they are bound up in traditional gendered divisions and power structures. Discourses of ‘feminisation’ are thus highlighted as fantasy discourses, masking inherent misogynistic and sexist impulses to retain masculine-coded domains. These discourses serve to implicitly privilege the ideal as white, heterosexual, male, able-bodied and middle class – effectively as normative (Morley 2011). Within this view, it is also asserted that ‘feminisation’ discourses implicitly situate women’s achievements in relation to men’s punitive underperformance, providing fertile ground for a backlash against women within the profession from some quarters. ‘Feminisation’ discourses are therefore evidenced as complicated, mutable and paradoxical in their very nature and conception and this should always be borne in mind whilst studying various perceptions, and its impact, on the profession.

As with any work utilising terminology that is predicated upon binary thinking, I want to try and avoid homogenisation and essentialisms (Butler 1993). I utilise and critique ‘feminisation’ with an acknowledgement of its multiple strategic uses including its negative formulation in reinforcing/reproducing gender dichotomies as well as raising awareness of ongoing gender discrepancies in the workplace, and I conceptualise it as a compound term used to capture the character of women’s increase in and impact on the professions, without focusing on a stable definition of ‘women’ per se. Rather than being a term denoting the shattering of glass ceilings and vertical stratification which it may aspire to be (and which one wishes could be its apotheosis) I argue that its use generally eclipses the reality of working within the veterinary profession and that it continues to celebrate and sustain a masculine vision of professionality.

In the following section I consider how the UK veterinary profession in particular has engaged with such issues as well as how it also deals with ‘the gender question’.

V. Prior and current veterinary discussions regarding gender and ‘feminisation’ discourse(s)

The potential implications of these ‘feminisation’ discourses and perceived gender differences have attracted academic research interest as well as informal enquiries and discussions directly situated within professional discourse and publications (Henry & Treanor 2012; Allen 2016; Treanor & Marlow 2016). It should be noted however that such research generally laments an under-exploration of the issues I wish to examine, and thus only a small body of research is available to draw upon. Working with the available literature, contemporary research and debate has been predominantly built upon case studies carried out within the western tradition. Various studies have approached ‘feminisation’ and conceptions of gender as a priori concepts
and categories, their discussions containing implicit understandings of the author’s approach to either determinist sex differences in role composition and/ or as socially constructed in negotiations of gender equality. Such research tends to uphold the various conceptions of ‘feminisation’ as discussed in the above section and does not fully interrogate its potential utility (or lack thereof) as a conceptual tool where a clear definition of its use (or suggestions for alternative ways of discussing persistent unequal dynamics) may be beneficial in (re)thinking the future of the profession. As specific studies located within the context of the UK are few, reflecting a general international trend within this field, I also include those from similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds which UK-based studies regularly cite as offering analogous conclusions to their own.

A brief delve into the history of the UK veterinary profession highlights 1785 - 1791 as the years of its development (RCVS 2018b). Initially centered upon equine cases as a result of the work of blacksmiths in treating horses, the interests and milieu of the profession spread to more middle-class sensibilities and large-animal farm work in the latter half of the 19th century. This was underpinned by the retention of so-called masculine ethics as venturing into the (perceived) masculine ‘barnyard’ environment, as proponents within the profession claimed, would cause a woman to lose her ‘delicacy of feeling— her femininity’ (Jones 2003: 13). In 1922, Aileen Cust became the first woman to be awarded a veterinary degree in the UK although she completed her studies over twenty years earlier, in the 1890s. Since this time, the profession has expanded in terms of its demographic professional base as well as its overall scope, primarily as a result of the incorporation of small-animal care, now a major component of the profession with over 50% of veterinary work involving small-animals (RCVS 2018a). This change has generally been attributed to post-war social conditions however a genealogical study conducted by Andrew Gardiner (2014) exposed a hidden history behind this turning point in the veterinary profession. He demonstrated that animal welfare charities such as the PDSA (headed by Maria Dickin), in the interwar period, began providing hands-on-care for suffering small-animals outwith the confines of the veterinary profession, headed and run as they were by women who until this point had not been allowed or awarded professional qualifications within the field. This gaze and interest in small-animals, perceived successfully within the public domain, led the established professional elite to begin considering domestic pets as legitimate patients for a new type of veterinary practice; one that needed to adapt in order to retain its prestige and professional purpose, as a result of the decreasing dependency of the public on horses and large-animals. Whilst the profession appears to have appropriated this
focus on small-animals, as initially identified by women, it did also lead to vicarious advances in training and accreditation of women veterinarians, thus marking an increase of females entering the profession (although slow over the first few decades). Could it therefore be asserted the modern direction and success of the profession is a result of a certain type of ‘feminisation’? Perhaps.

Unfortunately, such history appears lost in modern conceptions of the profession and the majority of contemporary studies into the modern-day veterinary field still point to underpinning masculine ethics. In examining the culture of veterinary medicine, Irvine and Vermilya (2010) concluded that it glorifies stereotypically masculine actions and attitudes which are further compounded by the discursive ‘gender work’ strategies of women themselves who sustain and justify the status quo and thus preserve hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, strategies formally linked to those inhabiting ‘token’ positions in male-dominated domains, such as role encapsulation and distancing from perceived ‘feminine’ traits, are also employed. In effect, it could be argued that these veterinarians are engaging in a performance of acceptable female ‘masculinity’ (Butler 1990; Halberstam 1998). Many interviewees (Irvine & Vermilya 2010: 64) considered the veterinary field as attractive to women due potential nurturing and caring aspects, reflecting perceived links between femininity and care (Gilligan 1982) as well as the opportunity to engage in bond-centred practices with clients (Hochschild 1983; Omerord 2008) however they then distanced themselves from this view by stating it was the scientific (rational) side of the profession which ultimately attracted them (Irvine & Vermilya 2010: 66). The interviewees also considered the organisational context of the profession to be highly important when considering ‘feminisation’ in terms of gender typing linked to horizontal and vertical segregation and stratification (Britton 2000; Allen 2016; Bolton & Muzio 2008) where gender is often inscribed within particular domains i.e. small-animal care and being an employee as embodying the ‘feminine’ (Heath 2007) and large-animal work and leadership as embodying the ‘masculine’. Women in these interviews generally perceived the profession to be coded masculine overall.

The above study appears to reflect a general trend within the veterinary profession regarding perceptions of gender, ‘feminisation’ and professionalism. Building upon previous research and encouraging further studies within the UK, USA and Australia amongst others, this and other existing studies continue to draw from and abut each other, offering similar insights which are important to consider. They tend to offer and (re)cite potential reasons for the current
demography of the veterinary profession and associated university application rates (RCVS 2018a). These figures suggest an undergraduate female student rate of approximately 80% and a female veterinary surgeon rate of around 50 - 60% across the USA, Canada, Australia and UK (Lofstedt, 2003). Alongside such figures, discussions of ‘feminisation’ are entwined; research in Canada (Lofstedt 2003), Australia (Heath & Lanyon 1996; Heath, 2007), Turkey (Basagac Gul et al 2008) and the USA (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010) all appear to highlight reasons why women enter and men eschew the profession. In the USA, male flight and salary stagnation have been analysed as a particularity of the veterinary profession in opposition to other ‘feminised’ professions (Reskin and Roos 1990; Lofstedt 2003). It is therefore important to consider the utility and relevance of some of these suggested reasons for the current demography of the profession as they may shed light, or show themselves to be masking, certain undercurrents and perceptions within the profession.

Brief explanations regarding female entrance and numerical domination within the profession (as stated within existing research) can be summarised as due to the following; the elimination of discrimination based on gender when entering university, improvements in chemical restraints for large animals, increases in female role models, and a proliferation of caring images of veterinarians as portrayed in the media (Lofstedt 2003). Likewise, decreased numbers of men entering the profession have been attributed to a perceived reluctance to enter a career with a low or stagnant income, loss of autonomy, loss of prestige, and the ‘trend effect’ as increasing numbers of women enter the field (ibid). This trend effect has been viewed alternatively as both a vicious and/or virtuous self-reinforcing cycle. The reasons outlined also support Heath and Lanyon’s Australian-based study (1996) which evidenced Darwinian attitudes in which women believed the profession reflected their caring natures and men wished for better financial options and independent working styles, linked to their perceived naturally more competitive nature. Such conclusions have been continuously referenced across existing literature within the (Western) veterinary field and are rarely interrogated. If we look at Lofstedt’s article (2003) a little more closely, she also includes statements such as ‘women continue to accept lower salaries than men’ (2003: 7) placing income low on a list of expectations and expressing satisfaction with this lower salary; claims they are more emotional and subjective; and essentially that women are to be blamed for the prevailing situation because they are too passive and non-resistant. Furthermore, she states that the enhanced caring and nurturing aspects of the profession have come at the expense of income, less interest in practice ownership, and fewer graduates wishing to enter large-animal practice. All of these
‘conclusions’ help contribute towards, and perpetuate, gendered notions of the profession that may be viewed as unsustainable. I do not mean to dismiss the reasons that veterinarians within the field have provided for their motivations and/or reservations on entering the profession as many studies do support some of the above articulations however it is surely naïve to assume these comments as ‘natural truth’ without cross-examining such factors as socio-politico-economic context and institutional restrictions which are likely playing a large role in supporting and upholding unexamined misogynistic views. Such views have unfortunately been reinforced, whether intentionally or not, by key bodies within the profession such as the SPVS (UK) (Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons) through the president’s ill-defined response to a recent survey into the gender pay gap in which he suggested women lack ambition and thus were key in maintaining this gap (Veterinary Woman 2018).

In relation to the ‘feminisation’ of the veterinary profession, the reveal of a pay gap (Waters 2018) is an important element and one which has been directly debated and discussed across popular and academic veterinary literature. In an article by Chambers and Salter (2018: 6) they discuss pay-gap data and its impact on the profession citing it as a by-product of social, cultural and traditional factors ‘often independent of gender’. I believe this is a naïve view which does not take into account the inextricable links of power structures and institutions with gender; gender cannot be viewed in isolation from these factors. The authors however believe contextualising the pay-gap with reference to gender is inappropriate and hampers equality and progress arguments. The ‘fact’ of the gender pay-gap was not disputed however calls for more detailed and wider figures have been requested as the two surveys which formed the pay-gap data consisted of small sample sizes with pay-gap figures reported as varying from 19% - 36%. Also, due to the legislation involved in the 2010 Equality Act, only those businesses employing more than 250 employees were included in the figures.

In conjunction with the need for further examination of the figures, the report ‘Gender Discrimination in the Veterinary Profession’ (Begeny, Ryan & Bongiorno 2018) shows ‘compelling evidence’ of female discrimination within the profession. It examined the extent to which employers and managers believe veterinary women still face discrimination, and to what extent they treat male and female veterinarians differently. Assessed through background information provided by the participants themselves and their consideration of a mock evaluative performance linked to either ‘Mark’ or ‘Elizabeth’ (all information within was identical), the key findings noted that 44% of participants (out of 260) believed women no
longer faced discrimination however also offered ‘Mark’ a higher salary (between £1,100 - £3,300 more). Those who most strongly endorsed this belief evidenced the greater disparity and also believed ‘Mark’ to be more competent. Conversely, those who believed discrimination and gender bias were ongoing issues showed little to no difference in how they perceived and treated both. The gender of the participants seemed to make only a minor difference as to whether they felt women were discriminated against; a third of women believed there was no discrimination. The study concluded the greatest discrimination was perpetuated, paradoxically, by those who most vehemently believed no gender discrimination is evident within the profession. Such findings are highly important as they highlight the sometimes subtle ways in which gender discrimination is being employed, subconsciously within internalised stereotypes, by those within the profession itself, making this a key challenge for the profession to tackle if it wants to truly offer a profession based on parity. Perhaps ‘feminisation’ discourses are being utilised to mask inherent discrimination as well as a superficial view of the profession where greater numbers of females are assumed to negate the possibility of ongoing gender bias? As Michelle Ryan, one of the researchers of the study noted, conversations addressing the issue should be encouraged, within both media and workplace settings following the belief that ‘awareness is curative’ (Woodmansey 2018: 3).

In terms of reported gender divides within professional roles, Irvine and Vermilya (2010) examined companion-animal practice and the inherent client-employer interactions shaped by often emotional and costly decisions (such interpersonal skills have not been reported as intrinsic to large-animal medicine). They reported that women tended to undertake the communicatory aspect of work, often with little recognition of their emotional investment and hence their perceived undervaluation (2010: 63). This is a view which is problematic on a number of levels including the undervaluation of certain perceived ‘feminine’ qualities, as well as reifying traditionalist views of specific gendered behaviour; it is however a perception that women (and non-women) within the field have observed as a constantly conditioning behaviours and roles, by both employers and employees. In relation, gendered perceptions of leadership skills and autonomy have also come under scrutiny. Treanor (2016) cites that despite women outnumbering men in clinical practice (57:43) in 2014 (RCVS 2014) they did not own veterinary practices or hold practice partnerships/leadership positions in proportions that may be expected, even when adjusting for age and experience (RCVS 2014). These figures are supported by Castro and Armitage-Chan (2016) who found 83% of male students and 73% of female students had aspirations to own their own practice. Whilst gender differences were
identified, they were slight when compared to the reality of actually owning/partnering a practice. Are there therefore intervening mechanisms and obstacles at play between aspiration and achieving such goals? Castro and Armitage-Chan believe so and that this may be attributable to past, gendered notions of ‘fit work’, i.e. areas of work perceived more suited to women which are conveyed during veterinary education and work experience placements, ultimately directing women to fields such as small-animal practice (Treanor, Swail & Marlow 2014). In addition, it has also been noted that women with the available financial and technical capital who aspire to ownership are being denied such opportunities due to persistent gendered barriers, stereotypes and assumptions as well as existing male owners preferring to sell to corporate chains (Treanor, Swail & Marlow 2014).

In response to such attitudes, Colette Henry adopts a proactive examination of entrepreneurship, believing small steps are required towards greater parity. In studies by Henry and Treanor (2010) and Henry, Baillie and Treanor (2010) they evidence the need to break down gender-specific barriers to entrepreneurship and the value in doing so – they suggest the importance of developing entrepreneurship modules within veterinary curricula (Henry and Treanor 2010: 617) to help evince the huge potential for the development of female leadership (Henry, Baillie & Rushton 2016). As further significant gender shifts are envisioned in future years due to demographic changes as a consequence of retirement, leadership skills are being promoted as key to achieving a sustainable workforce with female headed enterprises. Forming the basis of an inductive study, Henry, Baillie and Treanor (2010) explored Dr Sarah Baillie’s experiences, motivations and future aspirations within the context of operating within a traditionally male-dominated environment (both academically and in industry). In terms of motivation, she cited her entrepreneurial endeavours were driven by intrinsic rather than extrinsic values, and in relation to entrepreneurial abilities and self-confidence, she did not perceive herself as an entrepreneur. Instead she emphasised practical skills such as problem-solving and team-working, as key to her innovation and practice, and acknowledged her own limitations. She referred to herself as creative with a penchant for ‘fixing things’. None of which would necessarily indicate she has won prestigious awards for her work. A key issue she faced during her work was dealing with negative comments from farmers; this is a point which has been raised consistently across blog and anecdotal accounts regarding the farming sector. Her experience in this regard appears be typical of those faced by women in encountering farming environments within the some part of the UK. It is interesting to note that Sarah herself, in this study, believes that her use of humour to alleviate difficult situations, may be further
preserving this masculine domain, also reflecting the conclusions of Irvine and Vermilya (2010). This is an issue I intend to explore further within this thesis upon examination of my own interview and survey data.

Westgate (2016a), building on Henry’s examination of entrepreneurship amongst women, interviews leading females within the profession regarding their thoughts on ‘feminisation’ and leadership. One response mentioned the emergence of the ‘millennial’ vet; the expectations of new graduates appear to be different from their predecessors, in part due to conceptions of veterinary practice as a job rather than a vocation (2016: 6). Linked to the changing demographics of older vets as mentioned previously, it is envisioned that female veterinarians will not buy into practices due to a combination of changing life commitments and the increasing corporatisation of the profession with predictions that male retirees will consider selling to external companies. In addition a persistent lack of female leaders is viewed as having important ramifications as decisions continue to be made by men about a profession dominated by women. It appears that women returning to work after maternity leave are more likely to be flexible in regard to other parents in the same position; reflecting an understanding of life/work commitments which do not necessarily negate each other. It has also been noted that young female veterinarians are being asked and appraised at some interviews (illegally) about the likelihood of whether they intend to take maternity in the near future (a response also highlighted by Juliet, one of my own interviewees). This is a major issue for a profession undergoing the existing demographic changes cited above; if people are put off by perceptions apparently inherent within the profession regarding maternity/paternity leave, and the older (male) generation are retiring with a subsequent increase in women over the age of 46, the profession faces an uncertain future (Veterinary Record 2012). This has also been linked to a common social perception that young women cannot have it all (often masked in terms of ‘millennial’ discoursing); those who do undertake childcare tend to be women and also tend to (re)enter the profession as part-timers (Heath 2007) due to the inherent difficulties surrounding childcare and flexibility within the profession, as well as persistent views regarding traditional divisions of gender within the familial space. Linking this to leadership, Gudrun Ravetz, a former SPVS President, does note it is incredibly difficult to undertake partner/director duties when working part-time (as a result of childcare) due to economic and time limiting factors but she also pinpoints increasing numbers of strong female leaders who are taking on this challenge, to change the profession from within, and believes there is a change towards greater parity, required to take the profession forward in an inclusive manner (Westgate 2016a: 8-9).
Further reflections on gender within the profession have been highlighted by Alison Lambert who asks people on Twitter to ‘see my role, not my gender’ (Westgate 2016b). She notes that leadership tends to be viewed in terms of a ‘female’ or ‘male’ style, rather than as effective leadership per se, and in conjunction with Colette Henry, believes increased entrepreneurship teaching and opportunities at university are required. A focus on the differences of a fluid conceptualisation of gender is welcomed in terms of positively directing the profession i.e. not purely in the placement of women in leadership roles for the sake of numbers, but recognising requirements for flexibility, avoiding polarising discourses, changing perceptions of family roles, adopting new ways of approaching challenges and options within the profession, and looking at the quality of work undertaken not just quantity. Dialogue and fairness are highlighted as key mechanisms for progress within the profession, involving discussions across all members.

Further research countering some of the assertions regarding salary aspirations and lack of prestige in the profession, as well as proposals for a sustainable workforce, have been undertaken however appear to lack the significance of citation that the majority of the above studies attract. Felsted and Volk (2000) suggested women were as affected by tuition and salary as men, and that ingrained perceptions are responsible for perpetuating sexist views upholding gendered labour divisions within the profession as well as perceived differences in ambition. They also believe the issues inherent with private ownership are linked to a lack of opportunity for millennial vets rather than women per se, mainly due to mass corporatisation; they expect practice ownership opportunities to decrease for all. Whilst this remains a fear that professionals believe they are witnessing and expect to continue, it has also been argued that increasing corporatisation could be positively viewed and acted upon by considering how women may drive changes in work-life balance, that corporates tend to include key targets in their demographic makeup regulated to promote greater equality and diversity (Allen 2001), and that shorter and more flexible working patterns may be encouraged within larger practices and franchises, encouraging greater degrees of job-sharing (Spence 2011). The corporatisation debate appears to be gaining momentum and may have repercussions for women in leadership roles, with the potential to either delink the profession from a largely perceived male ethos or instead to justify and uphold its existing character; further work through longitudinal studies may help in this regard. For the present moment, whilst corporatisation may offer opportunities for new ways of working, there are still uncertainties regarding the extent of salary negotiation.
and (perhaps misplaced) fears that a ‘numbers exercise’ without co-current changes in perceived ideas of leadership and the implementation of leadership education during student years, may lead to increasing numbers of women in leadership roles following and being encouraged to mirror male leadership styles (Castro and Armitage-Chan 2016).

Finally, although little research has been undertaken regarding the potential positive impacts for the profession in exploring and positively engaging with diversity across a range of subjectivities, a current action plan, as part of the Vet Futures project (2015) has adopted a flexible approach to exploring potential outcomes and paths for the profession. This has in part been influenced by some of the above previous research and thus brings many issues together which can be targeted in a holistic and hopefully flexible manner. In joining forces, the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) have instigated this project and have formulated six main ambitions, including aims to encourage a broad range of diverse and rewarding career paths (Ambition 4) and to promote exceptional leadership (Ambition 6) (Vet Futures 2015: 5). Methods of implementation and evaluation are being conceptualised and mobilised through outreach programmes, delivering peer-support, promoting diverse career opportunities, exploring how to encourage a more diverse profession in relation to ethnicity, socio-economic background and gender (Vet Futures 2015: 38) and to instigate proactive leadership which includes developing lifelong learning and targeted programmes for those underrepresented in leadership such as women and ethnic minorities (Vet Futures 2015: 5). The results of this ongoing engagement within the veterinary profession between such issues as unequal gender relations (i.e. especially identified in the vertical stratification of the profession) and the future of veterinary work will undergo constant review in reports by the BVA and RCVS, but it may take some time before real changes are evidenced in the structure and organisation of the profession, especially if poorly conceived discourses and their lack of interrogation continue to influence and shape perceptions within the veterinary field.

VI. **Aim and research objectives**

After outlining my impetus for this research, as well as contextualising existing work in the field, I now turn to my aim and research objectives. These have undergone a process of dialogic (re)formulation through my continuous exploration of relevant theoretical concepts, methodology and emerging primary material. They have been informed by my sociological
understanding of the UK veterinary profession and its relationship to ‘feminisation’ discourses and gendering processes. I believe that whilst the ‘feminisation’ of the profession has been explored to an extent, it is fairly limited in its scope and aims to account for two main observations: 1) the increase in female surgeons by regurgitating uncritical statements regarding this rapid numerical ‘feminisation’, and 2) the lack of female leadership within the profession, requiring targeted education for those underrepresented at these levels.

I wish to depart from previous research, adopting a different angle of analysis through the combination of both theories of professionalism(s) and feminism(s), to question and explore the legitimacy and efficacy of the concept of ‘feminisation’ when applied to the processes, maintenance and progress of the veterinary profession. In essence, has women’s rise to a proportional majority resulted in the accrual of benefits assumed within a simple understanding of the ‘feminisation’ thesis? I argue that understandings of ‘feminisation’ within the profession are paradoxically contributing to the retention of a male-dominated field, one which also manages to downplay gender imbalances through the deployment of ‘feminisation’ discourses as a type of defence mechanism. I believe such an analysis will be able to critically inform further work examining the rapid numerical ‘feminisation’ of the profession as well as expanding ways in which we consider the future of the profession with recourse to how underlying structures and discourses may be hindering progress for both gender parity and diversity across the field.

My aim will be operationalised through the following research questions:

- How is ‘feminisation’ understood by those within the veterinary profession?
- How is gender consciously acknowledged, employed and/or experienced within the profession, if at all? Is it considered a matter of importance?
- Are traditional gender roles, perceptions and socially prevalent constructions of femininity and masculinity challenged in the daily work of veterinary practitioners? If so, are new boundaries and meanings being created?
- What impact do varied understandings of ‘feminisation’ and gender have on everyday work, individual engagement with the profession and visions for the future?
- And finally, after consideration of the above, what are the consequences of ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) within the context of the veterinary sector?
VII. Conclusion

As a foundation for the remainder of this thesis, this section has outlined my motivation as well as offering a pertinent contextualisation of current discourses and research. The following insights will provide a foundation for developing strategies, based on qualitative data generated during the thesis, to support and promote parity within a profession in which paradoxically both men and women are seen to dominate. By analysing the nature of ‘feminisation’ discourses and attitudes to gender processes within the profession, I highlight the problematic nature of engaging in a rhetoric, poorly defined but utilised nonetheless for strategic purposes, which may hinder dialogue and progression within a field which aims to be dynamic and inclusive. Although outwith the scope of this current thesis, my research may also be partially useful for exploring and addressing the lack of ethnic and class diversity (Vet Futures 2015: 38) amongst veterinary professionals. I will now however commence Chapter Two: Theoretical Contexts, offering an important grounding for my own later analysis.
Chapter Two: Theoretical Context

I. Introduction

This chapter provides my theoretical foundations, contextualising the discourse(s) of ‘feminisation’ within the veterinary profession as discussed above, to be framed by relevant sociological and gender theory. A critical overview and approach is thus undertaken beginning with an examination of the ‘sociology of the professions’ (Weber 1978; Macdonald 1995), before proceeding with Witz’s (1990, 1992) seminal theorising of gendered professional projects, as well as more specifically the boundary work that may be employed to maintain and restructure professions (Gieryn 1983; Persson 2010) as well as Acker’s notions of gendered organisations (1990, 2012). Once the context of professionalisation has been established I consider feminist and post-structuralist critiques of discourse production drawing on gender performativity (West & Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990, 1993, 2004) in addition to hegemonic and critical masculinities (Connell 1995; Hearn 2004) as I believe it is through both meaning and performativity that constructions of gender and ‘feminisation’ are established and maintained in relation to professional and occupational bodies. Parallels and linkages between and within theories will be highlighted, as well as their relevance for this thesis.

Whilst a fairly linear theory path may be detected, beginning with the (obsolete) 1950s taxonomic approach (Macdonald 1995), I believe it is important to briefly historicise the overall context as it lays the foundation for more recent and complex theorising. Certain strands of theory have appeared contemporaneously and continue to be utilised today, as both theory and praxis, by academics and public bodies who draw on notions of ‘professionalism’ and/or ‘gendered divisions’ when navigating their everyday work activities. It therefore appears apt to locate my research within this broad context as ‘feminisation’ discourses appear to be both embedded within and affected by the gendered division of labour and gender coding within the veterinary profession. Subsequently, this chapter concludes as I entwine the ‘professional project’ of veterinary practice with relevant feminist theory to help understand contemporary ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) and how the meaning, status and power of the profession continues to change as traditional gender dynamics are altered (Reskin and Roos 1990). Using gendered codes as a device, the ‘masculine cultural project’ of professionalisation (Davies 1996) demonstrates how particular practices, processes and structures produce control, accountability and performativity; accordingly, do current ‘feminisation’ discourses within the veterinary profession highlight modes of subverting this project, reinscribing it with more complex
understandings of gender and professionalism, or are these discourses masking an active maintenance of the mechanisms which preserve a traditionally male-dominated professional domain?

II. *Merits of defining professionalisation*

As my focus lies in exploring ‘feminisation’ discourses inherent *within* the veterinary profession, a demarcation of what constitutes a ‘profession’ is deemed beneficial. I now offer a brief overview which details and complicates various definitions, whilst also contextualising these within a Western academic tradition. Whilst some have argued that the very definition of a profession is a futile exercise (Johnson 1972; Evetts 2003) I defend my consideration of it not least because to ground this work in the discourse and meaning of ‘professions’ seems relevant as veterinary surgery is considered an integral part of the ‘veterinary profession’ as consistently defined by those within and outwith this occupational area i.e. by the British Veterinary Association and *Veterinary Times*. If those within the veterinary world refer to their work as located within a particular ‘profession’ then the concept of a profession must have meaning for those located within it; the veterinary profession is often viewed in terms of closure strategies (Weber 1978) where accreditation, registration and regulation often define its boundaries. Practitioners within the field are often viewed as embodying notions of the ‘professional veterinarian’, instilling impressions of trust and authority both within and outwith professional confines leading the public to expect certain services and appearances from this ‘profession’ (Macdonald 1995:30 - 31). These notions, linked to prestige, respectability and upward social mobility have embedded themselves within the veterinary profession accompanying discourses of ‘feminisation’ in which academics (Lofstedt 2003; Irvine & Vermiliya 2010) and practitioners (Kernot 2018a) decry falling prestige and respectability, linked to the increasing number of women joining the profession.

I therefore aim to utilise critical definitions of profession(s) generally employed by neo-Weberians and Anne Witz (1992); those of ‘professional projects’ and ‘closure strategies’. This includes understanding the strategies of knowledge-based occupations in achieving their goals of being recognised as professions through various measures such as the use of regulative bargaining with the state, conditioning by political cultures and political power networks, and how discriminatory actions in the interest of promoting a ‘professional’ image or goal contribute to creating professional boundaries and/or de-professionalisation.
III. Sociology of the professions

Developed over the 1950s and 1960s, the taxonomic approach to professions generally delineated professions as possessing unique and positive characteristics, including esoteric knowledge and expertise, as well as being a functional good for society (Freidson 1986; Goode 1960). Trust and authority were considered inherent factors in the construction of a profession and prestige and respectability were viewed accordingly (Macdonald 1995: 30-31). Basic, ahistorical and prescriptive, it represented ideology rather than reality (Macdonald 1995; Hanlon 1999) and was heavily criticised; critical perspectives applied to this theory exposed incredible biases towards a male gendering of ‘professions’. In its crudest form, it is interesting to note that historical representations of the veterinary profession (Jones 2003) have been conceptualised within this framework.

Various challenges to this approach are levelled, from (neo)Marxists, Foucauldians, Bourdieu’s habitus concept and most importantly neo-Weberians and later proponents (Saks 2012). These concentrate on action and relationships rather than knowledge and expertise as being central to profession formation, allowing professions to be viewed as a body of individuals hoping for recognition for collective actions. Interactionist and Marxian perspectives considered micro-level and macro-structural conceptions of professions respectively, tending to utilise parallels rather than differences between high status professions and more stigmatised occupations, highlighting socially negotiated labels based on occupational ideologies (Hughes 1963). Again, such approaches have been largely abandoned due to a lack of empirical support combined with weighted focuses on either individuals themselves or the state (Larson 1986; Sak 2012). Both Foucault’s (1977) and Bourdieu’s (1989) theories have successfully been utilised to challenge taxonomic accounts of ‘professions’, relevant for more contemporary theory regarding professions and occupations. Foucauldians have challenged the rationality implied by taxonomic theory by highlighting relations to governmentality and the state (power and discipline; Foucault 1979) as key defining factors in the establishment and maintenance of a profession. Larson (1986) subsequently defined a profession in terms of a concentric circle from the core of which ‘true discourses’ are issued. The professional domain remains subordinate to the state and thus is not viewed as a truly independent entity (Macdonald 1995: 26); a relationship of sorts is always ongoing and shaping both the profession and means of governmentality. Gendered dynamics however fail to appear in these conceptions and thus such accounts falls short (Macdonald 1995: 24) of truly exploring the gendered nature of power. Similarly, Bourdieu’s (1989) habitus and field
concepts focusing on the social world have been utilised to explain how groups of individuals may adopt similar perspectives and behavioural patterns to help constitute the perception of a strong ‘professional’ identity. The profession becomes a self-fulfilling re-enactment of perceived characteristics, enclosed within limits posed by and outwith the profession itself i.e. in comparison to other occupations, delineated by educational attainment and registration, and by sanctioning from the state. Economic, cultural and social capital are utilised by members of the profession to help maintain its status, allowing both self-classification and the classification of others; although constrained by the limits and performance of certain characteristics there is manoeuvrability for change and thus for the profession to undergo transformation in terms of how it is constituted (Flemmen 2013).

Drawing on Foucault’s disciplinary knowledge and power concepts, Fournier (1999) considers the importance of the ideology of professionalism and introduces boundary work as a two stage process of the constitution of a self-defined and independent knowledge base, and the ongoing effort to maintain the profession’s role boundaries. Introducing and drawing upon Weber’s social closure concept (1978), where individuals pursuing similar interests result in collective action, legitimating the pursuit of their interests through social closure to attract certain privileges such as power, economic and social advantage, the boundaries to be constructed and maintained were: inter-professional boundaries; boundaries between the client and the profession; and boundaries between the profession and market. This is particularly relevant for the current study as the present socio-political climate is witnessing increasing challenges to some of these boundaries in terms of market and inter-professional forces; the impact of Brexit in terms of veterinary services and recruitment as well as growing dissatisfactions of client groups (Kernot 2018a) are leading to changes in perceptions of the veterinary profession and the prestige and authority it is deemed to hold.

Perhaps the neo-Weberian challenge is one of the most analytically inclusive theories of professionalisation as it helps centre exclusionary social closure as a fundamental cornerstone of such projects, laying the foundation for Witz (1992) to incorporate and apply an explicit gender focus in her conception of ‘professional projects’ and which Acker (1990) also considers and expands within research into gendered occupations. Parkin (1979) identified two distinct strategies of closure: exclusionary (by dominant forces) and usurpationary (by subordinate forces). Further complicating these, Murphy (1988: 77) posited two forms of usurpation - inclusionary (getting into present structures of positions) and revolutionary (directly attempting to change position structures). Particular benefits associated with being
part of a group are secured and protected by excluding and disempowering other groups by monitoring and limiting entry into the group (Saks 2010). As seen further below, Witz (1992) extends this model to include four forms of closure: exclusionary, demarcationary, inclusionary and dual closure, whilst also paying attention to the gendered dimensions implicit within defining and maintaining professional boundaries. I believe such forms of closure are integral when deconstructing ‘feminisation’ discourses as they provide contextual frames for subsequent analysis. The neo-Weberian approach also acknowledges socio-political influences at the macro and micro-level, as well as the dynamic and changing nature of professions and boundary competition. It centres on the tenet that the creation of legal strategies of exclusion heavily influence the position of specific occupational groups (Macdonald 1995; Saks 2010) and that the attainment of a particular form of formal legal regulation creates these bodies of insiders and excludes outsiders. A further key point acknowledged by this theory is that entry to professions is traditionally via higher educational credentials (Saks 2012: 4); a point which heavily characterises the veterinary profession today. The above theories offer a partial reading of professionalisation, linked to governmentality, power, social behaviour, and milieu, and I consider these to be of relevance for my research however again they fail to incorporate gender as an analytical lens and thus I will complicate and expand upon it utilising the work of gender and socio-gender theorists below. Notwithstanding this aspect, the neo-Weberian insights as explored above do have the potential to provide an excellent context for an insightful study into ‘feminisation’ discourses within the veterinary profession as competition and contestation between traditional and contemporary perceptions of the veterinary profession, as well as the roles and specialisms within it, have come to define some of the biggest issues currently facing it.

IV. **Gendered professional projects**

Recognising organisations are never gender-neutral (Ely & Meyerson 2000), professions as ‘gendered professional projects’ posit gender as a key feature in constituting, maintaining and complicating professional identity. Witz (1992) complicated and critiqued the ‘professional project’ (Larson 1977) to highlight the gendering processes of agents within such projects and to locate them within a particular patriarchal socio-political-historico context allowing such projects to be considered as empirical entities, rather than generic universal concepts. Gender and the axis of class are shown to interact to produce hierarchies of power and prestige; the project is defined as the systematic attempt by occupations to translate a scarce set of cultural and technical resources into a secure and institutionalised system of occupational and financial
resources. Witz exposed the implied gender-blindness of these projects, associated with ‘turgid and Whiggish accounts of professional men’ (Reader 1996), by centralising gender as a defining mechanism within professional constitution. She highlights the inherent conflicts and interactions within and between professions through considering the highly important strategies of occupational closure which seek to justify and perpetuate structural inequalities within society, resulting in exclusions of people of race, non-cis males, and certain class identities through specific training, education, and credential requirements. Witz’s four strategies of closure; *exclusionary strategies* (people[men] maintain a monopoly of practice/expertise by legalist and credentialist tactics) *demarcationary strategies* (inter-occupational control and policing of boundaries - ‘occupational imperialism’ (Larkin 1983)), and *inclusionary and dual closure strategies* usually employed by subordinate groups i.e. women and people of colour. Dual closure strategies may be significant as they provide evidence of exclusionary and usurpationary closure (Parkin 1979) and are the type of closure Witz (1990: 678 – 679) argues female professional projects typically assume – offering a further point of divergence for exploring the ‘feminisation’ of the veterinary profession as its origins lie in a traditionally male-dominated domain. It is also important to note that these various forms of closure are not exclusive phenomena and often interact to demarcate various forms of exclusion i.e. in radiography (Witz 1990), the failure to exclude women from formalised routes and access to training contributed to gendered internal demarcations of vertical segregation; a notion which may be highly beneficial for my current research. Both the structure and agents of professions are shown to be gendered. Gender is shown as a paradoxical identity marker – acting as a fluid and complex source of proletarianism, an obstacle to advancement, an incentive to professionalise and as a defensive barrier for entrenched professional elites. Witz builds upon previous research i.e. Freidson (1986) which although did include elements of gender differentiation in relation to occupations, did not problematise taken-for-granted sex roles and attributes, and thus further reified family/career dichotomies, leaving these uncontested and undertheorised within professional theory. Further below I link this to Acker’s (1990) consideration of the gendered structures of organisations and her identification of the conceptual ‘ideal worker’.

Witz’s context of grounding professions against patriarchal practices and a patriarchal society has thus been highly influential in propelling this angle of analysis across sociology into feminist theorising by locating it within power relations of male dominance and female subordination. This should be important for this thesis as it appears evident that patriarchal
processes still frame the veterinary profession in certain ways and help account for shifting gender relations, their navigation, and opposition as they formally act as a key mechanism of male dominance in modern society (Mark-Lawson & Witz 1988, Cockburn 1983) even if masked in gender-neutral language.

V. **Boundary work**

For the purpose of this thesis I think it is important to expand on the notion of boundary work, exploring the discursive rhetorical strategies that consolidate gender divisions despite the realities of physical proximity between agents. It is not unfeasible to hypothesise ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) within veterinary practice may indicate particular forms of boundary work, employed by different actors for different purposes. Drawing on Witz (1990) and Gieryn (1983), Persson (2010) considers boundaries as flexible in relation to different contexts and that the maintenance of them usually allows for the privileges of the dominant group to be retained. Initially, boundary work explained demarcations of scientific and perceived non-scientific fields of study (Gieryn 1983) which Allen (2000) sums up as ‘micropolitical strategies through which work identities and occupational margins are negotiated’ (2000: 348). Persson (2010) applies and expands a gendered critique to this notion exploring boundary work as a fluid concept, forever undergoing strengthening and readjustment, similar to Witz’s conceptions of demarcationary work (1990). It can be used to explore the changing nature of veterinary work, similar to how Persson (2010) considers the reconstitution of prevailing norms of the masculine and feminine within organisational change. Tensions may be explored between preserving the status quo of a profession and challenging established patterns within it (2010: 167); discourses (including metaphors and cultural contexts), demarcations of gender and the purpose(s) of the veterinary profession can all be explored in this light. Boundaries may be maintained and deconstructed from both within and outwith, complicated by co-constructions of gender and professional identity i.e. female veterinarians maintaining occupational boundaries with male surgeons against veterinary nurses (essentially core vs support) so as not to lose status (Witz 1990). Recognising the importance that stereotypes and/or organisational symbols have in public consciousness is also crucial to understanding boundary work and how individuals negotiate and manage their engagement with the profession. Boundary deconstruction may be a particularly useful tool for considering the future of the veterinary profession as intersections of roles, identities, boundaries, visions of the future and contemporary issues all contribute towards gendered notions of the profession; ‘feminisation’ discourses may be consolidating boundaries and negative perceptions, leading
to notions of a ‘de-professionalised profession (Ackroyd and Muzio 2007; Irvine and Vermilya 2010), or alternatively, they may be undoing such negative perceptions.

This allows us now to turn to Acker’s (1990) identification and critique of the ‘ideal worker’, exposing everyday interactive and relational processes within professions and thus destabilising this ‘worker’ as a tightly bounded subject; gender comes to be (re)constituted through embodied organisational practice.

VI. Gendered organisations

Acker’s seminal work (1990) highlights the fallibility of the disembodied, abstract worker, assumed ‘gender-less’, masking the reality that this figure represents a male persona, one imbued with a particular image of masculinity (1990). This figure represents a specific masculine form which continues to pervade ideals of the ‘ideal worker’ and contributes towards gender segregation within occupations. This masculine form has been identified by Kanter (1977: 22) as embodying supposed ‘male’ traits such as enlightened rationality, reason, analytical abilities, an unemotional demeanour and leadership qualities. It is this figure which may be problematised within the veterinary profession as notions of the ideal may have transformed; perhaps the ideal worker is now a woman? Or woman as ‘social man’ (Sorenson 1984)? When Gardiner (2014) (re)examines the origin and proliferation of small animal general practice as a result of women spearheading this sub-field, I believe potential challenges to the ‘ideal worker’ (i.e. white, middle-class, man) can be discerned, however this lasts for only a short period as this sub-field became central to the veterinary profession (RCVS 2018b) with an apparent re-centring of the ‘ideal worker’ as ‘male’ once again.

Entwined with the concept of the ‘ideal worker’, social constructionism and knowledge of the cultural may be highly important for understanding gender construction (Hearn & Parkin 1987). As a profession which evidences socially situated practices (Halford, Savage & Witz 1997: 13), it is important to consider how Acker (1990) demonstrates the embeddedness of gendered social relations in contemporary organisations by showing that both the structures of the organisation/profession and individual agency are immersed in interacting gendering processes, in direct contradistinction to the previously supposed gender-neutrality of organisations (Acker 1990: 142). At least five processes were identified; firstly through the construction of gendered division lines (men maintained the highest occupational positions), secondly through the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce or oppose those divisions i.e. representations of mean and aggressive men vs. caring females,
thirdly through interactions between men and women, between women and between men in which dominance and submission are enacted and occasionally resisted producing gendered social structures. West and Zimmerman (1983) explore this in relation to recreating gender inequality through conversation and also show how men are often portrayed as actors and women as emotional support – important points for me to consider when analysing the position of veterinary surgeons who have traditionally been viewed within these divisions (Hochschild 1983). Fourthly, these processes help to produce gendered components of individual identity such as consciousness of the existence of social expectations and presentations of self (Reskin & Roos 1987), whilst the fifth process understands gender as implicated in the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualising social structures (Acker, 1990: 146 – 147). The organisational logic of the profession is thus deemed to have a highly gendered substructure expressed through the largely invisible processes of the lives of those within professions in which gender inequalities are perpetuated (Acker 2012: 215). This is especially useful for me as I look at the everyday realities of veterinary practice and ‘feminisation’ discourse(s). These considerations of how gender interacts within a profession are helpful for understanding how the meaning, status and power of jobs change as women move into them (Reskin and Roos, 1990); the extent to which organisational change is related to gender divisions and gendered careers; and how gendered embodiment features in professional discourse and practice. The analysis of ‘feminisation’ I intend to undertake is entrenched within this inquiry which allows me to consider the embedded perspectives of the gendered substructure of the profession. It is important to consider that specific gendered and sexualised masculinities, femininities and sexualities are embodied in performing tasks and are real – as opposed to the abstract notions of previous professional project theorisations. In addition, I also note the importance of an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989; Lykke 2010) to add nuance to my analysis. Whilst the veterinary profession is constituted of a predominantly white, middle-class social identity, recognising the complex interactions of gender, age, class and race, as well as their entanglements with perceptions of the profession, I will incorporate insights that show a multidimensional perspective of the ‘feminisation’ debate(s). Acker expanded her own theory to include an intersectional perspective (2012) as it became apparent discrimination could not be analysed through a single category; in my application to the veterinary profession this also helps to highlight responses to issues perceived outwith the ‘feminisation’ debate which I nonetheless identify as being potentially implicitly related to the discussion.
In exploring how women (and the feminine) as well as how men (and the masculine) are constituted within ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) rather than focusing on men and women per se, I utilise intersectionality to undergird my analysis, aware of contested perceptions, claims and identities. This also compliments my consideration of performativity, of both individuals and the profession, as outlined in the next section. In conclusion, the overall premises of Acker’s work continue to illustrate the highly gendered nature of organisations (Pringle 1989, Cockburn 1985, Acker 1990, 2012) evidencing a marked distinction between the ‘male/masculine’ and ‘female/feminine’, perhaps embodied today in pay gap and client expectations (Woodmansey 2018; Kernot 2018b). Does the ‘feminisation’ debate, and all that it entails, support, create or subvert new division and/or ideologies of masculinity and femininity in relation to the profession?

The recognition of gendering processes as integral to an organisation or profession has encouraged further inter-disciplinary analysis between sociological and feminist theorising, especially as both advantages and disadvantages as a result of such processes can be differentiated and I explore some of these engagements below through Connell (1995), West and Zimmerman (1987) and Butler (1990, 1993, 2004).

VII. Doing gender and performativity

Following Acker (1990, 2012) who also draws upon West and Zimmerman (1987), I believe the performative agency of an individual is an integral factor when considering and challenging ‘feminisation’ discourses; discourses as socially organised frameworks incorporating corporeal and symbolic signs as well as speech and text that define and specify what can be said and done. Performativity can be used as a framework for critically assessing gender performances in patriarchal workplaces, including the institutional rules and norms that shape behaviours and interactions. It is a notion that focuses on a multitude of active markers - what people do, how they dress and how other learned attributes are displayed and enacted rather than a biological marker of sex. Systematising concepts previously discussed by Garfinkel (1967) such as sense-making procedures, as well as Goffman’s (1959) symbolic interactionism and introduction of the term ‘doing gender’, this notion has been widely applied in constructivist theorisations of gender to ask what is meant by ‘femininity’, ‘masculinity’, ‘masculine work’ and/or ‘feminine work’ (Aulenbacher et al 2010: 60). The social presentation of the self and enquiries into social performances directly influenced West and Zimmerman (1987) and Butler’s development of the ongoing reiteration of the gendered subject through performativity (1990, 1992). Gender is
considered something that is ‘done’, akin to performing for an audience (Goffman 1977) and thus is an interactional portrayal of what individuals want to convey to others, using the human ability to produce and recognise masculine and feminine ‘gender displays’ (Goffman 1976: 76). Acker (1990) utilises this interactional perspective in her work on gendering processes as outlined above. West and Zimmerman (1987: 130, 2009) later extended the notion that gender is a socially scripted dramatisation of an idealised femininity and masculinity, assessed through pre-conceived appropriate gender presentations. This appears to resonate with my current research; by applying the notion that gender is a performance to the current ‘feminisation’ discourse(s), it may help delineate inherent issues with the ambiguity of utilising ‘feminisation’ rhetoric across the academic and practical field of veterinary practice. Femininity and masculinity as ‘essential nature’ can be refuted (West & Zimmerman 1987: 126; West & Fenstermaker 1995) and can instead be considered as interactional properties of a system of relationships (2009: 115).

Continuing and expanding upon this work, Butler (1993) introduced the concept of gender performativity as ‘the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names’ (1993: 2). Thus performatative acts are constitutive of meaning, producing a series of effects: ‘we act and talk and speak in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man, or a woman’ (Butler 2014) i.e. they create the illusion of an identity. Power and discourse are key; gender (and other identity markers) are considered discursively embodied categories constructed on the basis of knowledge and power. For Butler, the performance of the gendered and sexual subject is positioned within a Foucauldian regime of regulative discourses, frameworks of intelligibility, and disciplinary regimes (1990). I consider Butler’s theorising highly influential when considering the ‘doing’ of veterinary practice, as well as its ability to frame prevailing ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) as potentially producing the effects they articulate, regardless of their original intention or belief they are ‘just rhetoric’. Furthermore, thinking of ‘feminisation’ discourses within this framework allows recognition that femininity and masculinity are not natural attributes but culturally acquired through repetitive acts. The self-presentation that produces gendered identity (Butler 1990), as well as the potential and limitations of gender performance, may also account for some of the conceptions, subversions and navigations of the supposed ‘feminisation’ of the veterinary profession.
VIII. Hegemonic and critical masculinities

Further informing my analysis, through a continuation of constructivist conceptions of gender, I explore the dynamics of hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1995, 2000) which denote culturally exalted forms of masculinity guaranteeing the dominant position of men in opposition to other masculinities and women. Such a concept can be identified in Acker’s conception of the abstract worker (1990) and is often viewed as a visible phenomenon in traditional professional images. In its crudest form, the absent female body struggles to make a meaningful appearance; I argue this can be problematised and explored within the veterinary profession as the numerical dominance of females is juxtaposed with discourses of ‘feminisation’ and an apparent underlying masculine ethic which upholds forms of hegemonic masculinity. This is despite fears the profession is/becoming ‘feminised’ (Lofstedt 2010), evidencing the complex entanglements and ways in which hegemonic masculinity and ‘feminisation’ discourses may co-construct each other.

Applying a broader perspective to concepts of masculinity, Hearn (2004) considers replacing ‘masculinity’ with ‘men’ as an analytical marker, allowing for more nuanced research to be undertaken as men are recognised as being constituted in different ways, recognising intersecting axis’ of identity as well as nuanced conceptions of what constitutes hegemonic masculinity. In recognising the merits of such an approach, I utilise the theorising of both Connell (1995) and Hearn (2004) to consider how ‘feminisation’ discourses constitute masculinity, femininity, men and women as well as how they reify these binaries as the only gendered and sexed identities within the veterinary profession. This allows me to incorporate Halberstam’s (1998) examination of the ‘feminisation’ of masculinities as performance; ‘performative maleness as enacted by women’ and ‘masculinity without men’, both of which may have resonance for my current research as the performance of masculinity (and also femininity) appear tangibly in veterinary practice although the effects are little analysed in this context in contrast to the double-bind of female workers in bureaucratic and educational settings (Acker 2012). Processes of ‘feminisation’ may impact upon the realisation of socially endorsed masculinity as values previously associated with femininity (such as emotionality) may mark a resignification of particular actions or attitudes to be incorporated in new ways of performing gender (Swan 2008). This reconfiguration, sometimes viewed as privileging ‘feminised’ subjectivities (with all the problems this essentialism contains), when performed by (certain) men may destabilise dominant images of a masculine, white, middle-class,
heterosexual man as a bounded, independent and self-aware individual (Lupton 2000). Men may come to fear ‘feminisation’ and stigmatisation in a female-dominated occupation and thus a profession may be further reconstructed to minimise non-masculine associations and restore a dominating position (Alvesson 1998; Pringle 1993) where distance from the perceived feminine is practiced (Williams 1993). ‘Feminisation’ in these instances is met with a backlash discourse in which femininity is positioned as tainting true masculinity and further gender work may be undertaken to restore a masculine image that has been perceived to be undermined (Simpson 2004: 29).

The dynamic nature of masculinity, how it is (re)constructed, how it is experienced at a subjective level and how multiple masculinities exist in relation to the dominant (hegemonic) form all indicate various ways of perceiving the performance of masculinity (and inversely femininity). These constructions of masculinity are often located in, acted out and negotiated within the context of work (Morgan 1992) and therefore understanding how masculinities are experienced and constructed is highly important in my particular analysis. Considering theory with recourse to performativity and critical masculinities allows one to consider gender relations as multidimensional and experienced differentially within specific organisational and politico-historico-socio-economic contexts. Gender regimes can be exposed by examining ‘feminisation’ discourses which help us to explore power, justification, production and emotional relations within professions. This is evident in Irvine and Vermilya’s study (2010) in which particular discursive strategies were utilised by women veterinarians to justify the status quo of veterinary surgeons (unequal pay) thus preserving a form of hegemonic masculinity.

The supposed stability of gender categories is challenged from within this perspective as well as the ‘doing gender’ and performativity approach. Masculinity and femininity are accordingly seen as ideologically and discursively produced and hence as contingent, fluid and uncertain (Whitehead 2001; Kerfoot & Knights 1998; Collinson & Hearn 1994). Viewed in tandem with an individual’s social field, gender work combines multiple discourses which are often incomplete and fragmentary as other discourses cut across and contradict the dominant form (Simpson 2004: 30), thus the importance of recognising intersecting identities and modes of performance (Acker 2012; Lykke 2010) are key in exploring how ‘feminisation’ discourses are construed and effected.
IX. Conclusion

The theories discussed in this chapter ground my subsequent approach to the data collection and analysis I employ in exploring ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) and biases within veterinary practice. Acknowledging the extensive approach of this chapter, I also believe it to be defensible insofar that an inclusive analysis may be undertaken, drawing on a range of intersecting theories which at times parallel, draw from, reinforce and constructively critique each other. There is an emphasis on a socially constructed approach to gender and ‘feminisation’, based on my own epistemological understanding that individuals have the agency to construct and reconstruct their identities through performances, interactions and interpretations as bound up with the meanings and interpretations of what it means to work within the veterinary profession. I initially worked from a broad approach to the ‘professions’, exploring nuances in their conception and definitions, before moving on to closure strategies, the importance of gender as intrinsic to processes, structures and individual agency as well as gendered boundary work. I then examined theory more firmly rooted in feminism(s) such as the ‘doing gender’ approach, performativity and critical masculinities; all of which resonate with my current research and will be used during the thematic analysis of my primary material.

These theories should help inform my analysis, alongside integral considerations of how sociologically defined ‘feminisation’ discourses (as outlined in Chapter One (IV and V)) are constructed and discussed within the veterinary profession; each of them can be examined as demonstrating a socially constructed nature of meaning attached to professions and gendered identity - gender is considered performative rather than an ontological category. It is hoped these theories adequately locate my ‘feminisation’ discourse debate within critical organisational and feminist theory, or at least offer foundational blocks to hypothesise more complex understandings of this prevalent phenomena. Perhaps by applying these theories to how the ‘feminisation’ discourses of the veterinary profession impact on, and are concurrently shaped by complex organisational and social interactions, this work will have important implications not just for considering ‘feminisation’ discourses within veterinary practice, but also within and outwith other professional contexts.
Chapter Three: Methodological Approaches and Analytical Tools

I. Situated knowledges

In situating myself in relation to this research, I understand epistemology, ontology and methodology as interconnected, allowing particular forms of knowledge productions to be identified and utilised (Lykke 2010: 144). Influencing how knowledge is produced, garnered and (re)presented, they also comingle to affect knowledge(s) interpretation and significance, and are therefore central in underpinning research which is accountable and transparent. Adopting the notion of ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway 1988) in which experience is not assumed universal but instead emerges from intra-actions between and within different contexts (i.e. socio-political-cultural), I consider the experiences and viewpoints of veterinary professionals who define themselves and their own backgrounds, in relation to and apart from each other and myself. I also consider their responses and knowledge(s) in relation to knowledge imparted by public and professional media, general veterinary discourses and academic literature, without assuming my own standard of an ‘official’ discourse or standpoint from which they deviant or align.

Through such knowledge production and examination, I hope to claim a level of accountable and sensitive objectivity, a feminist objectivity (Haraway 1988) if you will, which also recognises knowledge as relative and subjective, moving away from positivist notions of knowledge production. This requires reflection on the position of the subject and myself, as the researcher, and how we interconnect and influence one another (Lykke 2010). This feminist objectivity is an amalgamation of continuously negotiated positioning in and between myself and my respondent(s), alongside the questions, answers and dialogue we engage in. I combine my prior and current knowledge of feminist theories with the experiences and accounts of those within the veterinary profession, both drawing on two relatively distinct fields. This knowledge exchange is therefore situated within a particular time and space and is heavily influenced by current issues facing the profession such as the political context of the UK and debates surrounding gender pay-gaps. I utilise a process of triangulation to help situate and contextualise the questions I pose, issues I explore, and the analysis of the answers I receive, with recourse to previous research and current discussions within the veterinary profession.

As stated previously, I approach this thesis through the partial perspective of a self-identified feminist and gender studies scholar in my late twenties with a vicarious interest in the veterinary profession as a result of my relationship with a veterinarian. Having observed and
engaged in informal discussions with veterinary students and veterinarians over the last decade. I have witnessed some of the frustrations and debates engaging the profession regarding pay discrepancies and the negotiation of sex differences through sexism and prejudicial behaviour. I do not claim to have a medical understanding of the profession, nor am I speaking from experience of working within it but I do believe that applying interpretations of feminist perspectives to the issues mentioned above may offer new opportunities for dialogue between the seemingly disparate disciplines, as well as being able to unearth some of the paradoxes of employing ‘feminisation’ discourses within a profession which appears to use the term frequently but uncritically. Luckily, due to my close and informal connections with the profession, I have been able to access an immediate contact and resource base which has helped promote my work and encouraged informal discussions alongside my official research. I have also made visible my position in terms of ‘site’ and ‘sight’ (Haraway 1988) in relation to my research; survey respondents were made explicitly aware I was undertaking research as a gender researcher (see Appendix 1) and interviewees were aware of both my identity as a gender researcher and as the partner of a veterinarian. I also tried to ensure neutrality regarding the surveys and interviews to the extent that a gender researcher can be perceived, in relation to differing subjectivities, as ‘neutral’ in relation to feminist issues. I tried to make clear I welcomed various interpretations of gender and ‘feminisation’ and that I had no preconceived ‘authentic’ notions of these concepts. In also scrutinising the partial perspectives of respondents themselves I remain alert to nuanced relations between us, and always consider, given our different professional backgrounds, whether responses are more or less candid because of this and whether they are shaped by reactions to the nature of the study itself (Finch 1984: 72).

II. Data collection

I employed a two-stage primary data collection method utilising a short online survey followed by four interviews. The subsequent responses form the majority of my data however I also utilise secondary data in the form of contemporary articles and reports from professional literature published between 2017 - 2018 to help contextualise responses and provide supporting information where necessary, employing a method of triangulation (Denscombe 2007: 138). I retain both digital and hard-copies of my distributed survey, the survey responses and consent forms as well as my interview transcriptions. The interviews were recorded, with both written (Appendix 3) and oral consent, and have been retained as digital sound files. The data provides a snapshot of opinions and experiences, partial perspectives, which are made transparent throughout the methodological and analytical process.
a. Surveys

In the first instance I chose to create and distribute an online survey (see Appendix 1) via SurveyMonkey which could quickly provide an indication of whether pursuing research into notions of ‘feminisation’ and gender was a viable topic of interest for those situated within the veterinary profession. The survey consisted of nine questions and took on average four minutes to complete. I asked a small selection of immediate veterinary acquaintances if they would undertake a pilot survey to ensure the questions were legible and the questionnaire was relatively accessible and quick to complete. The survey included background information regarding the purpose and confidential nature of the research, my own researcher identity, contact details and also thanked participants for their responses; all considered good research practice (Denscombe 2007: 159). I tried to ensure questions pertaining to participants’ backgrounds were not leading or intrusive, and allowed participants to self-identify their gender and job roles. Once demographic data was collected, the questions followed an open format so that participants could provide as much detail as they wanted. I aimed to construct questions which would welcome a diverse range of answers however was aware that my identity as a gender researcher might influence some responses.

As an inexpensive, non-obtrusive and wide-reaching method of data collection (Dillman 2007) the survey link was initially shared across two platforms - Facebook and an online veterinary forum through which one of my interviewees acted as auditor (and thus nominator (Denscombe 2007: 17–18) of the research). A snowball effect also ensued as peers and survey respondents shared the survey through their own social-media platforms. The survey was primarily directed towards people working within the UK veterinary profession and utilised non-probability sampling (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Denscombe 2007: 13). I subsequently compared provided contextual data to determine whether respondents reflected current demographics using the latest RCVS figures (RCVS 2018); this triangulation does suggest the responses reflect the general demography of the profession in terms of ethnicity, age and gender and therefore I consider the survey respondents to be relatively representative of the profession in regard to simple identity markers.

I envisioned a response rate of approximately 100, adequate for my research (Denscombe 2007), however in the course of a couple of days the survey attracted 463 responses. I concluded the survey at this point, recognising the extensive amount of material I needed to sort and analyse. Whilst working with a large amount of data can be time-consuming and
responses may show little variation, the response rate confirmed my motivation in exploring this enquiry into the veterinary profession as it does appear to have attracted detailed, varied and considered responses as evidenced within Chapter Four: Results and Analysis – Part One. The responses also highlighted which questions and issues were considered of greater relevance for participants and I was able to refine my interview questions as a result of this.

Advantages of this method included the provision of real world observations, provided through an anonymous space which still allowed me to identify some of the self-identity markers of respondents. There were no data-entry costs involved and the survey had a quick completion time whilst still providing detailed answers to the five main questions (Q. 5 – 9). I am aware that in some cases there may have been a lack of detail and engagement due to the one-way nature of information provided in a survey, which more extensive face-to-face surveys, interviews or focus groups could have alleviated through their dialogic mechanics (Denscombe 2007). Also, this survey was most likely to reach respondents within their twenties and thirties due to the distribution of the survey on Facebook through my own network of acquaintances, however as Caterina acted as nominator in sharing it through an online veterinary forum, I believe the survey managed to reach a wider audience and thus this issue was somewhat negated.

b. Semi-structured interviews

Following an initial thematic analysis of the above, I chose to conduct four semi-structured interviews providing further insight regarding experiences and opinions within the veterinary profession in relation to ‘feminisation’ and gender. Professional accounts of navigating everyday work within the profession are central to addressing my aims and objectives and thus interviews were considered vital in providing this rich qualitative data (Bryman 2012). Time, space and cost played a major role in this decision as interviews could be carried out within a small space, with limited cost to both the participant and myself and could be arranged at short notice. Although interviews have been considered as conventionally masculine tools (Oakley 1981, 2016) due to their origins in positivist and empirical research, I attempted to steer mine in the direction of a structured conversation (Bryman 2012: 471) where my own investment and identity in relation to the research was made clear and I could build a strong rapport with the respondent as we allowed a dialogic relationship to develop during the course of the interview. Although I predominantly asked the questions, I asked participants to direct any questions they had to myself, whenever they had them, evidencing my commitment to a
sensitive interview format (Oakley 1981). Four interviews were conducted consisting of thirteen questions (see Appendix 4), lasting between 1 to 1.5 hours, were double-recorded with both written and oral consent, and were then immediately transcribed in the week following. They took place between May and June 2018 and resulted in 125 pages of transcription. Questions were open-ended, allowing for potential storyline narratives (Sondergaard 2009) and could be reordered (or deleted) depending on the trajectory of the interview; provision was also made to include new questions if appropriate (i.e. a question pertaining to role models was incorporated as a result of the first interview). Such an approach also helped identify themes during the analysis as answers were provided to a set of predefined questions which remained largely identical for each interview. I attempted to remain neutral, whilst also evidently interested in the topics discussed, by adapting my behaviour (through active listening techniques such as nodding and humming in agreement) in relation to certain viewpoints and statements even if I may not have personally agreed with them. I did not want to bias, dissuade or encourage comments as this could potentially sway the direction of the interview however as mentioned previously I also needed to cultivate rapport (Oakley 1981, 2016) and thus I invested myself by considerately answering the questions posed to myself or agreeing to discuss certain matters once the interview finished (evident in Caterina’s and Edmund’s interviews).

I contacted potential interviewees conscious of my desire to interview two female and two male veterinarians, in the likelihood of exploring nuanced understandings of ‘feminisation’, that may have been affected by the self-identified gendering of the interviewee themselves. I identified my participants through snowballing (Bryman 2012: 202), first contacting Caterina, my nominator (met through my husband), resulting in the procuration of three further interviews with a former mixed-practice veterinarian, a new practice owner and a veterinary surgeon currently undertaking a research internship. The interviews took place in informal settings; in either my own or the interviewee’s house to mirror the type of dialogue and conversation I wished the interview to follow, as well as conducting it in a space free from distraction. This created a comfortable environment, seated obliquely at a kitchen dining table in each instance, with a mug of tea or coffee adding to the relaxed setting. In addition, I also prepared myself before each interview by scanning the Veterinary Times and Vet Record for any topical issues which interviewees may have alluded to within the interview thus displaying my willingness and investment in engaging in topics which concerned my respondents. If clarification was
required, I summed up responses in my own words, asking my interviewees to confirm and/or clarify my misunderstandings (Heritage & Watson 1979).

I recognised each individual for their heterogeneity but am also aware that interviewing four individuals does not begin to cover a multitude of intersecting identities or a representative sample of the veterinary profession. Rather I acknowledge the partial and situated knowledges, as well politics of location, of those I interview (Haraway 1988; Rich 1986), and consider their narratives and discussion in relation to my survey responses and the aforementioned publications and articles, through a method of triangulation.

III. Processing the data: thematic analysis

As I considered my survey and interviews to complement each other, I utilised a thematic analysis which could be applied to both. The survey results also lent themselves to analysis within the parameters of their respective questions as these questions were broadly themed i.e. understanding ‘feminisation’, perceiving gendered differences and experiencing the effects of gendered differences; these and any further themes identified in the responses were envisioned to be constructive in shaping my interview questions and potential subsequent interview analysis. I therefore structure my survey analysis around the questions posed in the survey, highlighting additional themes throughout and bringing these together in the concluding section (VI) of Chapter Four – Part One. My interview questions, as conceptualised and refined in relation to the above, encouraged responses which resulted in an expansion of identified themes. I approached such analysis through the following: ‘discovering’ themes within my text(s), narrowing these themes to a practicable amount, before linking them to my theoretical frameworks. In addition, the writing associated with Chapter Four emerged simultaneously with the thoughts I had whilst theming my material, ensuing in what Richardson and St Pierre (2005) deem ‘writing as a method of inquiry’; I summarised each interview and identified key themes within individual mind-maps before flitting between the responses during an intense period of analysis – this created the illusion through mind-work of the participants ‘speaking again’, but this time in dialogue with each other, allowing me to outline the initial structuring parameters for the final write up. I was able to think through and (re)-sort juxtapositions within and between their responses and comments in relation to certain questions and themes at the same time as writing.
I highlighted survey and interview quotes (stored via Excel and Word\textsuperscript{3} files respectively) and summarised responses and points of interest through pen and paper A3 mind-maps, categorising each under initial meta-themes as they related to theory, considering such an analysis to be the most beneficial way of addressing my research aims and objectives. Certain patterns emerged in the material, helping to create and (re)formulate themes; themes had to be significant for my aims but did not have to appear equally throughout the responses (Ryan & Bernard 2003: 87). Employing techniques for thematically categorising data as outlined by Ryan and Bernard (2003) I analysed responses by paying particular attention to repetitions (Guba 1978: 53), similarities and differences, metaphors and analogies, as well as theory-related material (Ryan & Bernard 2003: 89). A quick word frequency algorithm was employed during an initial stage of sorting my survey responses (embedded within SurveyMonkey services) allowing a swift identification of initial themes, however the majority of the analysis undertook eyeballing techniques (Ryan & Bernard 2003: 101). I utilised a combination of an \textit{a priori} and inductive approach to identifying themes, recognising the difficulty and superfluousness of holding back on prior theorising (Charmaz 1990) and also the advantages of forming new ideas and connections combining both my prior understanding of the issues under study and themes arising from the data i.e. I utilise the term ‘feminisation’ as resulting from prior knowledge(s) linked to debates in feminist academia, whereas identification of ‘creativity’ and ‘millennialism’ came to my attention through the research material and were not envisioned beforehand. In further consideration of my identification of themes, I asked of the material such questions as adapted from Denscombe (2007: 311) as: \textit{is there evidence of a wider ideology being communicated via the talk?; does the data reflect particular socio-politico-historico conditions in which it is produced?; are there intertextual connections?; how are people, processes and objects categorised and defined through the responses?; are exclusions evident?; are there things that are not said that might have been expected to be stated?} In considering some of these questions in relation to my research material, I think it is hugely important to be ‘alert to topics that your subjects either intentionally or unintentionally avoid’ (Bogdan & Taylor 1975: 82). Consequently, I also draw from discourse analyses’ exploration of such omissions, which may be found to reiterate and/or justify certain claims in the choice of what is \textit{not} said (Foucault 1978). I also acknowledge that these are subjective questions and am conscious that any analysis must be aware of this fact, highlighting the nature of interpretation and utilising triangulation where necessary to ensure fully accountable situated

\textsuperscript{3} Microsoft Office 2010
knowledge(s). Whilst I primarily discuss themes, I also link these to concepts (Strauss & Corbin 1990) which I define as the theoretical frameworks pinpointed in *Chapter Two: Theoretical Contexts*. The themes I thus identify and draw into my analysis are shown to act in a number of guises; shaping, refuting, contributing, problematising, confirming and interacting with the concepts I utilise to analyse my results. This thematic analysis has also helped rearrange and refine my research aims and objectives by identifying themes I had not previously considered and making redundant others which I had preconceived.

My method of practically (and physically) identifying and organising data consisted of surrounding myself with papers and a laptop, highlighting survey responses and transcriptions, with both digital and hand-held highlighters on word documents and A3 sheets of paper, using mind-mapping techniques to cluster themes. I adopted Sandelowki’s (1995: 373) recommendation of first proofreading texts and highlighting anything that made inchoate sense, as well as adding comments to the margins of my transcriptions, linked to any issues I considered potentially important, whilst I transcribed. A more systematic approach ensued thereafter in conjunction with keeping an organised set of notes, with a summary of potential themes, in one computer folder and a paper file. Using a technique of constant comparison (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 347 – 351), I was able to work between documents and responses, on a laptop using a number of tabs, cross-referencing themes and ideas. The themes I ultimately identify and utilise for my analysis are discussed in *Chapter Four*, but include perceptions and knowledge(s) surrounding the term ‘feminisation’, diversity within the workplace, and theory-related material such as the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker 1990). Remaining aware that the identification of themes is a subjective experience, I requested an independent veterinarian, uninvolved in the research, to eyeball the texts and themes (complete anonymity was provided for all respondents) and provide their opinion on my identification of themes and matters of importance. They concurred with my decisions in general although were less sure of the themes linked directly to feminist theoretical frameworks of which they wished to know more. I hope this intercoder agreement (although informal due to time pressures) provides a measure of validity and reliability for my research and allows me to make my position clear, utilising a form of triangulation ‘through multiple analysts’ (Patton 1990: 468). In addition I also provided interviewees with the opportunity to examine and comment upon themes once I began the analysis, creating further dialogic engagements with the research.
IV. Ethical considerations

Nina Lykke (2010: 144) considers ethics in relation to ‘how to conduct research in ethically sustainable and morally responsible ways’. Suggested guidelines include the option to withdraw from a study at any point, being ensured confidentiality and anonymity if requested and/or required (Denscombe 2007: 172), as well as having access to the data provided and being able to examine and comment upon its interpretation and use. In addition, as previously noted, this thesis is being undertaken as a scholarly enterprise, to fulfil the requirements of attaining a MSSc in Gender Studies. I am therefore, as a committed feminist researcher, ‘in the game of research out of self-interest’ (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 157). It is important to highlight this, making my investment in the research transparent and to avoid potential conflicts of interest between myself and my respondents. Both my introductions to the survey and interview state my identity as a researcher, my research proposal aims, confidentiality of any information imparted and the right to withdraw at any time. In terms of the interview, individual consent forms were also produced and signed by the interviewees whilst I verbally reiterated my investment in the research and gained oral consent for the recording of the interviews. Contact details were provided at the beginning of the survey and on copies of the consent forms. Respondents were also given the option to examine their transcriptions, highlighting and changing any misinterpretations if evident, and to comment upon the themes I identified whilst analysing the data (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 351: Patton 1990: 468). This seemed appropriate as one of the underlying currents of this research included identifying how individuals within the profession recognise concepts such as ‘feminisation’ - a key theme in this study. Participants were also offered a copy of the thesis on completion if desired. These combined strategies allowed a transparent and mutually beneficial transfer of trust and information to be enacted (Lykke 2010).

As the nature of my research is not particularly sensitive but does deal with potential gender inequality, I gave my interview respondents the choice of remaining anonymous for this study. Respondents were generally happy to be identified however as there was a little hesitation from one person regarding the use of their name, I have decided to utilise pseudonyms in the transcriptions and analysis whilst retaining identity features such as gender, geographical location and job role, as agreed with all participants. Participants were informed that only myself and examiners would have access to the recordings and full transcriptions.
In this research, I speak from my own situated knowledge and partial perspective (Haraway 1988), recognising the transitory fluctuations of objective and subjective elements of my own and participants’ responses and knowledge(s). I have always been ready to acknowledge my own vantage points of site and sight, in likelihood diverging from those whom I interview due to different speaking positions. This was outlined in the first part of this chapter. Relating to my own positioning, sensitivity and respect for interviewees beliefs and opinions, I needed to pursue a non-judgemental stance in relation to responses (Denscombe 2007: 192). This included careful negotiation of appropriate responses such as certain facial gestures and active listening techniques, as well as murmurs of agreement and disagreement where appropriate. I also remained aware of potential interviewer affects such as differences in vocation, education, gender, social status, professional expertise and age; would any of these affect the responses and perceptions towards myself and my particular research aims? To help alleviate and accommodate some of these potential issues, in my analysis I include an examination of the background of participants (both in survey and interview responses), the perspectives of interviewees and their epistemological standpoints and relationships, as well as the setting and context of the study (Bogdan & Biklen 1982).

Adopting an ethical stance towards data that did not fit my perceptions or expectations reinforced my belief in partial perspectives and feminist objectivity, as such opinions and utterances by participants evidenced subjective experiences regardless of whether they would be considered significant or not under traditional empiricism (Haraway 1988; Seale et al 1999; Silverman 2006). I believe the inclusion of such ‘outliers’ (Miles & Huberman 1994: 269), whilst the terminology rather negates my sentiments in the sentence above, in my own analysis strengthens the credibility of my research and protects against self-selecting biases.

V. Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of my main methods of data collection and subsequent process of thematic analysis, highlighting ethical considerations and my own positioning. I hope this results in a valid and reliable analysis which takes into consideration the position of myself and respondents, within the context of our wider surroundings in academic, professional and social settings, allowing me to remain accountable to those who partook in the research and in my interpretation of their responses in the following chapter.
Chapter Four: Results and Analysis – Part One

Understanding ‘feminisation’ and the gendering of the veterinary profession: survey snapshots

I. Introduction

In the first of a two-part analysis I broadly summarise and examine current states of ‘feminisation’ discourses as well as associated gender biases and stereotypes with recourse to my survey responses. The theoretical concepts as discussed in Chapter Two have been highly influential in my analysis, alongside thematic identification which has helped methodically structure the vast amount of information generated. My interpretive work utilises a method of triangulation and open-thematisation as some answers benefitted from being supported (or problematised) by contextualising data (Silverman 2006), whilst others could not be neatly categorised within a single theme respectively. In analysing this data, I focus on the free-text responses to Questions 5 to 9, whilst participant background data (Q. 1 – 4) helps contextualise these where required. The subsequent section, Part Two, extends my analysis by expanding upon themes and analysing the comprehensive responses stimulated by the four semi-structured interviews which were partially directed by survey insights. Furthermore, dialogue is encouraged between the interview and survey responses as well as relevant contemporary veterinary literature where considered pertinent. In Chapter Five: Conclusion, I draw my findings together to explicitly address my overall aim and objectives alongside ideas for future research.

II. Demographic data – contextualising survey responses

Participants were invited to self-identify gender, ethnicity, job role and age as I did not wish to delimit answers. A total of 463 survey responses were returned by 426 females and 37 males; approximately 334 respondents defined themselves as ‘White’, 300 as ‘British’, 3 as Asian and 5 as Mixed-Asian. The majority of respondents were female and white, reflecting the current diversity of veterinary practitioners (60 – 80% female and 96.8% ‘white’) (Vet Futures 2015; RCVS 2018). 218 individuals recorded themselves as veterinary surgeons whilst 125 were veterinary nurses. In addition, over 64 reported themselves as students, 14 as directors, 4 as practice owners, 3 as practice partners and 1 as a civil government advisor. Some roles overlapped, whilst some practitioners occasionally delved into academia and public speaking. Whilst responses were drawn from a wide age range (Appendix 2) the majority of responses
came from those below the age of 45. Interestingly, three out of the four practice owners, and 12 out of the 14 directors were women. As can be surmised from existing literature, this does not reflect existing ratios pertaining to veterinary leadership roles in the UK where only 25% are female (FVE 2015). Such figures highlight the application of caution when interpreting data as this survey had a high proportion of female respondents (92%) and thus inferences gained should be critically analysed. The predominance of female respondents may be a reflection of the general numerical trend of females within the profession and/or their engagement with the survey. The title of the survey ‘feminisation’ discourses in Veterinary Practice’ may also have influenced whether people chose to take part as ‘feminisation’ and its synonyms may have been off-putting for some (Ahmed 2010).

Supported by quotes I now consider survey responses pertaining to; perceptions of ‘feminisation’, the division of labour within veterinary surgery, and personal observations of gender difference(s) within veterinary settings.

III. Understanding the term ‘feminisation’

“An increase in the proportion of women in a particular profession far beyond a 50:50 gender split, with resultant adaptation in the professional climate to accommodate better balance with family life, but also movements toward lower pay and lower client respect” (N. 96 White, British female veterinary student)

The above highlights various complexities surrounding the term ‘feminisation’ within the veterinary profession. Entwining both positive and negative connotations, it highlights a seeming paradox contained within the notion of a ‘profession’ – increasing numbers of females lead to positively viewed alterations of the profession’s structure on the one hand and a demotion of its status on the other, highlighting the importance of considering professional projects as ‘gendered’ (Witz 1992). Starting with a question related to personal understandings of ‘feminisation’ allowed respondents to offer their own interpretations of the term, allowing me to identify whether there was a consensus surrounding it or whether it was understood differently for different people; I considered this to be an important point considering its apparent traction within contemporary veterinary literature, academic research, and policy-making (Ravetz 2015; Vet Futures 2015). The responses highlighted a multitude of interpretations drawn from a range of discourses including ideas linked to numerical dominance, cultural change and biological characteristics, many of which link to the definitions of ‘feminisation’ as outlined in Chapter One (IV). Stereotypical ‘traits’ linked to ‘being female’ as well as cultural constructions of gender (Butler 1990) and fears regarding devaluations of ‘masculinity’ (Connell 1995, Hearn 2004) were also identified. In some cases, responses
defined ‘feminisation’ performatively, as process or as progress towards more open and flexible ways of working, influenced by changing demands of the profession and work-life balances, both of which the profession is attempting to address by raising awareness of its predominantly male governance (Vet Futures 2015) and ways to promote females at higher levels.

Some respondents offered interpretations of ‘feminisation’ as they imagined it to be conceptualised by an imagined community, before stating this did not reflect their own beliefs:

“To become more "feminine" as in take on traits traditionally associated with women. Empathetic, less aggressive, less violent. However I don't believe these are inherently feminine traits, just the product of socialisation. I think 'feminisation’ can mean less toxic masculinity also.” (N. 391 White, Irish female vet nurse)

Such stereotypes and notions of masculinity and femininity were both reinforced and opposed by different respondents, highlighting the contested nature of ‘feminisation’, perhaps supporting Irvine and Vermilya’s (2010) findings in which respondents defined ‘feminisation’ though the use of stereotypes before counterposing these responses with views of what the term meant to them. Further answers appeared to view sex and gender synonymously, located within essentialising discourses which posited the profession as ‘becoming’ more female or feminine i.e. linked to a more ‘caring’ approach and increased empathy:

“Becoming more feminine, having an increasing set of "traditionally female” characteristics or bias” (N. 142 White, female veterinarian)

and

“Growing numbers of women in the profession also leading to more accommodating working practices (part time, flexible hours etc) and perhaps perception of more care based service rather than strictly scientific (although I think that bit has more to do with passage of time and owner expectations than female vets)” (N. 111 White, British female veterinarian, mid-thirties)

These quotes further highlight complexities inherent in such concepts of ‘feminisation’ as respondent N.111 clearly evidences an awareness of additional extrinsic factors possibly accounting for changing perceptions such as generational differences and client expectations. Equality was a further discourse drawn upon in which respondents generally offered positive views of ‘feminisation’: 
“An increase in the amount of meaningful inputs provided in the veterinary [sic] by women, both from an increase in the number of women in the profession and from an increased respect for their inputs and opinions.” (N. 331 White, Irish male, final year veterinary student)

This response highlights the importance of the concept as a descriptor of observable phenomena (increased numbers of women entering the profession) leading to a perceived positive material outcome which does not devalue identities or the image of the profession. In contrast, whilst retaining reference to the greater proportion of women within the profession, further responses juxtaposed such observations with direct experiences and awareness of it as a negatively connoted term i.e. … “the term is often used in a negative way to talk about problems” (N. 119), and “it has negative connotations; ‘dumbing-down’; a word used by men plaintively” (N. 106). Interestingly, I noted that of the small number of males responding to the survey, ‘feminisation’ was primarily viewed as an increase in female veterinarians, often alongside perceived progress towards equality and opportunity (reflecting the response of N. 331). Men tended to view ‘feminisation’ as being a positive factor for the egalitarian progression of the profession and did not appear threatened by what some have perceived the term to denote as ‘female/feminine takeover’ (Morley 2011). Conversely, a small amount of responses provided by women did indicate wariness and fear of ‘feminisation’ alongside the perceived increasing ‘feminine’ nature of the profession, highlighted in the following two quotes:

“Females who feel passionate that other females are entitled to at least what males receive (but actually feel they should get more!) and are very vocal about it” (N. 347 White, Irish, female veterinarian, mid-thirties)

“Equal opportunities for women compared with men. Although I think it can sometimes go too far the other way, I prefer equal opportunities for all” (N. 292 White, British, female veterinary student, early-forties)

What is particularly striking about these responses, and also a point of interest noted by Lofstedt (2003) and Irvine and Vermilya (2010), is that these sentiments appear to uphold implicit male hegemony over the profession. Males are held as the ‘norm’ and any attempts to strive for equal renumeration and recognition are considered potentially usurpationary (Witz 1992). ‘Feminisation’ in this sense is likely being viewed as non-transformative, its ability to change perceptions stifled under the belief it is but a tactic to be employed by women to shatter their traditional place in the hierarchy and to establish themselves in place of ‘man’, which may result in backlash towards the discourse and its potentially liberating effects. The contested nature of ‘feminisation’ appears in various paradoxical guises.
Finally, whilst some respondents believed ‘feminisation’ was to be utilised only as a biological referent and had no place in employment discussion, others noted their lack of awareness and/or engagement with the concept, nevertheless proffering definitions which remained in line with other survey respondents. This large and somewhat creative set of responses appears to offer nuanced visions and opinions of what ‘feminisation’ is. I also believe, through formulations of what it describes as a process i.e. “Empowering women to achieve the best they can in life and work. Challenging the norm…”(N. 359) it could be considered as a discourse which does, which performs (Butler 1990) through being utilised to indeed challenge the ‘norm’. For me this results in a paradoxical conception of ‘feminisation’ that I consider to be a fluid conceptualisation; a cultural process and not just an empirical category as commonly utilised and applied to the veterinary profession. In its negative and positive connotations, as a descriptor and as a prescriptor, it has both the potential to impact negatively and/or positively depending on its usage. The usage in the case of the veterinary profession is perhaps the greatest obstacle to it being used productively as a positive discourse. In its general usage I do detect a rather more negative use of the term; it’s perhaps more utopic inferences may be better realised under new discourses and is something I will discuss in Part Two and the conclusion.

I would argue the depictions of ‘feminisation’ as explored in the survey also tend to support an underlying view of the profession as male-dominated with regard to professional culture. The numerical domination of women appears to act as a superficial cover for maintaining the profession’s hegemonic masculinity, also obscuring multiple displays of what may be termed ‘critical masculinities’ (Hearn 2004) which I explore further below. I also believe that due to the current numerous understandings surrounding the term it should be used critically and with caution, if necessary, as ‘feminisation’ discourses have the power to result in material effects (Foucault 1978) such as the Vet Future Action Plan 2015 and (sometimes negative) rhetoric directed towards and within the profession. Notwithstanding the above, the meanings of ‘feminisation’ as identified have helped shape the remainder of the analysis, as it is from these understandings by veterinary professionals that the particular utility of the term and associated connotations relating to gender perceptions can be better understood.

IV. Perceptions, biases and work-placed observations: Alignment of work and behaviour along gendered lines

Questions 6 and 7 dealt with perceptions of whether certain roles and responsibilities were associated with men or women respectively, whilst Question 8 asked respondents to note
whether they had observed, in practice, any differentiations. These questions attracted the highest degree of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses however many participants subsequently justified these answers drawing on a range of discursive strategies such as implicit stereotyping (Foucault 1978; Butler 1990):

“Absolutely not, I have worked as a mixed vet and there were no jobs I could not do equally to my male counterparts and often I got told I did it better and with less force. As guys are used to using force with large and equine rather than a gentle touch and your brain” (N. 145 Dutch, female veterinarian, mid-thirties)

as well as implicit comparisons to the ‘ideal vet’ or perceived norm, i.e. male worker (Acker 1990):

“No. I am a farm vet and am just as good as a man! Some farmers want male vets but we always ask them to judge us by our work and not our gender which seems to work” (N. 79 White, British, female veterinary surgeon)

These responses, whilst claiming there were no differences between men and women in the profession, paradoxically drew from perceived differences to justify their answers. There is an implicit wish to show that a female vet is just as good as a male vet, if not better; highlighting Morley’s fears (2011) regarding the application of ‘feminisation’ discourses to meritocratic professions – they may mask complex interplays of gender, misogyny and bias behind a discourse purporting to evidence an equality which has not yet been achieved. Veterinary work appears implicitly conceptualised as a male-domain by which standards are constantly measured and exceeded, highlighting the highly gendered nature of the profession (MacDonald 1995, Witz 1992, Acker 1990).

In terms of whether people perceived and/or then explicitly observed gendered differences in the workplace, I wondered whether any noticeable differences would be identified by these slightly different angles to working practices and environments. Both male and female respondents stated there were some general areas that they or society perceived as being more suited to one sex or the other. Areas cited as ‘more’ suited to men included those requiring ‘physical strength’ (i.e. cattle caesareans), large animal work, out-of-hours work and within leadership roles:

“Parts of the job, particularly in game animal work, require physical strength. Calving, dehorning, trimming hooves. In general, men are bigger and stronger than women. This is not always the case though of course” (N. 13 White, British male veterinary surgeon)
Such responses drew on stereotypical behaviour associated with ideals of ‘masculinity’ and physical attributes considered the domain of the ‘male’ sex; it must be kept in mind that gender and sex have been conflated in some responses.

“I think people have a perception of farm vet work being more "masculine" due to the more "physically demanding" nature of the job (e.g. calving) because men are deemed to be physically stronger. Also I have heard female vets say they wouldn't go in to farm practice because of the OOH requirements and wanting to spend time with children. I also think there is an issue with the stereotype of men being more "level headed" than women and therefore more suited to a career in surgery (which makes me angry!). I personally do not agree with any of these views but these are just things I have heard from others (I think all jobs are equally suitable for all genders)” (N. 164 Mixed-Asian, female veterinary student)

This response once more highlights entanglements of societal perceptions, desires to subvert traditional gender roles and an awareness of the power of stereotypes to influence veterinary career paths; material outcomes arise as a result of gendering the profession. Further responses denoting potential gender differences referenced historical perceptions, vertical stratification, levels of self-confidence and client perception. Women were deemed to be more heavily involved in empathetic roles and those requiring the subtle handling of smaller animals; they were deemed by a male lecturer to be “less threatening and often better at dealing with vulnerable or fragile clients”(N. 380), again potentially drawing upon stereotypes linked to male and female ‘attributes’. Equally, some respondents noted personality would always be the determining factor regarding suitability to a task, that modern technology and restraint had managed to reduce and eliminate physical difference, and perhaps put most simply, “no, work has no gender” (N. 276).

Contrasting opinions evidence the multiple understandings and discourses respondents drew from to consider whether gender differences were evident within the profession, and whether it even mattered. Some respondents viewed women as essentially more caring and nurturing than their male counterparts whilst others recalled such stereotypes in their responses in order to ultimately challenge and subvert them. Highlighting individual experiences and belief systems, such conflicting responses evidence a multiplicity of attitudes and interactions within the profession, calling for the sensitive transformation of perceptions and behaviours towards a more equitable working environment. One female respondent commented farming was more suited to men, qualifying this by stating “…but I think this is due to the lack of women driving change in this sector” (N. 389). Her perception of farming as a ‘male’ role is down to a perceived passiveness on the part of females to ‘drive change’; implied is that the sector can
but it needs to be changed from within. ‘Feminisation’ discourse as applied to this example may highlight the masking properties Morley (2011) imputes to the concept; increasing numbers of women in the profession assumes women are now positioned to instrument change as a passive and direct consequence of their numerical dominance; the onus lies on women whilst ignoring the female-to-male leadership ratio of 25:75 in which the power to effect structural change also stems from those at the highest level of the profession, in this case (some) males who so far remain reluctant to transform structural inequalities and barriers to a large extent.

Respondents also recognised the likelihood of men being primary directors and managers within practice:

“Bosses are often male, holding roles of importance, meetings and decision making. Females tend to get delegated the cleaning tasks etc but I feel that’s often a vet/nurse barrier not necessarily a male/female issue” (N. 320 British female veterinarian)

This quote however goes a step further and counterposes the dominant role of leadership with subordinate roles linked to ‘delegated tasks’, often embodied by women, before complicating this simplified dichotomy by bringing in notions of boundary work (Gieryn 1983) inflected by gender (Persson 2010). The historical patriarchal structure of the profession is left unexamined whilst gender and professional boundaries are perhaps superficially delineated as exclusive aspects.

One final response provided by a male veterinary student regarding observable differences in everyday work is quoted at length below:

“At vet school, men seem to be more assertive and I think are seen as more likely to get 'stuck in' for example we had a practical that involved sifting through sheep guts to find worms. The girls looked at the worms under the microscope while the boys did the sifting. This was brought about at the beginning as people were reluctant to get sifting and I think there was some unspoken 'machoness' that it should be the boys to do the dirty task…[this is] just my experience but obviously women are just as capable of doing these tasks. I think being surrounded by women I do feel as though sometimes I need to show more of a 'macho' side.” (N. 432)

I highlight this response as the participant succinctly outlines his own experience, juxtaposed with his own critical consideration of his own and classmates’ behaviour. He contemplates awareness of a ‘masculine ideal’, never quite articulated but strived for nevertheless, which influences his performance of a socially acceptable form of ‘machoness’, marking his embodied experience of undertaking veterinary work. A certain form of ‘masculinity’ is being
sought in this instance potentially evoking the hegemonic male of Connell’s theorisations (1995, 2000) which is repetitively ‘performed’ (Butler 2014) as a result of observing and subconsciously amassing previous culturally constructed socialisation techniques.

V. Personal experience

Finally, I wanted to explore personal experiences of working within the profession and whether respondents felt their gender had helped or hindered their experience; did they feel comfortable in their role(s)? Respondents generally returned with a simple “no/nope” (approximately 232) whilst others attempted to reinforce their response i.e. “no, absolutely not” evidencing their belief gender was completely irrelevant to their working life. Some commented they only ever felt uncomfortable when undertaking work they felt too inexperienced to deal with, whilst others reported their preference for certain aspects and roles they particular enjoyed, linked to personality type rather than gender. The roles and activities respondents did believe themselves to be particularly comfortable undertaking, and which potentially linked to their gender, included (in the case of female respondents) caring and empathetic roles, dealing with upset clients and providing emotional support to colleagues.

In contrast, instances of feeling uncomfortable due to perceived gender differences were more numerous and cited by both male and female participants such as in the following cases: “sometimes I feel out of place on placements where I am the only guy.” (N. 447) and “I always felt I had to prove myself more as a female vet on a farm or yard” (N. 8). Gender, whether it impacted on the practicalities of everyday work or not, is felt as a constraining factor in these cases, highlighting ongoing perceptions and biases located within farm work and potentially as a result of increasing numbers of females entering the profession, impacting on respondent N.447’s sense of ‘place’ within veterinary work. Both respondents, although responding to different environments and manifestations of gender bias and/or ‘imbalance’, may have felt uncomfortable as a result of being potentially located outside perceived gendered codes with their associated material and symbolic consequences (Muzio & Bolton 2008); in varying ways, this traditionally masculine-gendered professional project (Acker 1990) may have contributed to both respondents’ sense of discomfort.

Lastly, the persistence of gender bias displayed by clients and at societal level also accounts for a small number of respondents citing discomfort in certain roles. Sexism from outwith the profession, through some client attitudes, is evidenced in the following:
“Unfortunately sexism on farms makes me very uncomfortable and I think I would struggle to work with farmers who hold sexist views about female vets (I have literally heard a farmer ask for "no lady vets" in front of me when on EMS on a farm and have been the butt of sexist jokes about my small size) and so I think this would put off female vets from entering farm practice. I think women wanting to spend more time with children would also be deterred from farm practice due to the OOH. However the sexism just makes me more determined to do a good job on placement in front of farmers (e.g. carrying heavy feed bags around and getting covered in muck to make a point....!)” (N. 161 Mixed-Asian female veterinary student)

This student highlights a salient point which I expand upon in Part Two of this analysis; namely that client perceptions (in this case regarding farm work) may be as detrimental as perceptions within the profession in propagating negatively enduring and material effects linked to both professional image and the embodiment of veterinary work. Gendered divisions of veterinary employment are perhaps being reinforced by the profession’s own masculine-dominated history embodied by clients unchanging perceptions as well as a continued reliance on male veterinarians to embody the public face of the profession in some cases. The repercussions of not tackling such sexism and prejudice, arising in part from the profession’s own historical development, reverberates today.

VI. Conclusion

I believe the above insights broadly support the notion of a masculine ethos underlying the veterinary profession although some responses also evidence perceived positive current and potential transformations related to changing gender perceptions, equal opportunities and increasing amounts of women entering the profession. The ‘feminisation’ of the profession has been conceptualised in myriad ways, often leading to conflicting understandings of the terms’ utility; no ‘universal’ definition has been agreed. Perhaps a unified interpretation of ‘feminisation’, specific to the veterinary profession, should be sought if it is to be further utilised as a rhetoric to effect positive change. As it stands, its more constructive meanings are being superseded by discourses referencing the increasing numbers of females entering the profession and associated unchallenged assumptions and stereotypes linked to perceived ‘female’ and ‘feminine’ attributes. The profession’s attempt to move away from a masculine ethos is potentially being undermined by its apparent rootedness to historical conceptions of masculinity, especially evident amongst its institutional arrangements based on patriarchal power (Bolton & Muzio 2008) highlighted by the female:male ratios of a 60/40 split at veterinary surgeon level and 25/75 split within leadership. This is further evidenced through the observations and perceptions of veterinary staff who, in the first instance, continue to draw
on discourses which posit a certain type of ‘male’ or ‘masculinity’ as the ‘norm’ (despite recognitions that masculinity is conceived in different ways), from which perhaps, these more ‘critical masculinities’ and ways of being and doing are considered and recognised. Gender in this case evidently has a material impact upon the profession supporting both Acker (1990) and Witz’s (1990) contention that occupations are never gender-neutral. This recognition of the vertical stratification of the profession along gendered lines further highlights the paradoxical nature of ‘feminisation’ discourses as they appear to mask the highly masculinised top-levels of the profession, instead focusing on entry-level numbers of veterinary surgeons and how increasing numbers of females may impact on the profession’s first-opinion and general practice level.

Gender stereotypes linked to notions of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ were widely utilised in survey responses, both as a repository from which to draw ‘knowledge’ regarding male and female sensibilities and also as recognised constructs to be recalled, challenged and subverted both hypothetically and practically. Such insights, coupled with the above conclusions regarding ‘feminisation’ support previous research and also evidence the sustained and nuanced engagement of survey respondents who provided thoughtful, detailed and compelling responses to questions regarding an issue which generally takes a debated but nonetheless peripheral position when challenges to and within the profession are articulated. The survey responses, both in terms of number and detail, extended beyond my expectations and strongly highlighted the importance of the subject matter for respondents, further justifying my motivation in comprehensively exploring these topics. This rich data set has helped shape the following section in which four interviewees were provided opportunities to explore these insights and themes in greater detail.
Chapter Four: Results and Analysis—Part Two

Performances of professionalism, ‘feminisation’ and gender: emergent themes in interview dialogue

I. Traversing spaces between the survey and interviews

Following upon the above insights linked to defining ‘feminisation’, peremptory perceptions and observations of gender difference, and some respondents’ personal instances of gender having perceived influences on veterinary experience, I now encounter my interview material. Whilst various questions I crafted were informed by survey responses and their subsequent analysis (i.e. Q7 see Appendix 4) focusing on themes I wished to explore in greater detail (such as the gender pay gap and supposed irrelevance of gender), they were also influenced by my awareness that interviews offer a different mode of interaction, able to potentially explore everyday experiences in greater and more intimate detail. I did however have to take into account the lack of anonymity between the interviewee and myself and the bearing this could have on our discussion(s). Whilst greater breadth and depth of material could be amassed and considered, perhaps particularly personal observations and nonconformist views would be withheld especially if the participant imagined there may be a conflict of interest and/or thought between us, involving but not limited to, my role as a feminist researcher. I did however indicate my impartiality at the beginning of the interviews and agreed with each participant that should any conflict(s) appear, we could adjourn and discuss matters outwith the interview context. As I aimed to elicit responses linked to participants’ embodied experiences and perceptions of working within the veterinary profession I refrained from asking relatively abstract questions, linked to my research aim, such as ‘what do you think are the consequences of ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) within the context of the veterinary profession?’ and instead asked questions such as ‘...is ‘feminisation’ something you’ve come across? Why do you think there is an increase in female veterinarians?’ positioning myself as the researcher who would later analyse responses with recourse to more abstract questions in light of previous research and the theoretical contexts as outlined above in Chapters One and Two.

II. The interviewees and interviews

The four semi-structured interviews aimed to elicit in-depth discussions of everyday perceptions and interactions within the veterinary profession. Utilising a thematic analysis, various patterns emerged which I deemed to be important in relation to my research aim and
objectives. These were identified through adopting methods outlined by Ryan and Bernard (2003) such as noting repetitions, juxtaposing responses with one another to determine similarities and differences, and through utilising theory-related concepts such as gender performativity, professionalism, and boundary work which underpin the overall thesis. Brief summaries of the four participants are outlined below.

**Jack**

Jack (mid-twenties) graduated in 2014 and formerly worked in mixed practice. He currently works as a small-animal vet in the North-East, citing his desire to work in the profession as stemming from work experience conducted alongside an older brother (veterinary surgeon) for reasons of personal interest before deciding to apply to veterinary school. He preferred the idea of veterinary medicine to human medicine. He is married to a non-veterinary partner and has no children.

**Caterina (Cat)**

Caterina (early forties) graduated over 15 years ago and currently undertakes locum⁴ and part-time veterinary work in South Yorkshire after returning to work four months after the birth of her first child a few years ago. Her husband is a veterinary practice owner. She has worked in small-animal practice since graduation and when she is not in practice she writes for veterinary publications, volunteers with animal charities, provides expert pet advice for a supermarket brand and is currently filming for a pet series broadcast in the UK. She was motivated to join the profession from a very early age due to a medical family background; she chose to enter veterinary rather than human surgery because she preferred working primarily with animals.

**Edmund (Ed)**

Edmund (mid-thirties) graduated approximately 13 years ago. Having originally worked in small, independent practices, he later locumed for a major vet corporation, of which he took control of one of their practices in March 2018 near Wales. His business partner and practice manager, is his long-term partner, Joy. He has no children. Ed initially joined the veterinary profession with a view to combining two of his life ambitions at that time; joining the military and working with animals i.e. through working in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. He also relished the challenge of getting into vet school.

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⁴ Standing in temporarily for veterinarians, across different practices, who are absent for various reasons.
Juliet

Juliet is in her late twenties and grew up in the Republic of Ireland. She later attended an English veterinary school and now works in the Midlands. Upon graduation she worked for a large veterinary practice near Birmingham before deciding to specialise and undertake a residential internship near Liverpool. She is currently undertaking further research and does not wish to re-enter first opinion practice. Juliet has a long-term partner who is also a veterinarian; they have no children. There was no ‘magic moment’ when Juliet decided she wanted to become a vet; rather she cites her parents as inspiration for joining the profession as both are veterinarians who set up their own long-standing and successful private practice which has existed since she was born. Whilst she toyed briefly with the idea of becoming a doctor Juliet knew she ultimately wanted to become a vet, observing her own parents’ enjoyment of the profession.

I wish to briefly justify referencing children in each summary; I deem this to be relevant to the following analysis as childcare, children, and/or parental leave are discussed by each participant although none of my questions make reference to them. Instead children are invoked within discourses and discussions of ‘part-time work’, ‘family’, ‘ambition’ and ‘worth’, associated predominantly with female veterinarians rather than their male counterparts. I am also aware of a lack of a broad heterogeneity amongst the existing participants in terms of age, whiteness and nuances in social-class; this is however fairly reflective of the profession at the current time. Due to the scope and time-scale set for this thesis, the number of interviews I could conduct and analyse was limited; a larger scale study would include a wider diversity of veterinarians including female directors, non-white veterinarians and older participants. The implication for this research is that I offer a snapshot of the veterinary profession through accountable situated perspectives which are made manifest within the thesis. The 13 questions can be viewed in Appendix 4. Minor variations in wording occurred depending on the flow of particular interviews.

III. Themes

Supplemented by participant quotes, the following themes structure the resulting analysis: ‘professional image, boundary work and the ‘ideal’ veterinarian; ‘meritocracy: ambition and

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5 Jack, Caterina and Edmund are all first-opinion veterinarians
6 Within the quotes, () indicates a pause, repetition and/or half-uttered word which has been removed to make the text flow more easily – it is not considered to significantly impact the response.
privilege’; ‘feminisation’, stereotypes, bias and perceptions’; ‘diversity’; and ‘flexibility, millennial generations and gender’. I also recognise themes as subjective, able to interact and overlap in multiple ways and thus they may draw upon and reference one another where appropriate. Theories of gender performativity and/or masculinity/femininity provide an underlying thread throughout the analysis, supporting my view that gender cannot be considered an irrelevant factor in the professional project of veterinary medicine. This is linked to insights arising from survey responses in which I believe ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) have material outcomes directly linked to gender as understood through various mechanisms such as stereotyping, social construction, gender bias and through less normative imaginings.

IV. Professional image, boundary work and the ‘ideal’ veterinarian: transformations?

Professional image remains integral to the veterinary profession; it helps shape perceptions and attitudes and has consequences for its evolution towards an equal working environment. Many of the survey and interview responses framed the veterinary profession as a vessel of specialist knowledge, bounded and regulated by self-autonomy, in line with Foucault’s theorising of power and governmentality (1978). Conveying both this knowledge and authority, in relation to clients and support staff, it aims to maintain relationships of trust and legitimacy within the veterinary realm. This image, akin to characteristics as outlined by Macdonald (1995) and apparent in taxonomic accounts of ‘professions’, has evidently retained traction at a basic level. When interviewees were asked what made an ideal veterinarian they noted unanimously that communication and rapport building were key, “the best vets are people persons...because every animal comes with a person” (Cat). Jack further noted compassion and empathy were integral to ensure owner compliancy:

“...we're trying to treat their animals but they're the ones that have to give us permission to do it and have to give the medication so... having a good...rapport with the owners is important”.

All participants mentioned their role in relation to clients, as well as the necessity of maintaining a professional image through interaction and performing the authoritative veterinary role, supporting Goffman’s theory of performances of professionalism (1959) and by extension performance as perceived by Butler (1993). Responses to further questions throughout the interview expanded upon, and differentiated in some instances, between personal notions and perceived notions of the ‘ideal’, highlighting a complex interplay of
characteristics, combining both identity markers and actions/attributes. For example Juliet noted:

“And I'm not sure if that was...probably in part because I was younger but I do wonder if I was a guy whether, I used to joke with like that guy that I used to bring in, he was a really good friend of mine like he was my mentor within practice he was very good about it, erm...said I just needed to grow a beard, go grey and have some balls, and it'd all be fine.”

Images of an authoritative, senior male vet are clearly evoked in this extract as Juliet considers her own experiences linked to client reactions to herself as a first-opinion vet in small-animal practice. She has also witnessed farmers to be likely sceptical of female vets, resulting in female veterinarians often attempting to ‘prove’ themselves as able in their ability as their traditionally male precedents. This contrasts with a previous response in which she states communication and kindness are markers of the ‘ideal’ vet; she may summon the image of an older, male vet to denote how clients perceive the ‘ideal’ in contrast to her own perceptions of the ideal. Both may have material effects. In a similar vein to the above, when asked whether perceptions of the ‘ideal’ veterinarian had changed over time, respondents proffered “your traditional..typical vet was male, he was old, he did dogs and cats but he also wrestled cows” (Cat) and cited figures such as James Herriot (“lovely but has a lot to answer for” Juliet) and Steve Leonard as epitomising a traditional perception of the profession, neither of whom featured in how my respondents viewed the ‘ideal’ veterinarian today. The professional image, bound to new concepts of the ‘ideal’ perhaps evidences ways in which the veterinary profession is potentially progressing in terms of its perception within the profession. Moving from a mixed-practice profession, undertaken predominantly by white, middle-class, middle-aged men embodying Connell’s hegemonic masculine ideals (1995) into a profession focused on ability, experience and personality it seems to transform from an identity-marked profession to one in which attributes and the ‘doing’ of veterinary work are more highly marked and valued. This interpretation, mentioned previously does however remain at odds with media representation

“...then again you know if you look at the () public face of the profession, you know if you are just sitting on your sofa at home watching, who are the famous vets? The famous vets are Steve Leonard, Noel Fitzpatrick...They’re all men... James Herriot, you know so...” (Cat)

which is further consolidated by Begeny and Ryan’s summation of the profession (2018) in which the ‘image of James Herriot striding across a misty field still epitomises a typical vet’ (2018: 2). The white, middle-class male ‘ideal’ (Acker 1990, 2012) is a ‘symbol’ retaining clout as a representative of a ‘true’ veterinary image, outwith the profession, despite increasing
numbers of female veterinarians in these roles. Further supporting this notion, Cat recalls, somewhat admirably, a difference she perceived between an older vet and a younger generation:

“...what is this chap doing? but the clients loved it because...he would just be old and authoritative and he would just go 'we're gonna give it this!' [deeper voice] and the amount of things where you'd go 'do you know what I think we might, do you know I think we might just try [tentative, quiet voice]...”

Whilst both perceptions of the ‘ideal’ vet rely on different ways of envisioning ‘being’ a vet or ‘doing’ veterinary work, they both appear unfettered by commitments outwith veterinary practice, embodying supposedly genderless existences read as the ‘norm’; gender is made mute and the ideal continues to be that of the unencumbered worker of Acker’s theorising (1990). These concurrent and sometimes contradicting images of the veterinary profession encourage it to be viewed as both empirical entity and as an interactional, transmutable profession. Whilst the profession may be moving away from traditional imageries, subtleties pervade which are potentially masked by the rhetoric of ‘feminisation’ and what vets now ‘do’ rather than ‘are’, stoking fears amongst some regarding de-professionalisation (Witz 1992) of veterinary work. Despite the ‘feminisation’ of the profession and constructive ideas of what ‘feminisation’ is, such concepts do not appear to support a transformational agenda to positively change professional images outwith individual veterinary fields; patriarchal power continues to be subtly reified (Muzio & Bolton 2006, Witz 1990). Whilst visually, veterinary students are overwhelmingly female and veterinary surgeons are becoming more so, these changes tend only to reflect sex differences; the white and middle-class ethos remains unaffected. At the level of leadership, the image shows little promise of current or future change, or even the reflection of sex differences.

Further influenced by Acker’s theorising, I asked participants whether role models had featured in their lives; could insights into gendered perceptions be further highlighted by such identifications? Drawing on Bourdieau’s habitus concept (1989) to inform notions of gender performativity, some responses allowed interpretations which appeared to evidence the power of repeated performances to highlight and emulate ways of ‘doing’, sedimented over time, by recognised figures within participants immediate lives. This view was however challenged by Edmund as he held himself apart from his role models, i.e. non-human puppets from children’s television, stating he found the “whole idea you need female role models really weird because I don't think I need male role models”. He did not believe he needed to observe identity
markers, reflecting himself, for them to be considered role models; consequently their (re)presentation meant little to him. It was just ‘who they were’. Later in the interview however Ed returned more critically to the subject (whilst adopting a tone of self-mockery):

“but maybe one just feels like this because one is in a position where one’s role models have been white, British, upper-middle class...of empire...if one was just born holding all the aces then maybe one should be more sympathetic to people who weren’t... yeah () again because I’m white and male and British and every job I’ve ever aspired to do has been done by [laughs] someone who's white and male and British, the idea that I might not be able to do a job because I’ve not seen a white male British person doing it is nonsensical…”

Beginning to examine his own perceptions and experiences, he lays bare some of the inherent gender biases within this professional project and the career aspirations of a middle-class sensibility. In contrast Juliet and Cat cite their parents, specifically mothers, as role models, observing their sustained dedication to their careers (as vets and doctors respectively) as well as role as a parent. Perceived with recourse to Bourdieu and Butler, this may have encouraged both participants to (re)enact perceived ways of working, both currently and in future scenarios, allowing them to transform within their own niche within the profession and thus challenging the established aura of masculine hegemony pervading conceptions of the profession as one embodied by an ‘abstract’ worker. The potential for a figure, working within and around familial responsibilities, may also act as a role model for further members regardless of sex and/or (non) gender, who witness the ability to both work and raise families as part of a fulfilling and worthy entwined way of living. Both Cat and Juliet linked professional working with being a mother and it being doable, having witnessed it within their immediate environments.

In terms of boundary work (Gieryn 1983) various demarcations became visible. One division heavily drawn upon by all respondents was the veterinary/human medical divide. Jack, Juliet and Cat mentioned toying with the idea of human medicine, before outlining their attraction to the perceived kinder nature of veterinary medicine, drawing on discourses of ambition and job satisfaction. Human and veterinary medicine were situated equally along professional standard lines helping respondents examine their own motivations in joining the veterinary profession by drawing on the differences and similarities between each. Glory and high wealth prospects were aligned with human medicine, whilst true compassion and kindness shaped perceptions of the veterinary field.
Inter and intra-veterinary professional boundaries were drawn between veterinarians and support staff, as well as clients. Whilst these were discussed in relatively gender-neutral terms, figures showing females represent over 96% of veterinary support (RCVS 2018a) cannot be ignored. When asked to discuss working relationship with colleagues, Ed, Jack and Cat initially assumed I meant other veterinary surgeons and either spoke only of other veterinarians or demarcated divisions between ‘colleagues’, placing those within a support role in a position of subordination in some cases:

“Colleagues with regard to other people who work in the practice like nurses, receptionists and things we're all ready to use them to hold animals and sort out things and so... it depends who you mean by colleagues.” (Jack)

Constructed hierarchies amongst colleagues were evident and often also depended on the relationship of the surgeon to the rest of the team. Cat, similar to Jack, commented support staff were there to help, to be directed, echoing Ed’s view as a practice owner however when Ed talked about his previous locuming work he viewed this relationship slightly differently, stating his goal was to conduct his own work without the help of other practitioners. Such attitudes are made increasingly complex when manifested amongst groups of women with different professional designations within the same profession; could attitudes towards support staff be a result of performing a certain type of masculinity (Halberstam 1998, Morley 2011) or is it merely a professional boundary uninflected by gender? I believe this hierarchy can be viewed as maintaining a highly gendered professional image (Acker 1990, Witz 1992) upholding boundaries predicated on subordination and domination which although not apparently gendered, are caught up in structural systems resulting in the prevalence of veterinary surgeons being more highly valued as autonomous authorities over support staff. In this vein, boundary deconstruction (Persson 2010) is required to reduce tensions which may manifest and which maintains the perception of the profession as one which is guided by hegemonic masculinity. Upholding a binary linked to domination/subordination also feeds into veterinary presentments of wishing to retain autonomous control of the overall profession, apart from public influences and government regulations (Gieryn 1983). This is further highlighted in the relationships between surgeons and clients in which boundaries between those with specialist knowledge (Weber 1978) and owners can be viewed in such responses as:

“...I think another thing in that setting is like I think the client communication is like massively underrated erm cos like you can do all the most () amazing medicine and surgery in the world but if you can't communicate the damn thing to the owner they're gonna like.. they're gonna do stupid things post
discharge with their pet and not understand and then complain and then not take your advice later because they don't trust you...” (Juliet)

All respondents offered similar articulations of client/veterinary relationships and justified their belief in their expertise due to the dedication and hard work undertaken at university instilling confidence in their own work. Such relationships also serve to reinforce a particular professional image, linking back to Macdonald’s (1995) identification of the aspects which grant the profession legitimacy, respect and authority. All of these examples highlight ways in which gender and professionalism intersect and shape one another in interesting ways.

V. Meritocracy: ambition and privilege – “It’s ability not gender that matters...”

As envisioned, meritocratic ideals, viewed extrinsically to gender, were drawn on to account for some of the divisions and aspirations of veterinary professionals. This belief in meritocracy as a gender-neutral mechanism to attract the ‘best’ professionals often meant that Jack and Edmund considered gender to be irrelevant when discussing the profession; they focused their gaze on class and ethnicity and diversifying the profession along these lines, an aspect to which I return later. As I discerned meritocracy to hide potential structural barriers (Acker 1990, Witz 1992, Morley 2011) I also asked respondents to consider privilege and ambition and to consider comments made by the SPVS President, Peter Brown, in which he regarded females as potentially lacking in ambition and thus accounting for a gender pay gap.

In addition to responses highlighted above regarding what makes an ideal vet, Jack and Cat also mentioned the attainment of qualifications and experience. These responses seemed to imply hard-work alone would allow attainment of ambitions; this does not take into account some of the privileges of coming from higher socio-economic backgrounds which may make it easier to comply with the financial and work experience requirements to enter the veterinary profession in the first place; structural barriers to attaining these are forgotten. Cat also notes the privilege of being able to work part-time as a choice now that her children are older, although her part-time work began due to a lack of childcare facilities in the first instance (and the difficulty of being a working mother when attempting to re-enter full-time veterinary work) evidencing the complexities of barriers and privilege, not least entwined with societal gender perceptions of childcare responsibilities. As a self-declared middle-class white woman, she is happy with her decisions and states:

“So if you're, you know if you're comfortably middle class with a comfortably middle class husband... You know why would you bother[working full-time]?”
Edmund also draws on class (as well as intersecting discourses of gender and nationality) to discuss the meritocratic and privileged route of entering the profession citing its highly rigid entry requirements as a barrier to encouraging those from lower socio-economic households to enter the profession through other routes such as vet nursing:

“...if erm Johan with his South African degree can come into the UK, sit our regulator’s exams and then practice there doesn't to me seem to be any logical reason why ‘Tracey’, can't study in her part-time around looking after her kids and then apply to the regulator and sit the exams and be a vet because the fact that I got drunk on five years constantly with a bunch of other vet students wasn’t one of the things, when you asked me what made a good vet.”

Various strands of thought are explored in this quote, reinforced by observed experience and stereotypical discourse; Edmund, perhaps by dint of being white, male and middle-class has been privileged enough to enter the veterinary field without encountering any known structural barriers whilst those who may also claim similar professional experiences and knowledge are denied access to the veterinary title due to strict regulations on who can and should enter the profession. This could be extended to explain why the leadership figures of the profession evidence a 25:75 split in favour of males. If the profession is predicated on meritocracy, linked to the assumed gender-neutral concepts of knowledge and skill, then barriers will continue to stop women reaching the higher levels despite being numerically dominant at lower levels (Acker 1990; Persson 2010).

Expanding upon notions of privilege I recall Juliet’s recognition of a differently identified privilege when she acknowledged the existence of having two role models embodied by her parents. Observing parents who continued to work, set up their own practice and bring up two children, as well as supporting their children in their life choices, Juliet believes she has been privileged in this regard, surrounded by repeated positive performances of the possibilities for her future. She juxtaposes this dimension of privilege against structural barriers she perceives ongoing within certain veterinary specialisms such as orthopaedics which she considers “like it is a little bit of a boys club”, where practitioners encourage and more enthusiastically mentor those they view in their own image (white, middle-class, males), thereby likely attracting more males to this niche in the profession. She also states feelings of discomfort when attending job and internship interviews as she has been given the impression that some interviewers may be assessing the likelihood of her requiring maternity leave at some future point. Gender and privilege are evidenced as entwined often influencing one another with resultant mental and material effects.
Linked to notions of meritocracy and privilege are also discourses of ambition. Edmund states males have different ambitions to females, being more realistic in their goals whereas females are more likely to be encouraged to follow a ‘pipedream’ – this contrasts sharply with Juliet’s experiences with a school careers advisor:

“I remember her writing a report to my parents and like I used to read all of them...saying that erm it was something like...[Juliet] appears to be overstretcing herself, she should probably () reassess her future and. find a more appropriate career path.”

Juliet is discouraged from following her ambition, an ambition shared with a multiplicity of people regardless of gender, sex, age and so forth, and yet perhaps her gender subconsciously affects the advice provided (although it is unlikely the adviser would admit as much). In comparison, Jack notes his own careers adviser supporting him wholeheartedly, with no career paths being considered perceived to be ‘below’ the level of veterinary surgery. He begins to reflect upon this and questions whether gender stereotypes and perceptions influenced his careers adviser (and himself) effacing the possibility of entering vet school through veterinary nursing; advice he images would have been imparted to a female student.

Expanding upon notions of ambition, Juliet considers the different ways it is construed; whether through aspirations for greater wealth, prestige, life experiences and so forth; when is ambition ‘reached’ and who decides? She notes her reaction to Peter Brown’s allusion to a lack of ambition in women

“That made me so angry. Less ambitious is like the most insulting thing they could possibly say...to a profession that's predominantly female...you can't win as a girl, like if you, if you're ambitious then you're heartless...because you just care about your career and you care, you don't care about your partner, or you don't care about wanting to have kids...but then if you were less ambitious then oh you just did a vet degree and wasted it didn't you? So like, you just can't win”

lamenting the impossibility, and ‘double-bind’, of ‘winning’ as a female within this particular professional project. Further consolidating perceived gendered differences in ambition, Edmund considers ambition as related to himself and his partner; he has one ambition, to excel at his work and would ‘eat, sleep and breathe work’ if he had no other commitments whilst he perceives Joy’s ambition to be variegated; maintaining a ‘good’ job, ‘good’ house, family and life experiences. He sees males as excelling at single tasks, whereas he perceives women as great multi-taskers and thus views differences in ambition accordingly (also pointing out there are exceptions to both his ‘rules’). Juliet also draws on what she knows of her partner’s
experiences, unable to recall a time when his ambition has been called into question such as hers has on various occasions since school. In response to why higher pay may accrue to male vets if ambition is removed from the equation, all respondents noted confidence in one’s ability (related to prior socialisation and previous experience with colleagues and clients), relationship to and gender of the employer and negotiating skills as key elements, all of which can be inflected by societal gender perceptions. Nevertheless, discourses surrounding what it means to ‘have’ ambition and ‘be’ ambitious structure perceptions within and outwith the profession; one has to constantly enact one’s ‘ambition’ to be taken seriously according to Juliet.

In conclusion, although respondents initially discussed the supposed gender-neutrality of the profession, with further probing and self-critical awareness, underlying gendered dimensions linked to privilege and ambition emerged. These highlighted structural barriers accounting for unequal gender relations and sexist perceptions maintaining some forms of gender inequality within the profession. Furthermore, focus on these issues may also highlight the impact they have on ‘feminisation’ discourses as discussions of privilege illuminate underlying masculine hegemonic ideals influencing the profession indicating that whilst female numbers are rising, engrained perceptions regarding stereotypes and prejudices remain unchanged. These are explored below.

VI. ‘Feminisation’, stereotypes, biases and perceptions: the elephant in the room

As I aim to deconstruct notions of ‘feminisation’ as related to the profession, I asked participants whether they had encountered this discourse and whether they felt it had consequences for the future. Drawing on notions of professionalism and merit as discussed in the opening section of the above (IV), Edmund and Jack stated their awareness of ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) but noted it was irrelevant for the profession whilst Juliet and Cat believed it could be used to shape a more creative approach to everyday working practices. As an indicator of numerical dominance at veterinary student and surgeon level all agreed on its utility however outwith this definition participants began to draw on some of the paradoxical conceptions as outlined in Chapter Four: Part One. Edmund believed increasing national consciousness related to pay gaps and #metoo campaigns had made the discussion topical but it detracted from more important issues such as open-access to those from lower socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The other interviewees noted flexibility and a lack of males entering the profession helped create ‘feminisation’ discourse(s), whilst also paradoxically observing these as resulting from ‘feminisation’ as something which was ‘done’, following West &
Zimmerman (1987) and Butler’s (1990) theorisations on performative discourses. Furthermore, it was perceived that males who did join were not put-off by dwindling male demographics and did not perceive the profession to be ‘feminine’. For example, Cat states:

“I don't think I have ever come across anyone who's ever given me the impression that men, the men in the profession find the ‘feminisation’ of the profession, upsetting from a working environment, how it reflects on their masculinity...I mean they might get upset because everybody wants to work part-time and is busy going off and having babies but I think from the point of view of like whether it makes them a lesser man because they're a vet...”

Echoing Jack and Edmund’s thoughts on the profession, neither of them feel ‘out of place’ (in contrast to survey respondent N.447’s quote on page 57) , the gender of their colleagues remains irrelevant in their eyes. Perhaps evidence arises of an awareness of different types of ‘masculinity’ envisioned outwith the hegemonic masculinity of Connell (1995). Hearn (2004) discusses the concept of ‘critical masculinities’; the embodiment of male vets referenced in interview and survey responses appears to point to contemporary vets as individuals exhibiting strong characteristics, deemed by some to be predominantly and traditionally ‘feminine’, such as empathy and compassion (strongly evident within Jack’s assessments of himself). Male vets appear to continue to retain a strong ‘masculine’ identity, but one at odds with the often “bullish” persona of traditionally perceived vets. As ideals change so can responses to gender norms; it could be argued however that males (heterosexual males in particular) have the privilege of exhibiting different forms of maleness and take it with them no matter which characteristics they embody; by virtue of ‘being’ a man their performance of traditionally perceived ‘feminine’ attributes may be (re)appropriated as a particular indicator of a dominant male form. This is however just one interpretation of my current material. The second part of Cat’s quote also brings into focus perceptions regarding females within the profession, juxtaposed against varied masculine ideals – part-time work and family responsibilities remain posited outwith the experience of men highlighting continued undercurrents of gender stereotyping and bias. Is ‘feminisation’ therefore predominantly linked to discourses surrounding flexible working as being a ‘female’ issue? Such conceptions would continue to leave unexamined and untackled assumptions and realities in which women take on the majority of familial responsibilities. Potential staffing problems were identified by all participants, noting increases in female vets had led to different working patterns as society as a whole failed to transform attitudes towards domestic care and to provide adequate child-care benefits to working families. Concerns were also expressed regarding implicit discrimination by employers who appeared reluctant to employ and sponsor women they perceived likely to
have children in the near future. Cat notes previous workplaces interviewing males only whilst Juliet remains uncomfortable attending interviews as she believes employers consider her “a risk”. Recognising harmful impacts such attitudes have on the profession, Cat laments a brain-drain should the profession not positively respond to increased numbers of women by restructuring to offer equal parental leave and new ways of working around child care responsibilities. ‘feminisation’ in this instance may be viewed as an increase in female veterinarians with decreasing value placed upon their work due to unchanging perceptions linked to traditional family roles and professional image. Whilst interviewees generally note this lack of value and worth strongly requires tackling, Edmund seemed to justify the worth accrued to men without examining the structural barriers women face in amassing experience. He commented where breaks were taken by practitioners, women took maternity leave and men took up opportunities to work outwith the UK, therefore in terms of experience, men would be worth more in later years. This sentiment echoes that of Massey University Chancellor (New Zealand) who commented female vets were worth two-fifths of a male vet due to the time they took off to have families (Morgan 2016). ‘Feminisation’ in this instance, a process or concept Ed finds irrelevant, may yet have more relevance than he envisions as it subtly accrues more value to men than women. It also supports Acker’s conception of the ideal worker as the unencumbered body (1990). Whilst Jack also discussed the irrelevance of ‘feminisation’, he constantly referred to it as “should be irrelevant” highlighting its potential negative connotations and discursive power to effect. He did not believe males were being actively discouraged from the profession and therefore believed no one should have cause to provoke backlash against increasing numbers of females – he therefore found some of the survey responses, as outlined in Part One, troubling as they did not support this view. In conjunction, Jack believed extrinsic factors such as the attraction of human medicine, linked to greater perceptions of prestige and monetary gain echoing Lofstedt’s (2003) suppositions, were involved in the changing demography as men (and women) chose different career paths of their own volition. Of course such a notion could also be read as that which subtly dissuades one from turning towards a profession; Juliet, Cat and some survey respondents all note the perceived masculinity of certain specialisms and large-animal work discouraging them from entering these niches. The complex interplay between who and what attracts/detracts can be hard to fathom and may be linked to individual temperament and social climate but gender and ‘feminisation’ discourses do appear to be influencing factors.
In these examples, aspirations and traits have been aligned with perceptions of maleness/masculinity and female/femininity – reifying male/female dichotomies and placing the onus on women to transform working environments leading to an entanglement of ideals linked to traditional gender perceptions, subversions and (re)appropriations to create new modes of working and thinking. Recognising gendered perceptions continue to govern ideas and behaviour, even if these are being challenged, it would appear that ‘feminisation’ discourses are being used, whether recognised as such or not, to embody misogynist impulses regarding the worth of women and a moral panic over staffing fears. They seem to be hiding the prevalence of gendered stereotyping ongoing within the profession which dictates working environments and the discourses used to talk about issues within the profession even if these are denied ‘gender’ links.

Taking this discussion of ‘feminisation’ further, interweaved with gender stereotypes, biases and perceptions, Cat reflects on some of the ‘feminine’ attributes characterising the current veterinary profession, noting women to be “more collaborative, more empathetic, to say they’re empathetic I think is, is a bit unfair on the men but I think we probably come over as more empathetic you know I think it's just easier”. Jack, drawing from his own experience of working with female colleagues, recognises the damaging authority of such stereotypes as he discusses his ability to empathise and show compassion, juxtaposed against his under-confidence relating to large-animal birthing

“You should take people on their merit and actually unless you've met me and I was a cold hearted horrible person or unless you've met Kirsty and she was...you know...unable to deal with farm animals for whatever reason unless you have that experience and you're saying I don't want him because I know he's not compassionate or I don't want her because I know she's not then actually...who are you to tell me I'm not compassionate, who are you to tell Kirsty that she's not able to go and you know, do cow caesers three times quicker than me and be amazing like it's just...and that's where prejudice gets in the way of life as it does in in pretty much every walk and it's something that in an ideal world should never exist.”

In this episode, Jack also recalls Kirsty’s initial patronisation and belittlement by the farmer; taking this in her stride she determined to ‘prove’ herself, resulting in the farmer’s grudging admiration of her adept handling of his cattle, better than either Jack or the farmer himself. Her ability in the first instance was clearly equated with her gender. Such examples and sentiments highlight Jack’s despair that such stereotypes do exist, with material outcomes – in this regard gender is displayed as something that is embodied (Butler 1993), that results in certain perceptions, attributes and behaviours. Jack aims to demonstrate gender should not define
actions and yet he realises, paradoxically that it does – it creates that which it describes in some cases; perhaps men gravitating towards large-animal work and women undertaking compassionate work or being pushed to undertake such work within practice by the perceptions and subsequent actions of others. This is further highlighted and expanded with recourse to the gender pay gap through Begeny and Ryan’s (2018) study in which ingrained gender biases, stereotypes and discrimination within the profession are made manifest in pay grades and evaluative reports. This is especially interesting considering all respondents, when asked, said they did not perceive gender stereotypes and prejudices to emerge from those within the profession but rather from clients and society in general i.e. who viewed traditional vets as embodying James Herriot-like markers of identity. In this study, skills and worth were construed differently for a female and male vet (hypothetical vets with the same evaluative report) highlighting underlying biases and perceptions within the profession, constructing and maintaining barriers for female pay rise and progression (which Edmund’s response supports when noting “boys... smash it...and girls want to have a chat and work out the best way forward”). These perceptions are also entangled with notions of ambition, confidence and perceived self-worth as highlighted in the previous section, all also linked to structural inequalities. Performances of masculinity and femininity aim to reify and subvert perceptions of the profession, although even when women are construed as being ‘of the same value’ as men, as in the case of the above study, ingrained gender perceptions also leave their mark.

Jarring somewhat unexpectedly with respondent definitions of the ‘ideal’ vet (in all cases no recourse was made towards visible identity markers), the embodied professional image becomes imbued with visible gendered biases. Juliet discusses navigating what to wear as a vet to be taken seriously, echoing experiences of Dobree (2017) in which impressions of female vets may often be formed on appearances, less likely to happen with male vets. Rather than making recourse to skill and experience of the vet, many women have noted client comments based on their sex, stature, youth and makeup as indicating their (un)suitableness for veterinary work:

“I think it leads you down the route of people can make a lot more judgements about...who you are and what your opinions are of things and like your attitude to work and professionalism...you can't win...so I think if I went to work wearing... like utilitarian shoes that were like functional, and trousers that were just trousers...people would make assumptions about me...that I don't care about my appearance or that I'm like really dowdy or...’Do they care about my pet because they don’ seem to give a crap about themselves?’... if I go to the other end of the spectrum and I wear a nice blouse that's perfectly professional and I have my makeup done, do people think I care too much about myself then and think...
that I have another agenda that I'm really not that clever and that I just have a head filled with air...like you just can’t frickin win” (Juliet)

I quote this extract at length as it highlights key issues linked to perceptions within and outwith the profession linked to embodied effects on others in their choice of attire and feelings of confidence, as well as their ability to confront clients and colleagues who may or may not be reacting to their outward expressions of individuality and professionalism. Dobree (2017) states in her article her vet status was brought into question due to her use of ‘eyeliner’ and disavowal of shapeless, ‘male’ clothing; disavowals she remained conscious of and allowed her to subvert the image of a traditionally perceived vet despite having to ‘prove’ herself as capable through later actions. Juliet furthermore uses her experiences to examine her own potential prejudices concerning gender stereotypes and biases, employing “the acid test” in which she considers how she would react to seeing a young female doctor in ‘nice’ clothing as opposed to her usual senior male doctor. In this way she identifies and establishes the ways in which ‘feminisation’ and stereotypes come to be repeated and (re)presented, solidifying into feelings and actions based around a social construct, in this case gender.

In all responses, interviewees drew from gendered stereotypes even if they considered gender irrelevant. Once recognising their reliance on such discourses they attempted to distance themselves from them although Cat remarked in relation to a stereotype regarding the practical attitude boys tend to take over girls that “It's a, you know, it's a terrible gender stereotype but the reason stereotypes are stereotypes is because they're true, to a certain extent…”. Critically thinking through the potential strengths of using stereotypes to answer my questions, she further wondered whether school children would perceive the profession within gendered terms and how much they would rely on stereotypes to inform these perceptions. In terms of thinking about such attitudes, evidenced by clients as well, ideals of masculinity and femininity as well as gendered stereotypes tended to retain a strong influence on perceptions of the profession possibly influenced by representations of the profession as a male-dominated domain, especially at higher and public-facing levels. Partial perceptions of the profession as a part-time job for females and a particular career path for males were offered by Edmund who continued to justify his remarks by recognising and drawing on discourses of traditional familial roles which he felt influenced his own attitude to his role in the profession. He continued to state “if I wanted to change nappies...I'd have not become a vet, I'd have become a nursery owner or whatever because like that would let me do that thing” and that he had an inability to multi-task which his female peers appeared to do effortlessly. Whilst these
comments were made partly tongue-in-cheek, Edmund did recognise their problematic nature but continued to state his own belief in them to a certain degree, based on his own upbringing and experience. As mentioned previously, they clearly show one form of gender entwined within a professional project – one in which ‘feminisation’ could be construed as the movement towards a profession of part-time work, involving multiple tasks and the accrual of worth to individuals based on time spent undertaking specific roles i.e. most worth aligned with that of the ‘unencumbered’ vet living, breathing and sleeping work. His conception of this vet certainly took no parental responsibility. It is interesting to note that out of the respondents, Edmund was the most vehement in his belief gender and ‘feminisation’ was irrelevant and yet tended to draw on the strongest gender stereotypes and biases to illustrate his responses. This supports findings from Begeñy and Ryan (2018) in which those who most disbelieved gender discrepancies perpetuated them most frequently. I believe such perceptions are damaging for the profession and continue to reify and uphold traditional gender roles. Unfortunately these are perceptions being maintained by a number of practitioners and society in general, and the negative consequences should be made explicit i.e. such as encountering a brain-drain of talented veterinarians being forced to undertake familial duties and outmoded ideals of domestic work. Cat, as a parent, registers her own changing attitudes towards working veterinary mothers; unsympathetic when younger towards a colleague single-handedly looking after young children and flying into work late, she now appreciates the resilience and strength of even getting to work in the first place never mind on time stating “you can do it but it’s bloody hard”, noting the issues still facing working families and a lack of available child care.

As already highlighted throughout, discourses of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are also drawn upon to denote everyday experiences and perceptions of the profession. These are viewed as performance indicators rather than static ‘attributes’ (Butler 1993) and are evident in respondents attempts to ‘prove’ themselves in the way of compassion and/or strength usually attributed as an indicator of biological sex. Gender is shown as a performative action, not as a given. Alongside this notion however remains an underlying ideal of a singular masculinity, embodied by the figure of a traditionally perceived male vet, the ‘ideal’ hegemonic male (Connell 1995) reflecting Acker’s (1990) abstract worker. This male-gendered figure is evoked time and again as measure, as the ‘norm’ to which other ideals and subversions respond paradoxically. In terms of leadership, this singular masculine figure appears to hold a certain hegemony over the profession; there appears to be an invisible glass escalator allowing men to
climb to the top, resulting in a vertically segregated profession which may be obscured by continuing ‘feminisation’ discourses.

VII. Diversity – race, sexuality, class and gender

A further identified theme, albeit relatively small, linking with notions of intersectionality, was raised in the responses of Edmund, Jack and Cat. Whilst I deal with gender and ‘feminisation’ primarily, issues of diversity appeared, entangled with complex conceptions of what and how a profession is formed, and how ‘feminisation’ becomes a dominating discourse. As Ed and Jack tried to move discussions away from gender, they posited open-access as a more pressing issue, highlighting the continued white, middle-class ethos of the profession, “we’re like ragingly white and middle class and if we’re not white we’re still middle class” (Cat). Whilst increasing amounts of women have entered the profession resulting in more varied conceptions of the contemporary ‘typical’ vet as female, or ‘female performing masculinity’, the class and ethnic base of the profession remains unchanged. Jack and Ed appeared to posit that discussing the profession in terms of ‘feminisation’ was detrimental unless it was used to further access. This notion is interesting as some survey responses referred to ‘‘feminisation’’ as a term or process denoting equal opportunities for all, not just predicated on gender. Could it therefore be utilised and ‘rebranded’ to drive transformation across the profession in terms of horizontal and vertical growth, through widening participation across class, gender, (dis)ability, and ethnicity? By exploring some of the positive consequences identified by varied usage of ‘feminisation’, could these not then be extrapolated to encourage wider access, to help uncover further structural barriers and biases to those outwith the male hegemonic domain? The potential for ‘feminisation’ discourses to be utilised in this manner should not be overlooked if it becomes possible to delink them from obscuring misogyny within the profession.

Whilst diversifying access to the profession and the veterinary surgeon base was cited as the most important issue, Jack and Edmund did neglect to consider the diversification of upper management which remains dominated by males (RCVS 2018). In this way perhaps ‘feminisation’ discourses could combine elements for progress in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, ability and sexual orientation across the whole profession. I did wonder whether gender appeared to be a lesser issue for Jack and Edmund because they equated ‘gender’ with ‘female’, and not the ‘norm’ which they subconsciously embodied. Other than bristling at gender stereotypes regarding their capacity to empathise and so on, had they felt the effects of non-
privilege within the profession? Cat and Juliet both drew on gender as something which had affected them at various stages of their careers.

In relation to ethnicity and class especially, Jack notes:

“probably in our profession we should be looking more to () our barriers for you know our guess what you would call social class barriers in that...out profession lacks diversity along the lines of social class perhaps even along the lines of race and actually if you have any anything like that where you are losing potential people who could be coming into your work force for whatever reason... then you are losing out”.

whilst Edmund comments “what would make me happy at work...I would like it if the profession became more ethnically diversive”, both appearing to posit class and ethnicity (and gender) as independent identity markers coming up against different structural barriers. Edmund also made recourse to his perception of the profession as a ‘gay’ profession linked to the high perceived ratio of gay veterinary surgeons as a proportion of the overall profession; he believed by having a greater proportion of individuals with a ‘non-normative’ identity within respected job roles would help society’s attitude overall to those deemed outwith the ‘norm’ – an interesting concept requiring further study outwith the scope of this thesis. In tandem, Cat also mentioned the creation of the British Veterinary LGBT group in 2014, expressing her surprise that such a group was required not having perceived any discrimination but then realising “well it’s kind of similar to sex discrimination isn’t it?”, perhaps reflecting the power discourses have in masking other discriminations and biases.

Linked to Cat’s suggestion above regarding the exploration of children’s perceived gendering of the profession, greater awareness and support provided by schools to promote those from a range of backgrounds could balance the white, middle-class domain of the profession, encouraging a practitioner base which fairly reflects the veterinary client base. This could also be linked to leadership training for women, and affirmative promotion as a temporary measure for all individuals outwith the perceived ‘norm’; perhaps the ‘feminisation’ of the profession could be used as a blueprint for greater diversity later on. An ‘intersectional sensibility’ (Crenshaw 1991), one sorely required in the veterinary profession entwined with dismantling its inherently masculine ethos, also reveals that ethnicity offers different possibilities for workplace interaction, cross-cutting gender and sexuality. These can act as pointers for further research and analysis. Whilst this section only briefly focused on diversity I wanted to draw attention to the ways in which it also potentially reifies binary notions (depending on how ‘diversity’ is construed by those within the profession) delineating the perceived separateness
of identity markers within respondents’ comments, as well as evidencing its potential, alongside ‘feminisation’ discourses to create a more equitable and less biased profession overall.

VIII. ‘Getting creative’ – flexibility, millennial generations and gender

Finally, I identified a theme of flexibility linked to both increasing ‘feminisation’ in numerical terms and a millennial generation. Highlighting complex entanglements in which gender crosses multiple axis’ such as age, Cat viewed ‘feminisation’ discourses as potentially able to propel creative thinking in relation to part-time work, value of female veterinarians and work-life balances. Whilst Jack did not mention childcare explicitly, Juliet and Cat both considered their experiences, perceptions and future ambitions entwined with the realities and possibilities of having children. Cat outlined a wealth of resources from which the veterinary profession could draw such as job-sharing and promoting new laws regarding parental leave i.e. such as the Swedish example, helping to also reduce the likelihood that ‘female’ would be equated with ‘part-time/parental leave/family responsibility’. Edmund’s stance regarding his own involvement with potential future parental duties has been outlined previously, linked to subconscious perceptions of himself as an ‘unencumbered’ ideal worker.

Recognising generational differences, both entwined with and apart from gender, Cat considers there to be a proliferation of ‘millennial’ attitudes as a result of the growing millennial employment base. She sees this as creating both issues and opportunities for the profession, entwined with the same issues and opportunities perceived within gender differences and perceptions. Individuals are more likely to recognise their own self-worth and value different lifestyles, also marking changes in gender performance and gender roles opening new ways of working and living. Increased awareness of gender pay gaps, harassment and discrimination, as well as a culture encouraging people to voice their concerns may help contribute towards a positive vision of the ‘feminisation’ of the profession; one which invites all members, regardless of sex, gender, race and so on to be open and adapt their working routines to fit healthy lifestyles, predicated on equality rather than modes of subordination and domination.

In contrast to Peter Brown’s comments regarding pay discrepancies, Cat noted an increasing prevalence of ‘ballsy’ females (drawing on perceptions of ‘dominant male’ personas)

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7 Usually referred to as a period dating from the early 1980s as birth years to the early 2000s.
requesting higher levels of pay than male applicants when applying for positions at her husband’s practice:

“what has really surprised me was how bullish all the applicants were about salary expectations... I think practices are going to have to also be creative about how they utilise their staff and how they pay them”

This apparent increase in confidence levels, certainly amongst some younger vets may mark a change for the better although Cat’s quote does highlight an ongoing prevalence which considers such attitudes along ‘females performing masculinity’ lines in attempting to achieve equal working environments.

In some interview and survey responses individuals also indicated creative ways in which they combined family and work commitments, as well as the skills required for both, to communicate with clients or to manage work-life balances and provide support for colleagues alongside mentoring opportunities such as those within a ‘Stay, Go or Diversify’ initiative. In terms of progression for the profession, notions of flexibility tended to support the adoption of new modes of working and in some cases the increasing corporatisation of the profession was welcomed as being more highly regulated and fairer with regard to pay accountability and scales. Social media was also cited as being a potential positive resource for the profession as it could offer support and channels for discussion formerly available only within limited geographical areas. Edmund did note however the caution to be applied to perceiving social media as a positive force as he perceived expanded avenues of unreviewed and disseminated ‘knowledge’ as having a detrimental effect on the profession in terms of unscrupulous dog breeders and those clients attempting to treat their pets with human medication (again evidencing the complexities between the dominant/subordinate relationships of practitioners and clients). Although gender may lie undetected in pleas for such caution, Juliet also notes the disparities between client and veterinary relationships in terms of the increased amount of information available to clients who then show a lack of respect for Juliet’s informed consultations when her advice and prognosis is at odds with a client’s ‘self’ diagnosis. Juliet feels that in cases such as these, if she were a grey, bearded male veterinarian, she would retain authority and her own judgements would be respected. Juliet also notes it would be nicer if the profession was kinder, lacked niches of “old boys clubs” and rid itself of an increasing blame culture which some have linked to millennialism.

Linked to what ‘feminisation’ may mean for the profession, flexibility was cited repeatedly and also remains in line with survey responses. Increasing female numbers within the
profession and subsequent daily impacts this has on ‘doing’ veterinary work, is well primed to be deemed creative as it opens up and helps define ‘feminisation’ as a discourse imbued with positive connotations. This turn towards thinking creatively allows new formulations of the concept to be potentially introduced and used throughout literature to highlight its positive aspects delinking it from essentialised views of males and females per se. Performing a job role along lines of parity should be encouraged, one which still retains a professional image with no falling levels of consequent worth. Jack notes the privileged position of the profession already in terms of being able to choose part-time work but also considers there is scope for improvement as work-life balances and the demography of the profession is encouraged to change to be more inclusive to all. Juliet envisions an ideal world where “maybe we’ll reach this like incredible point where we'll like job share”. Flexibility, in conjunction with the above, could also include the potential to open further avenues of accessing the profession and higher level roles so that structural barriers can be deconstructed (and/or circumnavigated at first); perhaps positive and affirmative action plans could have a role to play in this regard? Cat notes “we’re gonna have to get better at flexible working...always gonna have to be creative...practices...are going to have to be creative” believing in the power to turn a situation into a positive challenge with benefits for the profession.

The processes of establishing new patterns and ways of working has perhaps encouraged greater flexible and creative thinking due to the realisation of a more female heavy, and millennial workforce, combining an appreciation of intersectional identities in moving the profession away from its origins within patriarchal power structures. Persson’s (2010) identification of boundary deconstruction is paramount here for envisioning new ways of working within the veterinary sector if it is to move forward.

**IX. Conclusion**

Throughout these interviews, gender as performance was identified as both reifying and subverting gender stereotypes and biases, in both daily work and perceptions of those within the profession. My chosen themes helped sort and conceptualise different modes and understandings of ‘feminisation’ and gender, with recourse to organisational structure, colleague and client interaction, and societal and professional challenges affecting the current veterinary field. Whilst analysing these responses, I noted moments where imperialist tones, shaped by patriarchal culture, crept into constructions of gender and ‘otherness’, creating and maintaining boundaries between gendered divisions of labour as well as hierarchies between
veterinary staff. This was evidenced in Edmund’s ingrained belief (despite recognising this a highly gendered stereotype) that men should be ‘breadwinners’, linked to his historic notions of “men of empire”; by extension they should less likely be called upon to undertake familial, domestic duties leaving these to their female counterparts who would be paid accordingly (linked to time spent in the role), and in his view, fairly. All interviewees, in another instance, asserted the importance of using communication to ‘get clients to do what you want’ drawing on practices and discourses of authority to produce moments where dominant/subordinate relationships were recognised and upheld by both veterinarians and clients as a perceived necessity for the profession to function in its self-defined role. The relationship between veterinary surgeon and support staff further reinforced this angle of discourse as strong boundaries were further evidenced between groups within the profession, justifying the ways in which specialist knowledge is imparted to non-surgical veterinary staff (predominantly female) ensuring they also comply with one’s authoritative knowledge and actions. I believe that whilst gender may not be explicitly evoked in these divisions, they continue to reflect patriarchal power relations maintaining the profession and continuing to structure it in nuanced ways; gendered performances and perceptions from both male and female veterinarians continue to uphold, to varying extents, inherent structural inequalities, mirroring Irvine and Vermilya’s findings (2010). This is not to say deconstruction of such boundaries and gender biases are not being undertaken; Juliet, Cat and Jack (as well as survey respondents) clearly expose some of the ongoing discriminations within the profession, laying bare to increasing amounts of stress and ongoing prejudices those individuals and groups attempting to transform and challenge these problems and discourses which exist alongside, and in some cases reinforce, some of the uncritical discourses of ‘feminisation’ respondents draw upon. Juliet’s identification and use of an ‘acid test’ may offer one solution for examining one’s own and others’ perceptions in relation to gender bias, stereotyping and ‘feminisation’ discourses; perhaps by opening avenues leading to an exploration and tackling of sexism and misogyny within the profession without pinpointing blame and reducing the likelihood of a backlash towards the perceived ‘feminisation’, extending beyond numbers, of the profession.

In the next and final chapter, I draw my aim and objectives together with the insights gathered throughout this analysis, offering suggestions for future research.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

I. Revisiting ‘feminisation’, gender and the professional project

In drawing this thesis to a close, I briefly revisit my research aim and outline suggestions for further research. By applying a combination of sociological, professional/organisational and feminist theories to my primary material, the collection of which was informed and influenced by previous research and personal observations gained through my vicarious positioning to the profession, I offer a critical partial insight into the legitimacy and efficacy of the concept of ‘feminisation’ as applied to the veterinary field. In response to whether women have accrued the benefits related to a simple, isolated understanding of the ‘feminisation’ thesis, the answer is perhaps both yes and no. ‘Feminisation’ is understood subjectively by a wide range of veterinary professionals, influenced by experience, age, class, gender, race and so on, often calling forth a rich and varied spectrum of positive, negative and seemingly ambivalent conceptions of the term as well as comments on the subsequent state of the current veterinary profession in relation to how perceptions of gender affect daily work. The numerical rise of women within the student demographic and at veterinary surgeon level is not disputed but the effects of this rise are and continue to have consequences for envisioning the future of the profession. The term therefore presents something of a paradox however it is within this very paradox that strength may be found. Disentangling the effects of increased numerical ‘feminisation’ from further identified changes to the profession remains complicated and yet this interaction between increased numbers of women within the profession, an increasing millennial base, the awareness of the requirement for more inclusive access and the increased corporatisation of the profession, should not be conceptualised as a logistical headache but instead recognised as providing potentialities for the influencing and entwinement of one another in particular ways. Challenges facing the profession should be considered holistically, allowing for a range of varied and valued perceptions and experiences to be discussed and explored so that productive ways of assessing impacts and engaging in action can be formed. By thinking as such, hostile attitudes and perceptions which posit gender as irrelevant or which are inclined to provide a backlash towards numerical ‘feminisation’, may be better assuaged and the negative connotations associated with the concept ‘feminisation’ can be productively reworked. By positing a ‘reworking’ I envision an ever-widening concept of ‘feminisation’ as having the potential to encompass all that it might mean for the profession to embody notions of parity and/or equality, in a similar vein to survey responses which saw the term as reflecting
equal opportunities, of progressing towards flexible working patterns for every individual, and respect and worth for opinions and experiences regardless of the markings of practitioner identity whilst still recognising and celebrating difference. In the context of how ‘feminisation’ is multiply understood within the veterinary profession, I do consider it to have more potential than Morley (2011) envisions (generally) and I, myself, envisioned specifically for the profession, at the start of this thesis. As a concept which can underlie better inclusion and parity within the profession it should be expanded, even if its rhetorical devices undergo alteration (the term ‘feminisation’ itself may be better served if reconceptualised, in the current context) to widen its appeal i.e. by using different signifying terms and thereby distancing itself from binary conceptions of gender and/or sex as currently perceived by some practitioners.

I offer this reading partly in response to perceptions which became evident amongst respondents in relation to how ‘feminisation’ was imagined – by some (mainly women) denoting a power imbalance in favour of women whilst the, albeit small, sample of male respondents noted the term’s positive and more open conceptualisation of denoting the process and progress of equality. Such insights supported Irvine and Vermilya’s (2010) findings in which female veterinarians tended to implicitly uphold ideals of hegemonic masculinity, distancing themselves from the ‘feminine’ within the profession as a way of potentially maintaining professional integrity as traditionally conceptualised (Macdonald 1995, Witz 1992). This sense of a masculine ethos underlying the profession appeared throughout my study but rather than supporting the notion of hegemonic masculinity, I believe it supports Hearn’s (2004) movement towards thinking of critical masculinities as the ‘ideal’ veterinary professional appears to be altering (even if symbolically vestiges of James Herriot remain) and instead is embodying a wider range of behaviours and appearances linked to both reifying and subverting certain traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, whilst still appearing to privilege ‘the male’, especially at the highest levels of the profession. This constant recourse to men and/or masculinity, pervasive throughout previous research and responses within my own study, further highlights their necessity (as constructions, as ‘beings’: dependent on viewpoint) in articulating ‘feminisation’ (and it could even be argued ‘intersectionality’ as engaged within this thesis) as a concept. The often internalised white, middle-class, cis-heterosexual male ‘norm’ unceasingly appears as central to understanding and defining ‘feminisation’ even whilst paradoxically such an image is subconsciously recalled as an implicit point of reference. Gender in this instance becomes something which is performed (Butler 1990), linked to and also intertwining with ‘performances’ of ‘feminisation’ (when
conceptualised as a flexible, kinder, transformative and fairer mode of working), reflecting changing societal perceptions and understandings of the ways in which gender is enacted and privileged when associated with certain types of professional ‘bodies’. Whilst the use of the term ‘feminisation’ for calling into existence changes within the profession does appear to mask inherent patriarchal structures which although may be altering, do still underlie the profession – it does, if nothing else, allow such structures to become easier to discuss, explore and deconstruct so that a profession which is truly inclusive and fair can be (re)formed.

Further to the above and now focusing on the gendered nature of the contemporary veterinary profession, I believe potential inferences can be drawn highlighting similarities between this project and other professional projects more broadly. The responses and discussions emanating from my study regarding ingrained hegemonic masculinity, experiences of discrimination and gendered labour divisions mirror similar experiences and perceptions within, for example, the Swedish Armed Forces as reported by Persson (2010), and further professional fields such as dentistry, law and biomedics (Witz 1992). Each of these professions furthermore considers themselves to be wholly exceptional, a key proponent for defining and claiming their status as a ‘profession’ (Macdonald 1995) however as my study indicates they may have more in common than they assume (notwithstanding expertise). These professions, by their very nature steeped in patriarchal traditional origins, may struggle to extract themselves from embedded patriarchal structures and ‘ways of seeing and doing’ which are predicated and entwined within such structures. As my particular study evidences, whilst alterations of the ‘ideal’ and changes to working patterns have been observed and even encouraged, a transformation of underlying structures does not yet appear apparent and may not be unless we can continue conceiving of new conceptions of what constitutes a ‘profession’ and how ‘feminisation’ discourses (or their reconceptualisation) may help or hinder this move. Whilst I examined gender and ‘feminisation’ as related to a particular professional context (UK veterinary surgery) with the aim of contributing towards ‘knowledge’ linked to this profession, I believe I have also contributed to and widened the scope of how such professions re/maintain their image and focus within a sociological context and how constructive refigurations of discourses such as ‘feminisation’ may help them begin deconstructing their own patriarchal structures and biases, if not actually resulting in their ultimate transformation.
II. *Future research suggestions*

Additional opportunities for research into the ‘feminisation’ of the veterinary profession are vast; this thesis offers but a small snapshot of a profession working with conflicting notions of what ‘feminisation’ does and can mean, depending on individual viewpoints, experiences and their engagement with notions of ‘gender’, other identarian discourses and potential challenges facing the profession. The differences and boundaries between veterinary surgeons and veterinary support-staff could be explored in greater detail, potentially opening the ‘feminisation’ debate further due to the huge predominance of female support-staff stemming from professional origins (i.e. nursing (Witz 1992)) relatively distinct to the masculine-dominated origins of veterinary surgery. The lack of diversity within the profession, along lines of class and ethnicity, could also be explored with a strong intersectional analysis applied which focuses less on gender per se and more on the inter and intra-actions (Lykke 2010) of a range of experiences, helping to inform yet a still stronger conception of what ‘feminisation’ could mean or be transformed into. Combining both the efforts of those directly located within the profession and feminist theorists, where these are not already entwined, may motivate strong research aims and methodologies resulting in critical insights which can help move the profession forward as it aims to meet its objectives for a fairer, more inclusive and adaptive profession.

III. *Clearing up the bullshit - concluding remarks*

In the last moments of this thesis I consider whether I have indeed cleared up the ‘bullshit’ as my title contends. As coarse as the term may sound, leading to my initial misgivings in employing it, it commands attention as both pun and metaphor; evoking the work of large-animal farm vets as they navigate around and past actual ‘bull’s shit’, intriguingly one of the areas identified as retaining some of the greatest incidences of gender bias in veterinary work, and the ‘bullshit’ that veterinarians report encountering within the profession such as overt sexism (N. 161) and feeling the need to prove oneself as a result of perceived gender differences (N. 8). It is therefore an apt metaphor for potentially exposing the vested interests

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8 For a philosophical analysis of this ‘coarse’ term, its etymology and subsequent usage see Harry Frankfurt’s extended essay ‘On Bullshit’ (2005).
9 Participant N.161 – for the full quote please see Chapter Four: Part One p. 57
10 Participant N. 8 - for the full quote please see Chapter Four: Part One p. 58
of those who utilise ‘feminisation’ discourses and/or reiterated notions of gender irrelevancy, to disguise both inherently masculine substructures within the profession and fears of a ‘female/feminine’ takeover (Morley 2011). I therefore believe ‘clearing up the bullshit’ denotes an active deconstruction of the underlying structures maintaining and masking gender discrimination, prejudices, stereotypes and problematic notions of ‘feminisation’ within the veterinary profession (as one amongst many traditionally patriarchally-grounded professions).

**Has this been achieved? Yes, I claim it has.** Examples abound throughout this thesis, drawn from survey and interview responses, in which respondents themselves begin to deconstruct their own experiences and perceptions, in self-reflexive and dialogic instances, calling out ‘bullshit’ when it is intimated that gender ‘doesn’t/shouldn’t matter’. In addition, I believe I am also able to call out ‘bullshit’ (from my albeit peripheral location), exposing and clearing up the instances (supported by previous research and theory) where gender is assumed irrelevant, or ‘feminisation’ a ‘non-issue’ i.e. by underlining Edmund’s fervent claims that gender is irrelevant to the profession **whilst he simultaneously and paradoxically draws on some of the strongest gender stereotypes and biases to emerge within this study.**

Whilst it may be that I have cleared up certain notions pertaining to ‘feminisation’ discourses and perceptions of gender within the veterinary profession, mostly in the unmasking of an underlying masculine ethos and the fallacy of gender as irrelevant, the rich variety of ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) as discussed by respondents and throughout this thesis may potentially continue to hide other issues. I do however believe that when harnessed and conceptualised in certain ways, these discourses offer hope for the future of the profession; for enacting transformative ways of being and doing, altering images of the ideal veterinarian to encompass a multiplicity of ‘ideals’, and recognising difference as a positive force for adapting to changes within the profession. These hopes were all evidenced by respondents highlighting their wishes and desires for a fairer and kinder future, able to understand and productively work with the realities of a new generation and to provide greater open access to the profession. By cultivating a discourse where its boundaries can be encouraged to expand, and which can also offer a framework for deconstructing issues within the profession, the profession may justly become one in which individuals are not penalised or made uncomfortable due to perceived identity markers, and where traditional gender roles and perceptions can be unmade and reconceptualised, even breaking down binaries to reduce their potentially harmful impact within the profession and society as a whole.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

‘Feminisation’ Discourses within Veterinary Practice’

Thank you for participating in this survey. Responses are welcome from anyone who has worked within veterinary practice (including EMS) and especially those who are working/have worked as veterinary surgeons. Your responses will help to inform research, undertaken as part of a Masters thesis, into the current ‘feminisation’ discourse(s) surrounding veterinary practice within the UK. All responses are voluntary, anonymous and will be treated confidentially, to be compiled and analysed as part of a group. The survey should take between 5 - 10 minutes to complete. Your input would be very much appreciated.

If you wish to learn more about this research or have any further queries, please contact me (Pilar Girvan) at pilgi597@student.liu.se (MSSc Gender Studies - Intersectionality and Change: University of Linkoping).

1. Please indicate your age
   - 16 - 25
   - 26 - 30
   - 31 - 35
   - 36 - 40
   - 41 - 45
   - 46 - 50
   - 51 - 55
   - 56 - 60
   - 61 - 65
   - 65 +

2. Please indicate your job role and as this research is located within the context of the UK, please confirm your main country of experience.

3. How would you describe your ethnicity?

4. How would you define your gender?

5. Using your own words, how do you understand the term ‘feminisation’?

6. Do you think there are specific tasks/areas of work within veterinary practice more suited to men? If so please provide examples.

7. Do you think there are specific tasks/areas of work within veterinary practice more suited to women? If so please provide examples.

8. Thinking about your particular place(s) of work, are certain tasks dominated by either men or women and if so which ones?

9. Finally, on a more personal level, are there parts of your job you feel more comfortable doing as a woman or a man? Please explain.
Appendix 2: Age range of survey respondents

Q1 Please indicate your age

Answered: 461  Skipped: 2

- 16 - 25: 22.34%
- 26 - 30: 24.95%
- 31 - 35: 18.87%
- 36 - 40: 16.05%
- 41 - 45: 7.81%
- 46 - 50: 3.90%
- 51 - 55: 3.04%
- 56 - 60: 1.95%
- 61 - 65: 0.87%
- 65+: 0.32%
Appendix 3: Copy of Informed Consent Form distributed to interview participants

Consent Form

I voluntarily agree to participate in a research interview conducted by Ms Pilar Girvan (Masters student, Linkoping University). I understand that this research forms the basis of a Master’s thesis and is designed to gather experiences and opinions regarding gender and the veterinary profession. I will be one of four people being interviewed for the research.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.
- I understand the interview will last approximately 60 – 90 minutes. Notes may be taken during the interview. I agree to an audio recording, the subsequent transcription of the interview and the use of quotes within this Master’s thesis. I may however request that recording be discontinued at any time.
- Please tick accordingly:
  - I wish to remain anonymous for the purposes of this study (anonymised quotes will be used and it will not be possible for me to be identified by any information within the thesis)
  - I am happy to be identified within the context of this study.
- I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name, if requested, in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
- I understand that relevant sections of the recording and transcript, as gathered during the interview, may be looked at by researchers from the University of Linkoping where relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to this data.
- I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

I have been given a copy of this consent form.

__________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Name of Participant        Date                          Signature

__________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Name of Interviewer        Date                          Signature

Researcher contact details:

Pilar Girvan (Master’s student - Gender Studies: Intersectionality and Change)

pilgi597@student.liu.se

07990997094
Appendix 4: Interview Schedule and Questions

(Two recording devices set up ready to record once consent has been provided)

- Greet and thank for time given to be interviewed.
- Ask to read through consent form and sign if agree. Check consent given for interview to be recorded.
- (Re)introduce self and aim of research. Mention exploratory survey distributed which looked at perceptions of gender and the veterinary profession within the context of the UK.
- State reasons for interviewing: to explore impressions and experiences of working within the veterinary profession and any potential gender divisions or differences encountered or are aware of.
- Make interviewee aware the full transcript will be available to myself and academic staff at the university. Copies can be made for feedback if requested and adjustments made.
- Outline format of the interview (13 questions) and length of interview (1 – 1.5 hours)
- Refer to contact details on copies of the consent form
- Questions?

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about what drove you to join the veterinary profession? Why did you want to become a vet?

2. Did/do you have any particular role models?

3. What do you do in your daily work? What’s an average day like for you?

4. In your opinion, what makes an ‘ideal’ or ‘typical’ vet? Who makes a good veterinarian?

5. In the practice you work at, or practices you have worked at, what has the gender distribution of colleagues been like? Why do you think this is? Can you reflect on it?

6. Ok, so you say there were mostly (males/females)? Figures show that 59.4% of UK practising veterinary surgeons are female (40.6% male) and approximately 80% of veterinary students are female (BVA & AVS, 2016; HESA 2018). It’s likely this has contributed to a growing public opinion that the veterinary profession is going through a period of ‘feminisation’ or is already a feminised profession. Is this something you’ve come across or have thought about? Why do you think there is an increase?

7. What do you think it could mean for the profession?

8. Many survey respondents stated gender was not an issue/had no relevance within the veterinary profession. Others responded that there were quite significant differences in roles/specialisms/behaviour and perceptions. What are your views?

8. Linked to the previous question, two recent surveys conducted by the BVA and SPVS record a gender pay gap (average female full time vets earning £41, 152 per year whilst males earn £46,921, a difference of 12%) (females £40,960 and males £50,750 so 19%). The picture tends to show that graduates start off on an even footing but after 11 years discrepancies arise in hourly rates when a 20% difference emerges in general (BMJ 2018; Guthrie 2018; Kernot 2018). Comments linked to women becoming less ambitious over time and institutional barriers (Peter Brown, as quoted in Veterinary Woman, 2018). Why do you think this exists?
9. How much do you think gender stereotypes and perceptions within the veterinary profession influence your work and/or veterinary practice?

10. Thinking about gender stereotypes and perceptions at large in society, do you think these can influence veterinary practice or people’s perception of it?

11. What do you think are the major challenges facing the veterinary profession at the moment, from a non-medical point of view?

12. Finally, how do you envision the future of the veterinary profession?

References


