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The compounding feminization of animal cruelty investigation work and its multispecies implications

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All forms of human labour performed with and/or for animals are gendered, although not always tidily. Here we focus on animal cruelty investigation work, a particularly complicated gendered occupational case. Drawing on survey, interview and focus group data, we focus on a regionally based workforce's gendered specifics. In keeping with feminist political economy and labour process theory, we highlight both material and experiential dimensions, examining physical and psychological risks, and rewards. We argue that the gendered and multispecies entanglements of the work and the victims coalesce in the compounding feminization of cruelty investigation labour. We raise questions about the implications of the gendered and multispecies interconnections for the women and men involved, and for the animals dependent on their work.

KEYWORDS

animal cruelty investigation work, animal cruelty investigators, animals and work, gender and animals, gender and work, humane jobs, humane law enforcement

1 | INTRODUCTION

As decades of gender and feminist research has revealed, the gendering of occupations and organizations is far from straightforward. When animals are present and recognized, such processes can be further complicated. In some cases, multispecies workplaces reflect broader workforce trends and inequities. In other instances, the presence or involvement of animals adds layers of complexity to the gendered perceptions and dynamics of the work. Indeed, the many landscapes of human–animal labour are characterized by differences, possibilities, contradictions, and intra- and interspecies inequities. Given the material conditions of paid and unpaid human work with/for animals and the realities of animals' own work-lives, we see feminist political economy and elements of gendered labour process theory as useful conceptual frameworks. They are helpful for unpacking both the organization and experience of human labour, animals' diverse engagements in work and formal occupations, and the interspecies dynamics at play (see Coulter, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Indeed, as Susan Nance (2013) points out, 'There has never been any purely human space in world

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history' (p. 7) and more intellectual work is needed to thoroughly understand the nature–labour nexus, including its many gendered and intersectional facets (Coulter, 2014). In this paper, we focus on animal cruelty investigation work, a particularly challenging occupation which is interwoven with gendered perceptions and bodies in noteworthy ways.

All kinds of human labour performed with and/or for animals are gendered, although not always tidily (Coulter, 2016a). Agricultural work, for example, is widely socially constructed as masculine yet is experienced unevenly by women and men, particularly because of the emotional work involved in turning live animals into commodities to be consumed by people (Ellis, 2013, 2014; Ellis & Irvine, 2010; Halley, 2012; Porcher, 2011; Wilkie, 2010). Work in sporting industries that involve animals often reflect and reproduce predictable patterns of inequity through the division of labour and gendered performances (Butler, 2013; Butler & Charles, 2012; Larsen, 2006), although national contexts and political projects also shape local specifics to varying degrees (Coulter, 2013; Hedenborg, 2007, 2009; Hedenborg & White, 2013; Thorell & Hedenborg, 2015). Moreover, the daily labour processes, including the care and dirty work requirements, as well as the racialization of certain occupations like stable staff/groom in a number of locales, reinforce the need for an intersectional and context-specific lens which illuminates commonalities and differences (Cassidy, 2007; Castañeda, Kline, & Dickey, 2013; Coulter, 2016a; Miller, 2013).

Formal care work occupations with animals have often reproduced gendered hierarchies which see men in positions like veterinary doctor afforded with more status, pay and control, and women more commonly employed as veterinary nurses, technicians, assistants and animal care attendants (Hamilton & Taylor, 2013; Sanders, 2010). However, in recent years, there has been a numerical influx of middle-class women into veterinary doctor positions in countries across the global north. This shift may change the gendered expectations and associations of the job, but early research suggests that the work cannot yet be called feminized, but rather that it remains masculinized in key ways (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010). The often unpaid caring and emotional work involved in sheltering, rescue, advocacy and activism is highly feminized, both numerically and as socially constructed (Coulter, 2016a; Gaarder, 2011a, 2011b; Herzog, 2007; Markovits & Queen, 2009; Taylor, 2010).

Animal cruelty investigation work offers a complicated gendered occupational case. We focus on a regionally based workforce's specifics yet also raise broader questions about the implications of the gendered and multispecies interconnections of this occupation for the women and men involved, and for the animals dependent on their work. After briefly tracing the origins of cruelty investigation labour and outlining the details of our study, we highlight the key findings, focusing on the most salient gendered aspects. In keeping with feminist political economy and labour process theory, we highlight both material and experiential dimensions, and people's work-lives to recognize that paid labour affects and is affected by factors beyond the formal workplace (Coulter, 2016a).

Cruelty investigators are law enforcement workers, yet are unique relative to comparable occupational groups because in contrast to human-focused policing forces, cruelty investigation is feminized through both its social construction and, in the case of our data, in the numerical composition of the workforce itself. Cruelty investigation work has been systematically devalued materially and culturally, and we posit that gendered associations are a key reason why. Yet we also suggest that cultural ambivalence and contradictory ideas about the place of animals in our societies, even the most-loved companion animals who are the primary focus of current cruelty investigation work, reinforce and perpetuate the occupational devaluation. In other words, in the case of cruelty investigation work, it is not the occupation that influences the gendering processes, since law enforcement is a male-dominated and masculinized type of labour, even the human-centred police work which involves dogs or horses. Rather, it is the gendered and multispecies entanglements of the work and the victims which coalesce in what we call the compounding feminization of cruelty investigation labour. The feminization of animal cruelty investigation work contributes to the devaluation of the workforce, reproduces and exacerbates occupational risks, and constrains workers' abilities to more effectively help vulnerable animals.

2 | THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The links between violence against animals and the simultaneous or subsequent abuse of women and children are well-established (e.g., Brewster & Reyes, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2005; Fitzgerald, Barrett & Stevenson, forthcoming;

Gullone, 2012; Linzey, 2009). The Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States has begun tracking crimes against animals alongside felony crimes, a reflection of the organization's awareness of the broader social implications of harming other species. There is a growing and extensive body of literature on animals and law which considers how to best protect, defend and conceptualize animals legally (e.g., Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Favre, 2016; Francione, 1996; Tauber, 2015; Wise, 2014). Yet animal cruelty investigation work itself has received scant scholarly attention, particularly in the contemporary context (see Hughes & Lawson, 2011).

In countries like England, Canada and the United States, early cruelty investigation was pursued through the creation of a local, regional or national Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) or a similar humane organization. Such efforts were motivated, in particular, by public abuse of the cart horses who laboured continuously and conspicuously in rural and urban communities alike. Early animal protection work was often, although not always, connected to a broader social reform agenda prioritizing the welfare of women, children and animals (Beers, 2006; Chen, 2005; Gaynor, 2007; Kean, 1998). The first advocates focused on decidedly political efforts, on front-line interventions or pursued some combination. In 19th-century England, the possibility of the public, human-focused police force overseeing the activities of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) was raised, but an agreement was never reached (Harrison, 1973).

Class and gender figured in early animal protection work (which was almost exclusively racialized as white) (Beers, 2006; Cronin, forthcoming; Ingram, 2014; McShane & Tarr, 2007; see also Greene, 2008). Both women and men participated, though men were more involved in the interactive work of investigating cruelty and more commonly held the high-status leadership positions within humane organizations. Early humane societies charged membership dues in order to be able to perform their work, even though they were often run by wealthy individuals. Given the breadth and depth of poverty, most people would not have been able to afford such fees, nor had an abundance of time for the cause.

Over the last century, some of these dynamics have changed, while key patterns have endured. Animal protection efforts are no longer disproportionately the domain of the upper class. Animal cruelty investigations in most other jurisdictions outside of Scandinavia remain mainly the province of non-governmental charitable organizations, however. Human-focused police forces are normally able to enforce animal cruelty legislation in their given jurisdictions, but most of this work continues to be performed by SPCAs and humane societies that receive little, if any, public funding, have substantially smaller workforces and pay less than human-focused police forces. This is, of course, highly unusual — or in Hughes and Lawson's (2011) words, is a 'seeming paradox' (p. 375) — among law enforcement bodies. It is also not uncommon for some animal cruelty investigators to work without compensation as volunteers. As noted, little scholarly research has been done on this work in the recent and contemporary context, with Arnold Arluke's (2004; see also Arluke, 2006) ethnographic study of humane law enforcers in a regional SPCA in the United States serving as the primary exception. Our research identifies a number of similar findings, but we also bring a gendered lens and analysis to bear, offer more recent data and focus on a different jurisdiction.

3 | THE ORGANIZATION AND THE STUDY

The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) was formed in 1873. Today the organization is legally required to enforce regional and national animal cruelty laws which define cruelty as both wilful actions that cause distress or injury, and the failure to provide reasonable care (i.e., neglect). The latter can stem from a lack of knowledge or resources, or it may be intentional. The OSPCA is a non-profit and charity reliant on fundraising for its operations, including its investigations. In Ontario, the government began providing OSPCA with a small amount of targeted funding ($5M Canadian per year) in 2012, but this only covers one third of the animal protection budget. The OSPCA provides a range of animal welfare programmes and services, including sheltering and some humane education; cruelty investigation is one of a number of areas of work governed by the organization's board and hired leadership. Structurally, the OSPCA is comprised of a series of regional branches as well as more autonomous but affiliated local humane societies.

The OSPCA inspectorate was the focus of our research: 91 people, 62 per cent of whom are women. They are responsible for investigating 18,000 complaints about suspected animal cruelty per year in a geographic range of about 1 million square kilometres with a human population of nearly 14 million. Seventy per cent of the officers who participated in the research are over 30 years of age. Three quarters of them have completed some post-secondary education, most in applied educational programmes, and some have university degrees. Thirty-two per cent of the officers have worked in cruelty investigations at the OSPCA for 3 years or less, 24 per cent for 4–9 years and 44 per cent for 10 years or more. The longest serving workers had been at the OSPCA for 23, 25 and 31 years, respectively.

The cruelty investigations occupational hierarchy is comprised of one chief inspector, one deputy chief, four senior investigators, two regional investigators, 19 inspectors and 64 agents. Most work full-time but some are part-time employees. The hourly wage is $19-21/hour for agents, $22-25/hour for inspectors, $30-32/hour for senior inspectors, and $32-35/hour for the deputy chief (all amounts in Canadian dollars). The chief inspector is salaried. For comparison, the wage for the four senior investigators is very similar to the *starting* pay for new officers in the region's human-focused police force (before overtime, which the latter can accrue). Animal cruelty investigators are paid significantly less than human-focused law enforcement officers.

Since 2012, staff members employed directly by the OSPCA (that is, at regional branches not the affiliated local humane societies) have received an annual cost-of-living pay increase. Cruelty investigations staff at OSPCA branches are afforded eight paid sick days per year. Paid vacation begins at two weeks per year and then increases based on years served. Modest benefits packages are paid for primarily by the officers and there are no pensions. The working conditions for officers employed at affiliate humane societies are different and vary a great deal depending on the community. Fifty-eight per cent of the investigations staff work for affiliates. The pay is usually lower, officers at affiliates often do not have benefits packages and they are more likely to be responsible for additional, non-enforcement work such as animal control (collecting stray animals etc.). However, a few affiliates are unionized and certain aspects of these officers' working conditions are better as a result.

The region relies primarily on a complaints-based reporting system, and the OSPCA is legally empowered to investigate suspected cases of animal mistreatment in homes and in facilities where animals are kept for exhibition, entertainment, boarding, hire or sale. Officers are responsible for all stages of the investigation process once the complaint has been recorded by the dispatchers. Officers may observe a property, request permission to enter, can speak with people and examine animals and the facilities, obtain warrants, issue orders to remedy problems, revisit to ensure compliance, seize animals and lay charges. If charges are laid and cases brought to court, officers are responsible for preparing and providing pertinent legal documentation themselves, and are regularly called to testify.

Officers will receive new calls that need investigating, follow up on existing cases, complete paperwork and reports, speak and work with local or regional police, children's aid societies or other social service providers, and participate in legal proceedings. Senior inspectors have additional responsibilities including the inspection of zoos and indigenous communities. Seven officers are also on a major case management team (and three are reserve members) which involves a separate daily call load and/or responsibility for media, fleet management, livestock complaints or special projects. As noted, the OSPCA now receives 18,000 complaints a year and has 91 workers responsible for this very large caseload, which is often even larger in actuality when combined with ongoing cases from previous years.

Uniforms were introduced for branch officers only a few years ago. The provisions and equipment at affiliates vary. There are 10 local regions where the cruelty investigations staff person has no office space, works from home and has to use their own vehicle. Some officers have used donated vehicles baring a company or business logo which not only contributes to a lack of public respect for them as law enforcers, but causes confusion.

We employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach in our study (see Tashakori & Teddle, 2003). First, an online survey was sent to all members of the cruelty investigations staff and was completed by 64 per cent of them (n = 58). The survey focused on workers' background and training, motivations, current responsibilities, occupational risks, perceptions and experiences of their work, and what they would like to see done to improve their conditions and efficacy. Many questions were close-ended and thus generated quantitative findings, but some were open-ended and allowed for more qualitative answers.

Subsequently, two focus groups were held with officers (*n* = 15), one of which was entirely comprised of women, in order to probe the central issues raised in the survey more deeply, allow for additional qualitative insight to be gleaned, and encourage generative and cumulative exchange among participants. The chief investigator (a woman) also answered questions in her official capacity. All other participants were afforded confidentiality and are only identified here by gender. When multiple participants are speaking, their gender is denoted by M for man or W for woman. Consistent with the sequential explanatory approach, the quantitative survey data were analysed first using basic descriptive statistical methods. The qualitative focus group phase was then undertaken to provide clarification and richer context for the central themes that emerged through the analysis of the survey data. The findings we report here are derived from all of these datasets.

4 | KEY FINDINGS: PHYSICAL RISKS

Public perceptions of animal cruelty investigators vary. Some people are grateful and supportive, but the cruelty investigators are also criticized by those who feel they are too active and interventionist, and by others, including some animal advocates, who feel they are not active enough. These critiques are frequently quite vociferous and denigrating. All officers are affected by this devaluation, but women face additional disrespect. Some women spoke about their reluctance to talk about where they work in basic social settings due to their concerns about potential tensions. One put it this way:

> *I think 'oh my god, are you going to want to hit me?' because there is never any in between. They either want to shit down your throat or tell you stories.*

On the job, the derision they encounter is often coupled with sexism, which is articulated by some of the women officers as follows:

> *W: I was with another officer at a zoo, and it was completely obvious that the guy — we both had the same opinion — we were telling the guy this is what needs to be done. And he said to [male fellow officer], 'she doesn't even know what she is talking about', and would not talk to me. And I was like, this guy is completely sexist, and it took me aback, because it was so obvious. I guess sometimes we deal with it and it's not as obvious.*

> *W: I had a newbie, he hadn't been on for very long, we went to deal with a call, and I'm letting him talk and the messaging wasn't getting across. So I intervened, and the guy [being investigated] lost his shit all over me. And I was like, I just said the same thing he did, but as soon as I started talking, it was like 'no woman is going to tell me what to do'. And you get that, I will say I think to my advantage I think it makes a difference as a female, I find that because I am a tall girl and I have my boots, when I get on I don't think I get as much attitude, because I am taller and I look very stern on a good day without trying, so I get less flack. But I found that yes I can go with male officers and they [people being investigated] are like, whatever. But if it's a female officer, especially with the farmers, especially the old timers, clearly the domestic abusers, [they are] like 'no woman is going to tell me what to do'.*

Gendered performance is clearly important, as a number of the women emphasized the benefits of embodying a more masculinist persona when in the field, something not unique to animal cruelty investigators. Female officers also highlighted the recent introduction of the uniform which looks like those worn by human-centred police forces as important for the public's perception of them:

> *W: I think it's changed because of the uniform. That was a huge impact as a woman going out in a uniform. But what [co-worker] says is absolutely true. I often said to my new ones: the first part you are going to feel you don't know what you are doing, just put it on ...*

W: Fake it 'til you make it.

W: Fake it 'til you make it, you don't want them to see you wavering. If you want to waver, do it in the car. You can't let them, those men, if you let them know that they will intimidate you — or anybody, there are some women too — it will be that much harder of a hill to climb to get back up.

These officers were clearly very conscious of the role of gendered perceptions external to them and their own performance.

Given the size of the workloads and the budget of the organization, officers normally work alone. In certain circumstances, such as if a reported situation sounds particularly dangerous or if a complaint has been received about someone known to the OSPCA, two officers may make initial contact. Officers can also contact local or regional police and request support. However, human-centred police forces are themselves busy and are not always able to assist. The officers reported approaching properties with police an average of 10 per cent of the time.

There are clear risks to such an arrangement for all workers but even more so for women. The risks are compounded because the OSPCA inspectors currently do not have access to the Canadian Police Information Centre, the centralized database which provides information about previous charges, warrants and records. Investigators are largely relying on information provided by the person who called in the complaint. People who report suspected abuse are normally well-intentioned, but may lack essential information or misread a situation. Officers explained that misunderstanding the severity of a situation is common, something Arluke (2004) also identified in his research. Approaching an unknown person or property for the purpose of investigating suspected violent actions with minimal information was universally highlighted as a serious concern by the officers. OSPCA staff felt the same way as the investigators interviewed by Arluke (2004) more than a decade ago: '[O]fficers agreed that the most difficult and dangerous part of their work came from the people they encountered on the job' (p. 97). Of this challenge, an OSPCA officer said the following:

I cover [name of area] for instance, and I have a good rapport with that police service. They will often provide me with that information if I go in ahead of time. Problem is when you get nine or ten calls a day you can't do that with every single call. So, unless the complainant (the person calling it in) provides us with details that this person has previously been violent or flagged or something, we do go in cold. We have very little information.

Another woman said:

The only time we get the police is if the informant has given you an indication that there should be a concern, like they are violent, or if we have a history with them. But 95% of the time we are going in completely blind and have no idea what we are getting into.

More specifically, officers rarely know in advance if they are approaching individuals with weapons, an otherwise volatile or dangerous situation, someone with a serious mental health disorder, or people in crisis who might immediately need additional support and assistance. A long-serving female officer said:

I say this to new agents, is that you go to every door in defence mode. You have no idea how they are going to receive you, what you will be dealing with, and the impact of that every day [is serious because] every hour that you are on the road you are in defence mode. And then you are dealing with whatever roles [are needed] once that door opens: sometimes you're the social worker, sometimes you're the parent, sometimes you're the law enforcement. There's so many hats that you're wearing, but again, we don't know what we are going into. We don't get that resource. And even when we are going into those situations, we are often alone; the police have their partners, and we have some defence tactics in our training, but we are alone.

Often the officers find themselves on the receiving end of abusive behaviour. All had experienced verbal abuse which included rape threats, death threats, and threats of sexual and other kinds of violence against their families,

sometimes including specific references to real details (such as their children's schools). Officers of all genders were insulted, and women confronted both gender-neutral verbal abuse (e.g., 'Nazi', 'dog killer') and degrading female-specific and misogynistic terms. Some had experienced attempted physical attacks, and some had been assaulted. Alarmingly, officers felt it was only a matter of time before one of them was killed. In the Canadian city of Calgary in the province of Alberta, a municipal bylaw officer was killed in 2012 by a man who says he thought his dogs were going to be taken (he was found not criminally responsible for psychological reasons).

The female officers discussed their perceptions of the danger in detail:

> *W: And it's going to happen [an officer getting killed].*
>
> *W: Oh, absolutely.*
>
> *W: And I tell you, I say that, it's going to happen. And I know that when we did strategic planning a couple years ago that was one of the things I was saying: the safety of our officers. They are out there, someone is going to get hurt and you can use all your defence [training] that you have [but] when you go to the door and you knock and you go to the side — and they open the door and they have a gun, it takes one second. Someone is going to get [killed]. How no one has been seriously injured in my time here has been a miracle, has been an absolute miracle.*
>
> *W: I've had some really close calls. I remember one of our officers was responding to a domestic situation. [He] had written orders and was going to go follow up on those orders. Something had come up that was more of a priority, so he dealt with that first, then arrived on scene to find police, ambulance there. The veterinarian and the farrier and the female, the wife, they were all shot. And, if this particular individual had been there, he would have been shot as well if it weren't for the fact that a priority call had come in.*

One female officer was confronted by a man she was investigating who was armed with a hatchet. She was able to remove herself from the situation without being physically harmed, but later learned that the man was wanted in connection with a murder investigation and that a warrant had been issued prior to her arriving at his property.

Risks are exacerbated by the fact that some officers are responsible for large remote and rural sub-regions where the public is less likely to witness the interactions between officers and the individuals they are investigating. Some of the jurisdictions can take five or six hours to simply traverse in a vehicle. The long distances combined with the large workloads further affect officers' abilities to thoroughly do their jobs and require them to make difficult decisions.

> *I cover two counties and this year I've got seventy calls in, that's not counting the ones left over from last year. So, just to give you a perspective, if I'm at the south end of my territory, and I have to go to the north end, it's a five and a half hour drive. So, I'm eleven hours in and I haven't got any work done, just going there and back. So, it's very difficult, and I'm by myself, I cover all those territories by myself. I work by myself and I don't have the capability. Actually sometimes I don't lay charges when I should simply because I don't have the time other than that I'd be leaving other stuff sitting on the side.*

In other words, the material constraints on officers also can directly affect animals. Particularly in those areas with few investigators for large spaces, officers are being forced to make difficult decisions about how they allocate their time and undertake their work.

Moreover, in many rural and remote areas, cell phone coverage is uneven and officers enter into zones without service/signal on a daily basis. Some local humane societies, including those which are unionized, have two-way radios for officers, but the majority of the OSPCA investigators do not. Officers highlighted this as posing a significant risk. Branch officers' vehicles are equipped with a global positioning system (GPS), so it would be possible to find the recent location of these officers if she/he went missing, though perhaps after much time had passed. The length of time investigation visits take varies substantially. Someone on a property conducting an investigation out of cell phone range and without a radio for an hour may be engaged in useful dialogue with those in possession of animals, or may

be in danger; there is no way for someone on the outside to know. Relaying her fears for one of her colleagues who works in a remote area, a female officer said, 'It is so dangerous. What is she supposed to do if someone attacks her in the middle of the bush?' In other words, it is commonplace for officers to be conducting initial investigations by themselves without prior knowledge about who they are approaching, and doing so without a way to contact their supervisor or emergency services.

Without question, these conditions pose risks for both women and men, but female officers are at heightened risk. Female law enforcement officers more generally often face harassment, sexism and belittlement on the job (e.g., Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Shelley, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011; Somvadee & Morash, 2008), and this is true for women doing animal cruelty investigation work. This larger pattern is compounded for humane officers because a large majority of animal abusers are men. Female officers working on their own, in isolated areas, without the ability to request assistance, face even greater risks.

5 | KEY FINDINGS: EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RISKS — AND REWARDS

OSPCA officers see animals in distress, regularly. They see violence, neglect and difficult situations such as people trying to cope with dire poverty or illness, or the abuse of children and women alongside animals. The work of animal cruelty investigations is physically, psychologically and emotionally trying, and workers must be part police officer, part nurse and part social worker (Coulter, 2016a). The challenges are exacerbated because they often work alone in the field, and may need to travel, by themselves, for many hours. Women and men were forthcoming about these dynamics:

> *W: When you go to a horrible situation and you don't get to show your emotions, you have to be in your zone, and then you get back in that car and your heart is breaking because you have to leave that dog behind because you don't have enough [evidence] to do the order. And you're driving, and you don't have anyone to talk to.*

> *W: I've had to pull over because I am crying too hard to drive. I've had to stop if I can't cope, I can't see, I've had to stop until I calm down.*

Reports of an emotionally and physically challenging and risky work environment were not isolated to women; all officers spoke to the extreme and wearing demands of their work, and, notably, the connections between the physical and emotional risks and their working conditions. Of the relationship between working alone and the psychological effects, two male officers said the following:

> *M: I think that there would be a lot of benefits to having a partner if we did have that ability, primarily, of course, for safety, but secondly due to the work we do and the things we see. Because we are working alone, we have no extra body to vent these things off to, so we are forced to carry them around, deal with all the other stressful things during the day, and check out at four, five or six, and then go home. Whereas if you had a partner you could probably vent that off at the time that it happened and put it away in your mind and be done with it, but because we don't have the ability to do that … We do see a lot of not nice things and I think that that would be beneficial just for the emotional and mental health of the officers.*

> *M: Yeah, it's one of the key things because it's such a common thing that officers working alone are more susceptible to mental illness that I called them 'isoagents': isolated, they work on their own. They're alone, they might work from their home so they don't even have an office to go to, to have social interaction with coworkers and they might not even get a phone call, everything is email, text for the week. And they start to sink into a hole they don't even realize: burnout, depression, compassion fatigue. It's a big concern and it's such a simple thing, one on one interaction on a weekly basis can make such a difference.*

A female officer highlighted the low pay as also contributing to decreased wellbeing:

> *W: To touch on what [co-worker] was saying in terms of wages, I find that because we get paid such a poor wage, and the responsibility that we carry in a day, that often times that causes your own personal stress. Because we do not make a lot of money for what we do, and obviously I think anyone here would agree that it's not about the money, but at the same time you need to support yourself. So that sort of flows into your personal life, and sort of causes financial stress, and then if you're financially stressed after dealing with all the emotional and mental stress. It's just compounded. Whereas I find, I think that if we were paid a wage that was more reasonable that that would offset some of the things that we were responsible for. For example, if we had an incredible workload but we were being paid accordingly, then that may be like okay, yes I do have a lot of work, but I am being paid for the work I am responsible for. Whereas right now, I don't find that that is in balance.*

Paid work affects people's wellbeing and lives beyond the job, or what we would call their work-lives (Coulter, 2016a, 2016b). Officers speak frankly of compassion fatigue, also called secondary stress disorder, which can lead to depression, burnout and other mental health challenges. This is an established problem for people in social services, first responders, and others who must confront harm and trauma on a regular basis. Workers who witness horrors and empathize with victims are negatively affected, even though they have not experienced the violence themselves. This is also a problem that has been identified among people who rescue animals, and has been recognized as significant enough to warrant developing interventions (see, e.g., Rank, Zaparanick, & Gentry, 2009). Animal cruelty investigators, therefore, labour at the intersection of two forms of work that are simultaneously emotionally difficult and from which they cannot easily disengage.

Officers spoke about feeling unable to shut off, literally or figuratively, working well beyond their shift, foregoing vacation and feeling guilty while on vacation worrying about animals who might not be getting the protection they need. Women in particular raised these issues. One articulated the problem as follows:

> *I find it's stressful for me to not to respond quickly because I feel like I'm adding to the animal's distress. So we talked about doing it tomorrow or shut your phone off, but for me, it creates a distress on me because I am thinking there is an animal that needs me and I need to respond. We don't have enough resources and by not having the resources then I feel that, I feel you have to work longer and harder to make up for that because animals are counting on us to get down to it.*

Another said:

> *I just talked to an officer literally two days ago, because I'm not taking vacation. It's like, well, I only work with one other person, and if I go away, they won't fill them in and poor [co-worker] will be stuck doing all the calls.*

Another officer shared this:

> *And with vacation too, certainly in my area and certainly with [co-worker], when we go on vacation there is an officer that does only emergency calls. So if I take two weeks on Christmas time, three days before that following Monday I am getting a lot of anxiety think[ing] about what nightmares I am walking into. And you can't enjoy your vacation because you are laying with your girlfriends on the beach and you're thinking about all the calls you're going to walk into because we don't have the manpower to have two guys in while you're off taking a much needed mental break. And then we don't take vacation because we feel guilty because we think they [the animals] are going to sit there needing care.*

Arluke (2004) identified the same patterns and argues that workers engage in a tricky process wherein they seek to maintain empathy yet simultaneously employ bracketing and coping strategies given what they witness and their frustrations with ongoing abuse, weak legislation, a shortage of resources, and other systemic limitations on their ability to prevent and prosecute cruelty. Indeed, 88 per cent of the survey respondents identified stronger animal

cruelty laws as an important or very important factor that would improve their work satisfaction. Arluke suggests that humane officers develop a sense of 'humane realism' as they negotiate the law enforcement and care work requirements of their jobs, a concept of enduring explanatory utility.

Notably, there was no clear gendered pattern evident in discussions of psychological risks and essentially all officers raised the problem to a greater or lesser degree. However, given broader socialization patterns which encourage women to be more empathetic, caring and expressive about emotions like sadness and fear, we can posit that there are gendered implications, most likely a deepening of the emotional experiences and hardships for women, and potentially greater repression of these feelings among men.

The OSPCA, like many animal advocacy organizations, is cognizant of the emotional challenges of the work. Some supports are already in place and more are being discussed to assist workers. Three quarters of the officers identified structural changes that would be beneficial, like partners, but they were not optimistic about the prospects for an influx of co-workers. Certain workers were also uncertain about whether any additional resources and future hires should be allocated for partnering in order to offer reciprocal, daily support or whether officers should continue to work on their own in order to reach more animals.

Indeed, a commitment to the animals was central as a motivator and sustainer for the officers. Despite the risks, officers saw this as meaningful work. Only five out of the 58 survey participants identified their motivation for initially applying to be a cruelty investigator as not related to serving animals but rather as something intended to lead to a career in human-focused law enforcement. An even smaller number (3) identified future career goals outside of the OSPCA; the rest sought to keep their current positions for the long term, move up within the inspectorate or to retire at the pertinent time. In combination with the length of time officers had already spent working in cruelty investigations, these data suggest that this is a highly committed workforce, despite the challenges and the devaluation of their labour. All survey respondents and focus group participants identified assisting the animals as the most rewarding element of their work except for one who listed 'helping the community including animal owners'.

This commitment was reflected in actions officers took regularly, particularly when people being investigated were not deliberately committing cruelty, but rather were marginalized and in need of additional support. For example, a female officer shared the following, which had happened the morning before our focus group.

> *This man is a sweetheart. He has a severe mental disorder; he has been diagnosed with severe depression. He gets $660/month from the government to live on, $330 of that goes to his subsidized rent, leaving him with about $300. X amount goes to his phone, and x amount goes to his cable, and it leaves him with $66 at the end of the month, after he has bought food and litter for his two cats. $66 to feed himself for the whole month! This man loves his cats, he's got two. He saved his money from his $66 for seven months, to get enough money to put his female cat through our spay and neuter clinic. Seven months!*
>
> *[But] his one cat has a tape worm, so what am I supposed to do? Go over there and write him an order that I know he can't comply with? And then go and take his cat away so he falls further into depression? For what? He is a good owner, he puts food for the cats before himself and thankfully we came up with a viable solution — he was crying on the phone. So, we picked a vet, his normal vet. The cats are going there, and we are going to pay for it under investigations, and I was just talking to one of our officers, and we are going to go load up with a bunch of food and litter [to help him].*

Another female officer shared this experience:

> *We see the worst first ... They will call because the dog is crying and making noise and they think the dog is being abused, but it is the wife getting the shit kicked out of her, and the dog is reacting to that. Or we get called and oh the apartment is dirty, well the woman was in so much back pain she couldn't move, the apartment was cluttered ... [The landlord is saying] 'you're going to take that cat, you're going to take the cat'. And I said no. I said 'where is her next of kin?' [But] she doesn't have any. So I argued with the landlord to get her help. 'If you want your unit cleaned, you are going to have to get her help, she can't*

walk, her pain meds are not working.' The landlord reported her because of the cat, but we are not taking her only friend if we can help it.

Officers often sought to engage social service providers, local government and charities to help marginalized people they encountered. Such compassionate acts almost always occur away from the public's view, and they cannot be quantified. In cruelty investigation work, success can be defined as removing animals from harm, but it also includes correcting actions, finding resources, and allowing people and animals to remain together under the appropriate conditions. This provides evidence against the popularized claim that people who care about animals dislike people, as the wellbeing of animals and people are not mutually exclusive for this workforce. In this context, however, caring about both people and animals likely increases the emotional ante; the rewards are generated alongside and despite the risks.

6 | GENDERED AND MULTISPECIES CONCLUSIONS

To properly understand this occupation, the larger context and its gendered dimensions must be considered. As noted, animal cruelty investigation is atypical among law enforcement professions due to the lack of public funding and because of its feminization. We see these two factors as linked, and argue that they are compounded by the multispecies entanglements of the job. The feminization of cruelty investigations is affected by who does the work, and by the fact that the job focuses on animals. Women do the large majority of animal protection and advocacy work more broadly (Herzog, 2007; Jasper & Nelkin, 1992; Munro, 2001) and women tend to exhibit higher degrees of altruism than men (Dietz, Kalof, & Stern, 2002; Kalof, 2000; Kalof, Dietz, Stern, & Guagnano, 1999). Similarly, women seem to be more attracted to cruelty investigation, and consistent with altruistic motivations, they demonstrate a willingness to endure difficult conditions in order to provide assistance. Other law enforcement agencies which offer better pay, benefits and working conditions in the region are disproportionately staffed by men, are entirely unionized and are publicly funded.

Tolerating difficult working conditions in order to help others is not uncommon in caring professions like social work (e.g., Baines, 2006). The emotional connections and politics of labour and care play out in similar but also distinct ways when animals are involved (Coulter, 2016a, 2016b). A sense of moral, ethical and affective commitment is a recurring pattern among those who work for animals across contexts, whether they are doing so for pay or not (e.g., Parreñas, 2012; Taylor, 2004). Akin to social service workers (e.g., Baines, 2011), some of those who work with/for animals, like cruelty investigations officers, do even more work, including unpaid tasks and overtime, out of a commitment to those they serve.

Recognizing that your work makes a difference is important and clearly rewarding, but it is not a substitute for economic or physical security. As Bunderson and Thompson (2009) put it, animal-focused human workers driven by a strong sense of purpose may experience 'occupational identification, transcendent meaning, and occupational importance, on the one hand, and unbending duty, personal sacrifice, and heightened vigilance, on the other' (p. 39). Workers who are driven by deep commitment can be more easily exploitable by less-than-scrupulous employers, more prone to self-exploitation and more willing to tolerate poor conditions. Moreover, people who work for animals may eschew workplace resistance intended to improve their working conditions out of a perceived fear that it may harm the animals (Miller, 2008), whether this is true or not.

In most jurisdictions, including the one which was the focus of this study, animal cruelty is not a prominent public policy focus and not deemed worthy of significant public investment. Local governments are more likely to fund skeletal animal control operations which are designed to minimize potential public health risks. As a result, cruelty investigation, even though legally mandated, is left primarily to charities and non-profits reliant on donations and fundraising, such as through bake sales, as was the case in the jurisdiction we studied. In these cases and given this context, employers may not be purposefully seeking to exploit workers, but instead are highly financially constrained, particularly given the increased scrutiny and critiques of how charities spend their donations. The public may not properly understand that animals directly benefit when front-line workers are properly equipped and compensated.

The relatively lower quality working conditions of animal cruelty investigation officers (in comparison to human-focused law enforcement) and the risks they face as workers are thus interwoven and reinforcing. All law enforcers face risk on the job, but the situation for animal cruelty investigators is highly unusual if not unique. The conditions identified above would not be tolerated or deemed acceptable for human-focused law enforcers. This de-prioritization directly affects the women and men who do the work, and women face additional disrespect and risks. Moreover, despite their efforts and accomplishments, they are constrained and cannot reach as many animals as they would like, investigate certain situations as thoroughly as would be ideal or engage in much preventative humane education. As a result, both the workers and animals suffer, albeit in different ways.

Undoubtedly, larger social ideas about animals play a significant role in these processes. Animals are differently infused with gendered characteristics depending on the particulars and context. Even distinct breeds within a single species, like dogs, have different gendered associations (e.g., Dobermans are gendered differently than Toy Poodles). The victimization of animals is often feminized, however, as documented in examinations of rendering animals into meat (Adams, 1990) and into prey in sport hunting (Kalof, Fitzgerald, & Baralt, 2004). Moreover, animal abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men, and can be instrumentalized in the performance and construction of masculinity (Fitzgerald, Stevenson, & Verbora, 2016; Herzog, 2007; Luke, 2007). On the flipside, the animalization of women and other non-dominant social groups is a common cultural trope used to 'other' and denigrate (Adams, 1990; Fitzgerald, 2004; Patterson, 2002). These human–animal entanglements compound the feminization of animal cruelty investigation work and workers.

As a result, animal cruelty investigators are located within a gendered and multispecies cycle of devaluation. Their jobs are not deemed worthy of public funding and continue primarily because of fundraising, an always volatile revenue source. This means that the pay is lower than other law enforcement agencies and that they are operating with fewer resources. This translates into large caseloads, solitary shifts and daily risks which stem from a lack of basics such as reliable communications. Although workers are accomplishing a great deal given the circumstances, these structural constraints, exacerbated by weak animal cruelty legislation and legal systems which normally do not take crimes against animals very seriously, restrict workers' abilities to most effectively do their jobs. They are already viewed in uneven ways by the public and face verbal, physical and electronic disrespect or abuse. The institutionalized limitations on their labour require them to act (or not act) in particular ways which further affects how they are perceived and thus treated. Particularly in the context of austerity, it would take a sizeable shift, including widespread public support, for governmental actors to deem cruelty investigation worthy of full or even additional public funding in most jurisdictions, though we argue that such investment is worthwhile. The publicly funded Scandinavian exceptions and recently created animal-focused branch of the New York City police department will offer useful lessons. Yet it is worth noting that certain female officers in our study expressed concern that better public funding and improved working conditions might mean cruelty investigations work would become more attractive to men and thus contribute to job insecurity or fewer opportunities for women. Given historical trends in other employment sectors in a number of countries, such fears might be warranted and could create a gendered catch 22.

Cruelty investigation work illustrates how labour involving animals can involve what we call compounding feminization, as more women workers perform devalued jobs which are entangled with uneven social ideas about animals. Indeed, in Ontario, like many other places, companion animals are privileged well above farmed animals, for example. Yet there continues to be cultural ambivalence about the status, roles, and the political and financial implications of taking even companion animals' lives seriously. Crucially, there are substantial real-world effects of these gendered and interspecies dynamics for the wellbeing of the women and men enforcing cruelty legislation, and for the lives, deaths and suffering of animals. Cruelty investigation is an important area of work, and these are examples of humane jobs (Coulter, 2016a, 2016c, 2017) which warrant more analysis, improved conditions and greater public support.

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