Stock Shows and Rodeos: The Crossroads of Commodification, Consumption, and Care of Nonhuman Animals

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STOCK SHOWS AND RODEOS: THE CROSSROADS OF COMMODIFICATION, CONSUMPTION, AND CARE OF NONHUMAN ANIMALS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology in the College of Sciences at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2021

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex relationship between humans and nonhuman animals through the lens of stock shows and rodeos (SSR). This study employs a feminist theoretical framework and an interpretive qualitative research methodology to gain insight into the ways in which humans practice a range of speciesist behaviors relating to their commodification, consumption, and care of other animals. Data consist of semi-structured interviews with 21 individuals who participate in SSR as spectators and competitors and with two animal medical experts, along with field observations at three different SSR held in Florida and Texas. Findings suggest that nonhuman animals serve many of the same roles beyond the stock show and rodeo, such as companions, competitive athletes, workers, food, and clothing. An analysis of the environment and culture of SSR exposes forms of leisure, entertainment, and competition where nonhuman animals are involuntary participants within an animal sport and entertainment complex constructed by humans. In addition, this human construction is tied to a romanticized version of frontier culture. Additional analysis shows that commodification of animal bodies and consumption of those bodies as entertainment, food, and clothing, is necessary in the maintenance of this animal sport and entertainment complex. Finally, findings support the notion that humans love and care for nonhuman animals, however, that love and care is contingent upon the value of the animal. This study helps build upon the scholarship regarding human-nonhuman animal studies, including in sports and entertainment, and it illuminates the ways in which other animals are social actors subject to similar structural controls and constraints as humans.
Key Terms: nonhuman animals, speciesism, commodification, consumption, care
To my family, friends, and companion animals, I dedicate this dissertation to you all, from the bottom of my heart. This was not a solo journey; rather, it was a journey whereby you offered your love, support, and encouragement. More importantly, you provided unwavering belief in my ability to achieve this dream and for that I am grateful.
Writing a dissertation is a challenge that no one person takes on without the support and guidance of numerous others. I would like to thank several people who have helped make this challenging journey achievable. Dr. Liz Grauerholz, my dissertation chair, has been my mentor and advisor since arriving to UCF and from an academic perspective, it was a match made in heaven for me. I have felt supported since day one and am fortunate to have gained a wonderful friend who shares so many of my values. It is Dr. Grauerholz’s guidance and often calming and compassionate words that helped me to keep my sanity during the most challenging days in this PhD program. I would also like to thank the other members of my dissertation committee, each of whom provided their own unique perspectives and support. Dr. Amanda Koontz is one of the first professors I met upon arriving to UCF and I was fortunate to immediately become her teaching assistant during my first semester. Working with Dr. Koontz led to my deep interest in our consumer culture, which is something that I have incorporated into my ongoing work. Dr. Mike Armato, another committee member, has so graciously shared his enthusiasm for theory. I did not think I could get more interested in theory, but Dr. Armato’s knowledge and passion for the subject indeed spilled over. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Colter Ellis, who served as my outside committee member. When it was time to select an outside committee member, I had no doubt that our shared interests and Dr. Colter’s knowledge in the human-nonhuman animal relationship would be critical to my success. I was right.

The dissertation certainly is not the only part of this experience. I had many classes along the way with several other professors who I would also like to thank: Dr. Elizabeth Mustaine, Dr. Shannon Carter, Dr. Melanie Hinojosa, Dr. Scott Carter, Dr. Jason Ford, and Dr. Jay Corzine. I found great value in each course I took at UCF, and I have learned a great deal from each professor. I promise to make all of you proud to call me a colleague. The same goes for the other professors with whom I did not have class, but who were supportive just the same.

This study could not have been done without the study participants, who shall remain anonymous. They were inviting and open and I appreciate their involvement with the study. I will, however, name the two experts, Dr. Ben Espy and Dr. Peter Scheifele, who kindly took time out of their busy schedules to speak with me. They expanded my knowledge in ways that will only benefit me moving forward.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends from this UCF Sociology program, especially those of you from Lucky Cohort 13, the name we assigned ourselves as the thirteenth cohort to enter the UCF Sociology PhD program. They all served as my collective rock throughout this journey, along with a few others from previous and subsequent cohorts. What a journey it has been!
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<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRCA</td>
<td>Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSR</td>
<td>Stock Show and Rodeo</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sociologists have long neglected including nonhuman animals in the examination of our social world (Bryant 1979). Francione (1991:1317) posited, “our disrespect for nonhumans is so profound that virtually any human interest—however trivial—is sufficient to trump any animal interest—however significant.” The limited scholarship that does exist is largely interdisciplinary, looking at other animals from a philosophical perspective (Nussbaum 1996, 2004; Potter 2005; Rollin 2005), as objects of experiments (Akhtar 2015; Greek et al. 2012), as therapy animals for vulnerable populations (Creagan et al. 2015; Hawkins and Williams 2017; Levine et al. 2013; Melson 2003; Miles et al. 2017), and more. Within sociological literature attempts have been made to explore the interconnected relationships between nonhuman animals and humans, taking into account that nonhuman animals are indeed influencing and impacted actors within the social world (Irvine 2004; Sanders 2003, 2007). One area of emerging interest is within the sociology of sports. In this study, I focus on sport and entertainment associated with stock shows and rodeos (SSR).

The overarching intent of this study is to investigate how human interests (however trivial) undermine the interests (however significant) of nonhuman animals. The goal is to explore ways in which speciesism2 is practiced—explicitly and implicitly—by humans who participate in stock show and rodeo (SSR) communities. I

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2 *Speciesism*, as defined by Peter Singer (1975:7), “is a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species.” For further discussion regarding speciesism, refer to Chapter 2: Literature Review.
investigate how speciesism is practiced as a co-constitutive system of domination within a capitalist system. Given the myriad ways in which nonhuman animals are incorporated into and consumed within the events at stock shows and rodeos, the SSR events and communities serve as a microcosm of the larger social world, whereby nonhuman animals are similarly incorporated and consumed. I examine ways in which social and cultural norms (in terms of language and behaviors) are constructed and deeply embedded in order to perpetuate and maintain a dualistic and hierarchical relationship between humans and nonhuman animals (i.e., culture versus nature, us versus them). While speciesism is indeed practiced explicitly at stock shows and rodeos, it is the unquestioned adherence to those social and cultural norms that allows for the implicit acts of speciesism, under the guise of sport and entertainment. This implicitness, I argue, is necessary to maintain the socially constructed nature of the human-nonhuman animal relationship, whereby the interests of human animals usurp the interests of nonhuman animals for human benefit. Furthermore, this adherence is grounded historically within a consumer-based, capitalist economy. The SSR community and events provides a distinct structure and a unique opportunity in which to investigate the innumerable and complicated relationships between humans and other animals.

Humans serve many roles within the SSR community, including organizers, competitors, support staff, vendors, judges, nonhuman animal caretakers/handlers, rodeo performers, and spectators. Furthermore, humans in these arenas consume nonhuman animals as food, wear them as clothing, use them as sporting equipment, show them for prizes, compete with and against them as athletes, sell them as commodities, and display
them as other forms of paraphernalia (e.g., marketing and advertising). The overlapping experiences humans have with other animals within the SSR community are abundant, providing a concentrated social world ripe for sociological examination. The SSR community is also steeped in Americana. Lawrence (1982:5) describes stock show and rodeos as a way of life, positing that “rodeo is used by the ranching society—and by the population which shares that ethos—as a ritual event which serves to express, reaffirm, and perpetuate its values, attitudes, and way of life.” Peñaloza (2001) discusses how cultural meanings are shaped around the ideals and values associated with competition, tradition, independence, and naturalism.

As the only sport (rodeo)/competition (stock show) that has developed from working traditions on ranches (Errington 1990; Pearson and Haney 1999), the SSR events provide a perspective on how cultural meaning has historically and contextually changed, or remained the same, over space, time, and population. This knowledge is particularly important in terms of the human-nonhuman animal relationship, especially as our awareness about nonhuman animal cognition has increased (Bekoff 2007, 2010). In other words, it is important to consider the responsibility humans have in recognizing that other animals are active participants in society, including in the SSR community; however, it is critical to first gain a deeper understanding of the current state of this interconnected relationship. Moreover, it is crucial for humans to understand the roles, which Wade (1996) argues are performed involuntarily, of the nonhuman SSR participants, including the care and wellbeing—or lack thereof—to which the other animals are subjected. The point in suggesting that nonhuman SSR participants involuntarily perform their roles is
meant to point out that these other animals are not able to consent to their participation in the way that human participants are able to do (Wade 1996). Wade further posits that in many events associated with stock shows and rodeos, the nonhuman animals are in fact expressing distress and resistance to activity in which they are expected to participate (e.g., bronc riding, bull riding, calf roping, etc.).

Much of the existing literature regarding sports that include nonhuman animals, including stock shows and rodeos, focuses on the human participant, or on the violence that is explicitly perpetrated against the other animals. With some exceptions, such as the Gillett and Gilbert (2014) anthology, the scholarship is limited to conceptual and theoretical musings and/or calls for scholarly action (Atkinson and Young 2005; Wade 1996; Young 2014). While speciesism has been featured as a mechanism of control and domination over nonhuman animals in sports, this realm of inquiry has not thoroughly and meaningfully investigated the implicit speciesist attitudes and behaviors of the human SSR community. This study aims to empirically investigate both the explicit and implicit adherence to cultural and social norms associated with the SSR community in an effort to gain a more comprehensive and more consequential insight into how nonhuman animals are subjected to a system of domination. I further suggest that this system of domination objectifying other animals is co-constitutive of other systems of domination, such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, to name a few. This type of examination is increasingly important in terms of understanding the complex interactions humans have with nonhuman animals, whereby different nonhuman animals are treated differently depending on how humans have constructed the nature of our interconnected
relationships (e.g., animals as companions, animals as food, animals as property, etc.). Furthermore, a study such as this serves to place the nonhuman animal actors—actors who have historically been marginalized—at the center of examination and understanding.

From a theoretical perspective, this study broadly employs feminist theory. Feminist standpoint theory serves to provide an overarching understanding of lived experiences of both the human and nonhuman animal participants (Donovan 2006; Haraway 1978, 2004; Harding 2004; Smith 1987, 2004). A materialist feminist perspective helps to emphasize the ways in which systems of domination serve to perpetuate human oppression of other animals via the installation and maintenance of social and cultural norms, as well as through normative patterns of consumption (Hartsock 2004, 2010; Nibert 2002, 2013). Lastly, an ecofeminist perspective is incorporated as a means of suggesting a need for activism on behalf of nonhuman animals as a marginalized group in society, a key element in feminist theory (Adams 1990, 2003; Estévez-Sáá and Lorenzo-Modia 2018; Gaard 2011; Merchant 1980; Mies and Shiva 2004).

Conducting a study of the SSR community has several implications. First, extant scholarship regarding nonhuman animals and society is strictly focused on specific areas of inquiry (e.g., human-companion animal relationship, other animals as food, therapy animals, ethical considerations of treatment, etc.). The SSR community encapsulates many aspects of the larger social world that are captured within this study in a manner that broadly identifies how social relationships are influenced within the same social
structures by systems of domination. Second, this study advances the small but growing database of scholarship that incorporates other animals, expanding on existing literature that fosters a greater awareness of the interconnected social world. Considering the degree of interaction with other animals, developing a deeper understanding is critical to maintaining a sustainable existence that is beneficial to humans and nonhumans alike. Third, while this study does not depict every possible scenario regarding the human-nonhuman relationship, it does provide some perspective on the extent of our day-to-day interactions and how other animals are impacted by the same inequalities as other marginalized groups in society.

Chapter 2 provides insights into current scholarship regarding how other animals have been discussed within sociology and other disciplines. Additionally, a review of literature regarding other animals in sports, specifically rodeos, is presented along with discussion regarding the lack of scholarship regarding other animals in sports. Chapter 3 offers a theoretical framework for this study of SSR. This study broadly incorporates realms of feminist theorizing to best capture the spirit of the study. First, a standpoint feminist theory is used, especially for methodological purposes. Feminist standpoint theory encourages centralizing the voice of those who are being studied and, in this case, it is animals involved with the SSR (human and nonhuman animals). Second, a material feminism helps to highlight the ways in which the material experiences of others, primarily other animals in this study, are subjects of and objectified within a capitalist system. Third, an ecofeminist perspective is used to advocate for action on behalf of other animals. This action includes, but is not limited to, providing space to the voices of other
animals within the discipline of sociology. As such, Chapter 4 outlines the methodology, an interpretive qualitative approach, employed to center the voices of those who participate at SSR (human and nonhuman alike).

The findings of this study are presented in Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. Chapter 5 is dedicated to describing the environment and culture of SSR, taking the reader on a journey through the events that take place at each SSR and sharing the reasons why people participate within the SSR community. Chapter 6 presents findings that directly relate to the commodification and consumption of nonhuman animals at SSR, including as athletes, entertainment, food, and clothing. The findings discussed in Chapter 7 provide an understanding of how care of other animals is connected to the value associated with those other animals within the SSR. Finally, this study ends with Chapter 8, the conclusion, which connects the interpersonal relationships discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 to the structural level relationship that guides our interactions with other animals.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the increased interest and scholarly focus on nonhuman animals in sociology, including the sociology of sport, a dearth of empirical studies and literature still exists (Gilbert and Gillet 2014). The stock show and rodeo (SSR) events and community, as mentioned earlier, offers a unique opportunity to explore the human-nonhuman animal relationship, given the interconnected nature of humans and other animals during SSR events. This literature review is organized in a way that helps to guide the development of this empirical study regarding the SSR community as a microcosm of the larger society. As such, this review of literature focuses on the paradoxical relationship that humans have with other animals, comparative to human-human relationships. The literature focuses particularly on sports and entertainment, thereby exposing gaps in scholarship in terms of nonhuman animals, and the practices of explicit and implicit speciesism. Most scholarship emphasizes the marginalization of others in rodeos focusing on women and nonwhite men (Allen 1998; Branch 2018; Fredriksson 1985; Peter 2005; Stratton 2005), with little emphasis on how nonhuman animals may be marginalized within the sport.

Sociological and Other Scholarly Coverage of Nonhuman Animals

Sociologists have been remiss in their inclusion of nonhuman animals in the sociological scholarship (Bryant 1979). Over the last approximately forty years, however, an emerging field of scholars have been paving the way for a more inclusive focus on animals in society (Adams 1990, 2003, 2010; Adams and Donovan 1995; Arluke 2002, 2006, 2010; Grauerholz 2007; Irvine 2004, 2008; Nibert 2002, 2013; Sanders 2003, 2007,
to name but a few). Furthermore, a widening field of interdisciplinary scholars have helped to illuminate the need for continued examination of other animals in society.

Bryant (1979) presents the ways in which other animals are woven into our language and culture. Bryant also lays out possible directions for future sociological inquiry into this zoological connection, such as how nonhuman animals fit into the exploration of crime and deviance, work relations, ideological conflicts, social problems, and animals as surrogate humans. Many scholars have since impressed upon the fact that nonhuman animals are indeed co-actors in this social world (Arluke 1993; Cerulo 2009; Irvine 2004; Sanders 2003, 2007). Other scholars have examined ways in which cruelty to humans is connected to cruelty to animals (Arluke 2002, 2006; Fitzgerald et al. 2009; Flynn 2012), while others have explored ways in which incorporating nonhuman animals into humane education can help to develop empathy in children (Ascione 1997; Ascione and Shapiro 2009). Scholars have studied how other animals are depicted within our consumer society as either companions or food (Grauerholz 2007); how they have been objectified as commodities (Adams 1989, 2010); how they fall within human consumer habits (Hirschman 1994); and how they have been perceived—or not—as workers in the workforce (Despret 2015) or as having played critical roles in our “sociocultural evolution” (York and Mancus 2013:75).

The interdisciplinary literature also exposes a desire among scholars to expand our human-focused inquiries to include other animals. Theologians question the level of responsibility we have to other animals as opposed to dominion (McLaughlin 2011), and philosophers have questioned the ethical duties we have to other animals as sentient
beings (Nussbaum 1996, 2004; Potter 2005; Rollin 2005). Political theorists and legal scholars have sought to determine the reasonable level of rights and/or personhood to be ascribed to nonhuman animals (Ahlhaus and Niesen 2015; Cochrane 2010; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011; Nussbaum 1996, 2004; Seps 2010). Natural, psychological, behavioral, and medical scientists have sought to better understand the place of nonhuman animals in experimentation (Akhtar 2015; Greek et al. 2012), the impact of climate change on nonhuman animals and humans (Dirzo et al. 2014), and the physical, behavioral and psychological influence of nonhuman animals, especially on vulnerable human populations (Creagan et al. 2015; Hawkins and Williams 2017; Levine et al. 2013; Melson 2003; Miles et al. 2017).

It is clear from the above literature that a desire indeed exists regarding the integration of nonhuman animals into our scientific inquiries. Perhaps most critical to the inquiries presented within this study, is the literature pertaining to speciesism, which is tightly intertwined with issues of morality and ethics. Furthermore, in terms of how speciesism is practiced as a system of domination and oppression, it is difficult to separate it from other systems of domination and oppression, as the literature indicates.

Coined in 1970 by Richard Ryder, the term *speciesism*, as he explained, was meant to “draw the parallel between the plight of the other species and our own” such as the plights associated with racism, sexism, and classism (Ryder 2010:1). Singer (1975:9) explains:

*The racist violates the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of his own race when there is a clash between their interest*
and the interests of those of another race. The sexist violates the principle of equality by favoring the interests of his own sex. Similarly the speciesist allows the interests of his own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. The pattern is identical in each.

The scope of speciesism, as posited by Ryder (1970) and Singer (1975) has since been supported, called into question, and expanded upon.

Brennan (2003) has claimed that speciesism, in accordance with Singer’s perception, is too simplistic and not representative of the nature of the human-nonhuman animal relationship, which is similarly as complex as the human-human relationship. Brennan argues that Singer’s focus on sentience as being the singular moral imperative for equality, negates the differences between species that Brennan (2003:299) considers to be “morally significant.” This recognition of difference, which favors human interest over that of other species, according to Brennan, has more to do with a humanist and natural perspective that has less to do with discrimination than recognizing the various contexts in which species exist and thrive. Fjellstrom (2002), on the other hand, supports the general premise of speciesism; however, the author also suggests that Singer’s assertion of speciesism is limited in scope. For Fjellstrom, there exists more of a continuum on which levels of favoritism for human interests exist depending on qualifications of reasoning and the level of threat to life sustainability. On this continuum, speciesism “would primarily be normative opinions that with regard to species favour humans” (Fjellstrom 2002:65); however, this may not necessarily be construed as negative. Philosophical musings aside, Fjellstrom’s definition serves a
purpose for this study, given the range of perceived normative behaviors humans express
toward and in conjunction with other animals, and that favor the interests of humans over
those of nonhuman animals, both explicitly and implicitly. Therein lies the continuum on
which the SSR community exists.

The above literature is in no way an exhaustive portrayal of the extent of
scholarship regarding nonhuman animals in sociology and other disciplines. The
sociological landscape remains ripe with possibilities in terms of incorporating other
animals, including the realm of sports. The remainder of this literature review therefore
focuses on nonhuman animals in sports and entertainment, and most apropos to this
study, illuminates the scholarship on stock shows and rodeos.

**Nonhuman Animals in Sports**

Nonhuman animals are an integral part of many sports, whether directly or indirectly. For
instance, nonhuman animals may be actual competitors (e.g., Greyhound racing dogs) or
they may be used as equipment (e.g., footballs made from the hide of a cow). Nonhuman
animals may simultaneously be competitors and serve as equipment (e.g., horse who is
perceived to be competing against other horses ridden by a jockey who is competing
against other jockeys). Additionally, team mascots are often represented by other animals
(e.g., Bevo, an actual live Longhorn Steer representing the University of Texas at Austin
Longhorns football team). The point is sports have incorporated nonhuman animals into
the institutional culture.
Wade (1996) points to the stark difference between human involvement and nonhuman animal involvement, whereby humans intentionally and voluntarily engage in the sporting events while the involvement by nonhuman animals is neither intentional nor voluntary. Even if a nonhuman animal experiences some level of celebrity, according to Nance (2014), they have not chosen to participate in such cultural phenomenon nor are they aware of their celebrity status. Wade (1996) specifically discusses the ways in which nonhuman animal bodies have been co-opted for sports—as competitors and as equipment—such as sport hunting, rodeos, horse and dog racing, football, basketball, baseball, and golfing. Wade (1996:10) poignantly declares, that except for sport hunting, though animals may not be “intentionally killed for the sake of these sorts of sports, their bodies and lives are subjected to a variety of forms of control and constraint, some of which cause the animals discomfort and put their welfare at risk.” The author further contends that recognition of this exploitation rarely garners a moral concern compared to that of human competitors in sports.

In their examination of Greyhound dog racing, Atkinson and Young (2005:335) assert that dogs are abused and neglected within what they consider to be associated with “blood sports.” To be clear, while Kalof (2014:438) explains *blood sports* is “the practice of pitting animals against each other (or against humans) in bloody combat to the death,” Atkinson and Young consider the enveloping practices associated with the sport (e.g., suffering involved in breeding, their living and training conditions, and their fate upon the end of their racing lives) to be just as detrimental as any perceived combat with other dogs. Morris (2014) disputes this association, despite agreeing that underperforming dogs
may be violently treated and discarded. Similarly, Nance (2014) contends that racing dogs are essentially coerced to compete, and that the coercion of nonhuman animals to do so, in general, is for the benefit of human entertainment and profit.

While sanctioned sporting events, as described above, may be considered socially acceptable to mainstream society, it is important to note that there are unsanctioned sports that, on the continuum of speciesism, are deemed more harmful, such as cock fighting and dog fighting (Kalof 2014). These unsanctioned and socially unacceptable sports are still performed for human entertainment and economic benefit, a point that is critical to the overarching foundation of this study; however, these types of blood sports are not further discussed for the purposes of this study, as the focus here is on the systems of domination that are sanctioned and institutionalized. Furthermore, due to public outcry of cock fighting and dog fighting, laws have been implemented to criminalize such sports. It still bears mentioning for comparative purposes, especially given the definition of speciesism employed for this study.

Blood sports are not the only events during which nonhuman animals participate involuntarily. This is not meant to imply that other animals are not eager to interact with humans in these realms. The anthology edited by Gillet and Gilbert (2014) presents work by scholars who discuss non-violent sports such as dressage (Smith 2014) and dog agility events (Lund 2014). Both Smith and Lund explore the symbiotic interaction between the human and the nonhuman animal as the driving force behind the sport. The nature of the relationship is not one of dominant humans and coerced nonhuman animals; rather it is one of partners working together as a means to an end. Another distinction that should be
made is the difference in earnings between sports like dressage and dog agility, and that of horse racing, dog racing, and in some cases, rodeos (Lund 2014), which can be a motivating factor in the type and amounts of coercion.

Another aspect to consider regarding nonhuman animals involved in sports is the historical context. Historical context is often guided by the maintenance or the shifting of social norms (Fraser 2009; Guillo and Hamilton 2015; Proctor et al. 2013). Scientific knowledge and technological advancements have helped to usher in the advocation for and implementation of more humane practices regarding nonhuman animals in sports (Millington and Wilson 2014; Smith 2014). Smith (2014) describes these changes during an historical accounting of dressage, and Millington and Wilson (2104) assert that golf courses have increasingly been scrutinized for their environmentally friendly practices to accommodate the existence of other species. Additionally, Atkinson and Young (2005) have reported a steady decline in the Greyhound dog racing industry which is largely credited to the increased knowledge of dog abuse, the fact that humans’ desire to cohabitate with dogs as companions, and a host of economic issues.

Science and technology have also allowed for more humans to better understand the subjective lives of nonhuman animals (Fraser 2009; Guillo and Hamilton 2015; Proctor et al. 2013). This knowledge has helped to usher in new values regarding the human-nonhuman animal relationship (Smith 2014). The Gilbert and Gillett (2014:5) anthology highlights the “conflicting and contradictory elements of human-animal relations in sport.” Gilbert and Gillett (2014:5) further explain that challenges exist on both an individual level and a societal level as “animals have been valued and cherished
and also used, abused, and discarded.” Nonhuman animals in sports present a dilemma for which ethical consideration should be afforded, according to Morris (2014:129), who asserts that nonhuman animals are “subjects of a life” as opposed to objects that can be reduced to an exchange value. The continuum of speciesism expressed by Fjellstrom (2002) falls in line with the moral issue of “line drawing” (Morris 2014:130), whereby humans must decide what types of other animals receive what level of moral and ethical consideration, and/or when different levels of consideration are afforded. The point Morris is making relates back to the issue of consent (Nance 2014; Wade 1996), and the fact that nonhuman animals are subject to being loved and appreciated or devalued and harmed, at the whim of human desire and perceived need.

The question of moral and ethical responsibility is important to the discussion of nonhuman animals involved in sports. Regardless of how humans feel about other animals, the fact is that other animals are relegated to the status of objects—resources—used without consent for human pleasure and economic gain (Tymowski 2014). The goal of this study is to uncover and examine the explicit and implicit ways in which humans practice speciesism against nonhuman animals who are considered to be “valued and cherished” (Gilbert and Gillett 2014:5), yet who are also exploited in a consumer-based capitalist system of domination. Young (2014:389) notes that the “animal-sport complex” exists as a human made construct, and that its mere existence requires sociological inquiry into the human-nonhuman animal relationship. Young (2014:389) further offers that this inquiry should include:
how the use of animals in sport interfaces with culture, social class…and/or other social stratifiers, such as gender; definitional/conceptual ways of thinking about animals in entertainment cultures; ethical parameters of using—and abusing—animals for popular entertainment…the social and psychological processes and structures that allow us to treat animals in inhumane ways; how nostalgia, tradition and romanticism legitimize death as ‘sport’ in certain cultures; breeding, training and performance practices; the role of the policy, law and governance in animal sports; sporting animals and social change; sport subcultures which feature and/or depend on animal ‘athletes’ and give situational meanings to activities often deplored elsewhere in society; animal sport as spectacle, including mediated spectacle…consumptive practices and changing attitudes to animals as food; sport as a carnivorous culture; and perhaps most importantly, how questions of civility, morality and empathy weave through the animal-sport complex to facilitate acceptable leisure forms, and how these questions have shifted over time.

Young (2014) presents a tall order but, given how far behind sociology has been in terms of including nonhuman animals into the sociological discussion, it is an appropriate call to action. Gilbert and Gillett (2014) assert that despite recent efforts to build scholarship regarding interspecies sports, large gaps persist. As has been presented thus far, Atkinson and Gibson (2014) contend that issues of violence and discussions of ethics are predominantly featured when examining nonhuman animals in sports. Additionally, issues pertaining to the co-constituting nature of speciesism with racism, sexism, and ableism, while at times mentioned, have been lacking.
The Gillet and Gilbert (2014) anthology largely neglects any discussions regarding issues of race, sex, or gender, with two notable exceptions. The first is the presentation of the racialized body in the figurative branding of sporting bodies, posited by Carey et al. (2014). In this case, the authors state that, “branding has, as its historical roots, an act of violence; one that is inextricably bound to complicated and intersecting histories of colonialism, capitalism, anthropocentrism, and racisms” (Carey et al. 2014:213). The remainder of this study’s literature review offers deeper insight into how human bodies and nonhuman animal bodies are indeed commodified and branded in a way that devalues their subjectivity and relegates them to the status of an object to be consumed. The second reference pertains to femininity and masculinity, presented by Gilbert (2014). Gilbert asserts that female equestrians are able to partake in distinct masculine and feminine roles within the horse stables. In other words, feminine tasks such as caring for the horses and cleaning are mixed with the masculine tasks of bailing hay and shoveling. Gilbert (2014:247) suggests that young girls and women who participate in the sport are indeed able to “develop a range of femininities” and gain a sense of empowerment. Also, in the Gillet and Gilbert (2014) anthology, ableism is presented in terms of how equestrian sports have been the most prevalent options for people with disabilities (Larneby and Hedenborg 2014). In this case, individuals who have largely been excluded from other interspecies sports are able to participate in a sport that also offers a therapeutic component.

Kalof (2014) illuminates the connection between violent sports, masculinity, and heterosexuality, as well as the feminizing of opponents, while Atkinson and Young
(2005) assert that even though women do indeed compete in interspecies sports, the arena of these interspecies sports remains largely gendered and masculine in nature. It is perhaps Wade (1996) who has placed the greatest emphasis on the co-constituting systems of domination; however, as with the other scholarship, there is a lack of empirical evidence effectively shaping an adequate picture of this co-constituted concept.

Given the myriad gaps in literature, as outlined above by Young (2014), the SSR community offers an opportunity to examine multiple directions of inquiry—a goal undertaken with this study. Part of the critical examination of nonhuman animals also includes the co-constituting nature of speciesism to other forms of domination. This study will help to illuminate some of those similarities. First important to review the existing literature regarding stock shows and rodeos in general, as well as the part other animals play within the SSR community.

Livestock Shows, Rodeos, and the Place of Human and Nonhuman Animals

Young (2014) presented a host of inquiries that he suggests sociologists take up in an effort to build upon the limited scholarship regarding nonhuman animals in sports. For purposes of this study, I also include stock shows, which are a form of competition and entertainment, and which falls under the auspices of the larger SSR events. Young and Gerber (2014) suggest that increased awareness of the suffering of other animals has sparked debates and moves toward a more just treatment of nonhuman animals in society, a point also made by Gilbert and Gillet (2014) and Morris (2014) regarding nonhuman animals in sports. The SSR community is a uniquely positioned institution that seemingly
toggles between tradition and progress. The rich history of stock shows and rodeos provides insight into the tradition that solidly lingers, and which is emphasized through the romantic and often mythical perceptions of the American cowboy (Allen 1998; Branch 2018; Fredriksson 1985; Peter 2005; Stratton 2005). The history also indicates some change, albeit slow in most cases, to the ways in which different groups are treated and represented, including women, nonwhite men, LGBTQ folks, people with disabilities (Theodori 1997), and other animals. This study is concerned with how systems of domination are co-constituted in a consumer-based capitalist environment. As a scale model of the larger social world, the SSR community can be examined for its different realms of social life, including the livestock shows, the rodeo, and associated events (e.g., carnivals, music concerts, tradeshows). This section offers some insight into extant literature specifically about stock shows and rodeos, including issues associated with race, gender, nonhuman animals, and consumerism.

Rodeos and a Compromised History

The story of the rodeo is presented as having a mystical and often mythical connection (Allen 1998; Branch 2018; Fredriksson 1985; Peter 2005; Stratton 2005) to the “romantic images of the good old days of the wild west” (Serpell 1986:224). Serpell dispels this image, noting instead to focus on the commercialized aspects that result in the abuse of other animals during rodeo events. Lawrence (1982) contends that rodeos are a display of human domination over nature, while Errington (1990) maintains that rodeos have more to do with the assertion of human independence in the face of the constraints of daily life.
Despite this position, Errington acknowledges that rodeos are far removed from the life of a working cowboy and is not representative of the current day ranching/farming experience. Additionally, the so-called independence belies the necessary reliance on networks and fans, as Forsyth and Thompson (2007) explain.

Many within the SSR community are drawn to the romanticized version of the cowboy—a term that neglects the myriad other aspects of the community—rather than focusing on the distinct values associated with western culture, such as animal management, successfully and skillfully surviving unforgiving environments, and the pride associated with the culture of Western America (Rollin 1996). As idyllic as these value notions seem, Errington (1990) contends that some rodeo events such as bull riding, have never been associated with western or Westernized cowboy or ranching culture. Serpell (1986:225) points to ways in which bulls and other rodeo animals, for instance, are “deliberately incited to frenzied violence by raking them with spurs, constricting the genital region with leather straps, or by thrusting an electric prod into the rectal area.” Similarly, Murphy et al. (1992) describe values associated with livestock shows as teaching the values of leadership, responsibility, and instilling a sense of independence and self-worth; yet the expectations of prize money has led to illicit behaviors by human competitors, such as illegal drug use in getting nonhuman animals ready for market.

Fredriksson (1985) offers an historical overview of the relationship between humans and cattle, positing that cowboys become cowboys because they care about other animals. Fredriksson further asserts a level of flexibility in the relationship, whereby
levels of humaneness are associated with the economic value of the cattle. In other words, as their economic value increases, so too does the level of humane treatment. Indeed, according to Fredriksson (1985:141), “unwell or illtreated animals” would essentially damage the aesthetics of the arena performance, suggesting that humane treatment is necessary for improved entertainment and economic value garnered by humans. While not the primary focus of his yearlong journey with various rodeos, Stratton (2005) is one of the few authors who recognizes the exploitation and harm suffered by other animals for the purpose of human entertainment; however, he explains it in a way that fits on the continuum described by Fjellstrom (2002) and expresses his admiration for the induction of humane practices many rodeo organizations have implemented.

These images of exploitation and violence imposed upon other animals is rarely mentioned by scholars who have written extensively of the stock show and rodeo experience. Despite this omission, other forms of marginalization of humans have been discussed, which can ultimately be linked to the oppression of nonhuman animals in terms of the overarching social structures under which co-constituting systems of oppression exist. Indeed, women and nonwhite men have participated extensively in stock shows and rodeos; however, their contributions have largely been diminished and/or erased from the historical lore of the rodeo, which is undoubtedly problematic. Some literature has managed to elucidate this marginalization to a degree, whereas nonhuman animals have barely garnered a footnote in the larger discussion. To be clear, nonhuman animals have been integral to the concept of stock shows and rodeos, yet rarely conceived of as marginalized within the sport.
Historically, rodeos served as a form of entertainment for cattle driving cowboys; however, as Nibert (2002) asserts, once the capacity for making a profit was realized, the concept of the rodeo began to evolve to what it is today. Nibert offers that cattle driving is no longer a necessary element to the beef industry and hasn’t been for some time. Regardless, the entertainment factor presents another layer of capitalism that relies on the folklore of the cowboy’s westward journey across the frontier (Nibert 2002). The arduous journey was undertaken not only by white males, but by African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, women, and nonhuman animals. Despite this reality, the glory associated with the journey mirrors other realms of U.S. history, whereby white males have been more highly valorized and more monetarily rewarded for their abilities to transport spectators within the SSR community to a time that no longer exists, or that perhaps did not exist at all.

Rodeos, Women, and the Nonhuman Animal Connection

Though ranging fewer in numbers than men, rodeo cowgirls were widely revered prior to the mid to late 1940s, although men still held a dominant status. LeCompte (1990) associates the diminished status of women in the rodeo arena to that of the developing interests of patriarchally driven rodeo organizations, emerging Hollywood portrayals of the wild west, and involvement, or lack thereof, by the cowgirls. As the role of the rodeo cowgirl as performer shifted, Forsyth and Thompson (2007) make clear that women continued to serve central roles in the construction and maintenance of the cowboy image; albeit a much tamer role than rodeo cowgirl, according to Allen (1998).
Even as steeped in competition as women were in the 1920s and 1930s (Allen 1998; Forsyth and Thompson 2007; LeCompte 1990), gendered roles persisted. For example, LeCompte (1990) outlines the differences between women and men bronc riders as one of riding either slick or hobbled, which has to do with how the stirrups are situated around the horse for the rider’s foot placement. All men rode slick, which allowed for easier separation from the horse in the event of being bucked off. Women had the option to either ride slick or to ride hobbled, which provided a sturdier and easier ride on the horse; however, it proved to be more dangerous, and at times fatal, as once bucked off, women were unable to easily free themselves to avoid being trampled. Dangers aside, post-World War II, the nation was facing tough economic times. Rodeo organizations were not spared and as Allen (1998) and LeCompte (1990) point out, expense cuts often disproportionately impacted rodeo cowgirls who were often competing in fewer events and taking home smaller prizes compared to their male counterparts (LeCompte 1990). The focus of women in the rodeo shifted from skill and tough bronc riding to an emphasis on appearance and participation in less dangerous events, according to LeCompte.

Gender roles are also an expectation of some fans. In their interviews of women rodeo fans, Forsythe and Thompson (2007:401) indicate that “the form and substance of their rodeo involvement had much to do with the gendered nature of the organization of the sport” and that “the rodeo is mostly a sport for men and the normative environment in effect locks women out of most professional events.” The authors make clear that even when men and women are similarly skilled in riding, roping, and animal husbandry, they do not compete against each other, and when performed outside of the competition itself,
women are relegated to using their skills to assist the male competitors (Forsyth and Thompson 2007). In his book, *Fried Twinkies, Buckle Bunnies, and Bull Riders: A Year Inside the Professional Bull Riders Tour*, journalist Josh Peter (2005:20) states that the majority of the top male bull riders “found the notion of women riding bulls against men laughable,” despite the fact that women have indeed proven to be skillful in the event. Off-putting as these issues are, it is perhaps the similarities—either literally or figuratively—to nonhuman animals that stand out in terms of this study.

The title of Peter’s (2005) book is but one example, whereby the term *Buckle Bunnies* is used to describe female groupies to rodeo cowboys. Lawrence (1982:110) describes the common behavior of men in rodeo “grouping horses with women,” meaning that women, like horses, need to be dominated so that they know their place. The opposite, according to Lawrence, is not true regarding bulls, who are not feminized, but instead are considered to be part of the “masculine camaraderie complex” from which women are excluded. The solidarity of masculinity is made evident during the competition between the oversexualized bull rider and the equally oversexualized bull in what Errington (1990:636) refers to as a “display of virtually pure bravado.” In the sense of social value, the bulls in the rodeo are more highly regarded than women, which according to Forsyth and Thompson (2007:413), is indicative of “environmental and patriarchal context” that determines the usefulness and practicality of women and nonhuman animals around the status and power held by men. The diminishing and denigrating of women within the rodeo exemplify a patriarchal structure that values men (typically white men) over others, including nonhuman animals.
Rodeos, Nonwhite Men, and the Nonhuman Animal Connection

As Theodori (1997) points out, various rodeo organizations were devised to contend with the underlying issues of discrimination associated with age, race, ethnicity, and gender. Despite the assertion by Allen (1998) that discrimination does not exist to the degree that media tries to portray, other scholars have disputed such claims by documenting the erasure of African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Native Americans from the folklore of the cowboy (Pearson 2004; Penrose 2003; Stratton 2005; Theodori 1997). Patton and Schedlock (2011) posit that literature regarding rodeos does not adequately express the diverse contextual history of rodeos. Furthermore, the literature not only omits the myriad contributions of others in rodeo competitions, but also in the ranching and farming practices that serve as the guideposts in the creation of the rodeo.

Patton and Schedlock (2011:504) state, “The mythology surrounding ‘cowboy culture’ is that a cowboy is a cowboy and other factors like race and gender are unimportant.” Allen (1998) essentially makes this argument when outlining the superseding importance of the Cowboy Code—implied rules developed by the Plains cowboys during the late-nineteenth century, and that have further evolved as a result of modern technology. The Code refers to not possessing racially intolerant ideas. The Cowboy Code notwithstanding, Patton and Schedlock (2011) assert that certain trends in society, such as those institutionalized via Jim Crow Laws, were guiding forces in the practices of the rodeo. The influence of institutionalized and racialized norms prevented

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3 Gene Autry’s Cowboy Code can be found online (www.autry.com). Interestingly, the Cowboy Code references being gentle with animals, not possessing racially intolerant ideas, and respecting women.
the broader inclusion of other marginalized humans, at least in the documented history. Such exclusions include that of Will Sampson a Native American bronc rider, and Bill Picket, an African American who invented the bull dogging (also known as steer wrestling) event still performed in rodeos today. The latter, Stratton (2005) points out, was finally included into the Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1977, well over a century after creating the mainstay event for rodeos.

Patton and Schedlock (2011:xi) are clear when they state, “Rodeo, like any culture one examines, is deeply layered and historied and the popular culture story at the surface—the one that is retold, repacked, and visually revised as U.S. White and male—is narrow and not emblematic of rodeo’s international and interracial history.” Like Patton and Schedlock, many of the authors discussed here have recognized, to some degree, the marginalization of some within the sport of rodeo. Missing in the recognition of these works is the marginalization of nonhuman, who’s relevance is arguably more diminished.

The connections between women and nonwhite men in the rodeo and nonhuman animals may seem unclear, given the disjointed associations made in much of the stock show and rodeo literature. It is through the ideologies surrounding the perceptions of those involved in rodeo—women, nonwhite men, nonhuman animals—that connect the diminished capacities of each group within the SSR community. Like Ellis and Irvine (2010), studying ways in which humans possess dominion over other animals on a smaller scale, helps to illuminate broader social inequalities. The level of involvement and the recognition of women in rodeos changed as cultural perceptions shifted regarding
gendered roles of women in rodeo. Additionally, economic circumstances post-World War II pushed women rodeo competitors further out into the margins of earnings compared to their male counterparts. Cultural shifts in terms of race relations in society appeared to have diminished the level of recognition for nonwhite men of the rodeo, mirroring the altered history found in mainstream historical accounting of the U.S. (Theodori 1997). These changing circumstances for women and nonwhite men have been subject to historical shifts and cultural context. While the lives of other rodeo animals have also experienced changes due to historical and cultural shifts (e.g., greater awareness of animal cognition and subjectivity, more stringent humane practices due to public awareness of nonhuman animals suffering), speciesism, like racism and sexism within the SSR community is still evident.

Summary

The review of literature has included a brief summary of how nonhuman animals have been represented within the discipline of sociology and other fields relevant to interdisciplinary research regarding the human–nonhuman animal relationship. The increased interest in this relationship has led subdisciplines to examine other animals within the scope of their fields, such as sports. The sociology of sport, in terms of interspecies sports, exposes the many contradictions of the relationship between humans and other animals, as well as the glaring exclusions of other animals from much of the scholarship (Young 2014). Most specifically, the literature regarding stock shows and rodeos in large part denies the marginalization of nonhuman animals through its lack of
recognition that nonhuman animals are nonconsenting participants. By organizing an empirical study of nonhuman animals within the SSR community, a recognition of how nonhuman animals are marginalized within the same social structures as other groups based on sex, gender, race, ethnicity, abilities, and more can be critically undertaken and considered as an important and worthy topic of sociological inquiry and discussion. The following section provides a theoretical framework through which this study is examined.
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Broadly, this study uses the theoretical framework of a feminist perspective. While sociological inquiry often explores the many overlapping, interconnected, and intersectional lives of humans, the sociality with other animals is often excluded. The stock show and rodeo (SSR) community presents an opportunity to explore the human-nonhuman animal relationship from various intersections, moving from interpersonal interactions to the structural level. In the scope of the SSR community, humans maintain control over other animals and receive entertainment and economic benefits at the expense of nonhuman animals who are not consenting participants (Wade 1996). This study explores this human-nonhuman animal relationship more closely from a feminist materialist perspective, closely associated with feminist standpoint theory, as well as an ecofeminist perspective closely associated with feminist animal studies. Each perspective helps to promote a clearer understanding of how explicit and implicit forms of speciesism are perpetuated within a system of domination. Furthermore, as Gaard (2012:18) asserts, “such connections expose our own role in oppressive structures—as consumers of suffering.”

Just as historical voices of other humans within the history of rodeo have been diminished or erased (Pearson 2004; Penrose 2003; Stratton 2005; Theodori 1997), so too have the voices of nonhuman animals as active—albeit involuntary—and subjective participants in the SSR community. It is within this community that the incongruent nature of the human-nonhuman animal relationship is most obvious, with humans eating and wearing animals, while also expressing their adoration for the live nonhuman animal
participants. To help unpack the conflicting landscape of the SSR community, this study takes a cue from Gaard (2012:18) who contends that feminist scholars need to uninhibitedly work toward extending “theory from the realm of the purely intellectual to that of the political…expose the broader implications and deeper roots of animal studies insights, making the theory more relevant.” Indeed, just as Collins (2000:288-289) examined the situated knowledge of African American women as a “partial perspective on domination” and one that is not detached from “political or economic reality,” so too should the situated knowledge and experiences of other animals be examined within the same political and economic reality. This perspective is not meant to divide; rather it is meant to “serve as one specific social location for examining points of connection among multiple epistemologies” (Collins 2000:289).

Like Donovan (1990), Gaard (2012) points out that theorists have long mused about the ethical responsibility humans have to other animals, further questioning whether the wellbeing of nonhuman animals has truly been served by feminist perspectives that have fallen victim to the patriarchal and universal theorizing and methods of dominant scholars, such as Kant, Singer, Reagan, Derrida, Wolf, and even Haraway. This point is critical from feminist standpoint and materialist perspectives, considering the importance placed on centering the inquiry around the subject of the research, rather than making the subject of the research an objective reality. As Collins (2000:122) asserts, it is imperative to recognize the embodiment of others in a “world of

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4 Gaard (2012:17-18) takes issue with Donna Haraway’s “style-shifting accommodation” to dominant sociological influences. Furthermore, Gaard suggests that if Haraway were to promote subjects such as veganism, and refrain from her interest in horseback riding and dog training as “manifestations of dominance,” that her scholarship would fall from favoritism.
time and activity and materiality” that is not wholly contingent on the limitations of a patriarchal capitalist theorizing.

The unfettered practice of speciesism within the SSR community, the harmful consequences of which are intentional or unintentional, is practiced through consumer-based, capitalist, and hegemonic social structures through which exploitation and oppression of human and nonhuman animals are normalized. Just as feminist scholars assert that marginalized humans should be represented within sociological scholarship, so too should the interests of nonhuman animals, especially given the interconnected experiences of humans and other animals. Feminist standpoint theory, guided by a materialist feminist perspective and partnered with an ecofeminist goal of justice through political action, are appropriate frameworks through which to understand this study.

**Feminist Standpoint Theory and Material Conditions**

The voices of women, according to Smith (1987), have been historically muted in favor of male authority, organized around the forceful expansion of capitalism. Smith draws on historical materialism (Marx and Engels 1970), asserting that the lives of women have been constituted under the material conditions through which they are objectified and oppressed. Smith (1987) also contends that to best understand the various lived experiences of women, their lives must not be examined from a perspective organized solely around the experiences of men. hooks (2015) further asserts that white feminists have prioritized and essentialized their own experiences in a way that reflects class dichotomies and maintains racial hierarchies. Hartsock (2004:35) posits that, “A feminist
materialism might in addition enable us to expand the Marxian account to include all human activity rather than focusing on activity more characteristic of males in capitalism.” While Hartsock’s position is critical, it is meaningless if still lacking the inclusion of other voices, such as the voices of other feminists of color (Collins 2000; hooks 2015; Smith 1987), as one example. Hartsock suggests that human interaction with nature can inform theories of knowledge in ways not merely relegated to the relationship between the working class and the owners of the means of production. Indeed, expanding the scope of understanding regarding materialism beyond merely the class dichotomy that Marx proposes, leaves open the possibility to understand how material circumstances impact other relevant realms of the social world, including the human-nonhuman animal relationship.

While Donovan (2006) suggests that the standpoint of other animals should be considered, perceived human-nonhuman language barriers present problems for the comprehension of the nonhuman animals’ standpoint. Donovan, however, argues that humans possess the ability to understand other animals through repeated interactions as well as from recognizing similarities in response to stimuli (e.g., if humans cry out in pain from being cut, so too do other animals). In this sense, to diminish the standpoint of other animals has less to do with a lack of communication, and more to do with other material circumstances. Harding (2004:7) writes:

Let us begin with the claim that knowledge is always socially situated. Thus, to the extent that an oppressed group’s situation is different from that of the dominant group, its dominated situation enables the production of distinctive
kinds of knowledge. (And let us not forget that dominant groups have always insisted on maintaining different material conditions for themselves and those whose labor makes possible their dominance, and they have insisted that those they dominate do not and could not achieve their own exalted level of consciousness.)

According to Donovan (2006), it is critical to maintain an interactive dialogue with nonhuman animals—a conversation—rather than impose a human-centered and human-constructed monologue. Donovan (2006:306) suggests that feminists, whose focus centers on marginalized others whose voices have been “ignored, trivialized, rendered unimportant” are positioned to help illuminate the standpoint of nonhuman animals.

From a materialist feminist perspective, especially as presented by Smith (1987) and Hartsock (2004), socially constructed binaries (e.g., men vs. women) and gender hierarchies are relevant to understanding social arrangements that favor one group over another. In terms of the human-nonhuman animal binary, the social arrangements favor humans over other animals. The result is the ignoring, trivializing, and rendering unimportant the voice of the nonhuman animals whose labor makes possible the domination by humans (Donovan 2006; Harding 2004). This is evident in the myriad ways in which NHA are consumed within the SSR events and community (e.g., food, clothing, entertainment, etc.).

Yet, it is not enough to solely recognize the standpoint of the nonhuman animals within the SSR community. To fully comprehend the established social arrangements, it is critical to understand how human perceptions of the human-nonhuman animal
relationship are shaped in an effort to maintain the human-nonhuman animal hierarchy. Hennessy (1993) posits the importance of critically focusing on the materiality of knowledge in a way that does not reify the hegemonic norms of theorizing; rather, feminist scholars must constantly, consistently, and discursively interact with the multifaceted and “contesting materialisms” (Hennessy 1993:xiv) which exist within capitalist systems. The crux of materialist feminism is the situating of oppression in the context of capitalism, whereby, for example, the inequalities between men and women, or between whites and other people of color, are reproduced (Collins 2000; Gimenez 2000). From this perspective, and, drawing from the assertion Donovan (2006) makes that nonhuman animals should be considered as a marginalized group with their own standpoints, the materialist feminist perspective provides theoretical space through which to understand the material realities of other animals.

According to Hirschmann (2004:324), there is a socially constructed invisible harm that is operating, and that feminism “needs to engage discursively as a way to appreciate how the invisibility operates and to understand the relationship between gender oppression to other forms of domination.” According to hooks (1992:369), even if there is no “apparent will to dominate” others, there is a denial of “accountability and historical connection” that underlies the inevitable harm that occurs. Indeed, nonhuman animals are subject to an “invisible harm” triggered by the adherence to social and cultural norms that define other animals as less than human and as property. Adherence to these norms allows for what Gaard (2012) described as the consumption of suffering by humans. In other words, humans are complicit in the invisible—and not so invisible—
harm of a capitalist system. As such, there is arguably a clear connection between the oppression of humans (e.g., women by men, people of color by white people, etc.), under a capitalist-patriarchal system, and the oppression of nonhumans by humans under the same system of oppression. By employing feminist standpoint theory from a materialist feminist perspective, this study decenters the male/human experience while placing the nonhuman animals experience at the core of examination.

In addition to using a feminist standpoint framework from a materialist feminist perspective, engaging with an ecofeminist perspective enhances this study by further examining the nature versus culture dichotomy in a way that meets a feminist call to action. Furthermore, as Gimenez (2000) points out, it is difficult to separate materialist feminism from a Marxist feminist perspective. In other words, Gimenez points to the difficulty materialist feminists have had avoiding a reductionist examination of the male versus female dichotomy as one strictly associated with economics. Others, such as Landry and MacLean (1993) suggest that culture is indeed an influencing component to domination and oppression. Additionally, Hartsock (2004) proposes the incorporation of the natural world as an interacting entity to domination and oppression. Despite these propositions, it seems that ecofeminism is best poised as a perspective that truly ties the intersecting realities together through its adherence to multiple and intersecting standpoints that influence and are influenced by various realms of the social world, including the economic, the gendered, the ecological, and more (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 2018). Moreover, ecofeminism is a direct call to action for feminist
Ecofeminism and a Call to Awareness and Action

Ecofeminism was conceived of by Francoise d’Eaubonne in the 1970s (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 2018; Merchant 1995). According to Adams and Donovan (1995) the conception of ecofeminism essentially serves as a call to action, bringing awareness to the ways in which patriarchy is a significant contributing oppressive factor regarding gender relations, class relations, race relations, and human relations with other animals and the natural world. Kemmerer (2011) believes that d’Eaubonne’s call to action was for feminists to take the reins when it comes to ecological protection. Since the inception of the term, ecofeminism by d’Eaubonne, debates like those within the wider landscape of feminist theorizing have occurred, such as those regarding the nature versus culture debate (Harding 2004; Hartsock 2004; Mies and Shiva 2004), as well as the debates regarding whose voices are included and excluded (Collins 2004; Smith 1987, 2004).

According to Mallory (2018), some scholars are averse to the attachment of women spiritually to nature, and others deem ecofeminism too essentialist. Additionally, there is a rejection by some to connect the biological aspects of reproduction (Jagger 2004) and caregiving to that of Mother Earth. Mallory also points to the debate about feminists holding anthropocentric views of nature. Despite the many debates, Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia (2018) provide a definition that seems to encompass an expansive scope of concerns and provides ample space for diverse disciplinary scholars to bring greater awareness of the connections between humans and the nonhuman social world.
scholarship to engage in dialogue. Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia (2018:124) explain that ecofeminism

has been conceived as both a theory and a movement that associates women and the environment; that describes the connections that throughout history have been established between women and nature from cultural, historical, psychological, spiritual, or political perspectives; that denounces the comparable degradation, subjection, and exploitation of women, nature, non-human animals, and other marginalized social groups; and one that proposes diverse alternative solutions, addressing both gender and ecological vindications and hence trying to put an end to the violence exerted on women and the underprivileged, as well as to the destruction of natural resources and the extinction of non-human animals and species.

Importantly, the above description allows for context, intersectionality, and inclusion of nonhuman animals, the latter of which has dealt with its own set of controversies as the interest in animal studies has increased (Gaard 2011). While some of the controversy is contained within concerns of intersectional approaches being too general and overpowering (Kings 2017), others acknowledge the undeniable interlocking relationship between humans and nonhuman animals that requires an intersectional approach (Adams 2010; Adams and Donovan 1995; Gaard 2011; Kings 2017; Nibert 2002, 2013). This interconnected relationship is influenced by the same systems of oppression that marginalize others, including the natural environment (Mies and Shiva 2004), an
argument that corresponds to similar arguments posited by other feminist scholars (Collins 2000; Hartsock 2004; hooks 1992, 2015; Smith 1987).

Ecofeminist concerns with the appropriation of women and nonwhite men to that of nonhuman animals is a way of denying membership in a rational and moral community (Adams and Donovan 1995). This rationalization is done to justify the relegation of women and nonwhite men as inferior, and to maintain a hierarchy that situates nonhuman animals below humans. Adams and Donovan (2004) are discontent with realms of feminist scholarship, asserting that it has also maintained a reliance on heteronormative, heterosexist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric views of social relationships, including the relationships between humans and other animals. Arguments about the grand paradigms’ alignment with patriarchy aside, Nicholson (1997:131) points out the connection between feminist scholarship and Marx’s notion of capitalism, making clear Marx’s “recognition that the seemingly autonomous operation of the economy belied its interdependence with other aspects of social life.” This interdependence between economics and other realms of social life is critical to the ecofeminist perspective—as well as the materialist feminist perspective discussed in the previous section—pertaining to the co-constitutive nature of the varying systems of domination (e.g., sexism and racism). Mies and Shiva (2004) posit that the exploitation of nature by humans should be recognized as existing within the same patriarchal economic structures that perpetuate the domination of women and nonwhite men.

According to Benton (1996:19), nonhuman animals are “treated as means to socially established ends.” Benton further argues that other animals serve a commodity
status on par with that of human wage earners. It should be recognized that nonhuman animal wage earners are exploited for their labor, whereby the wages earned go directly to the human owners—a point that draws various similarities to human slavery (Collins 2004), the work of housewives (Hochschild 1989), and the historic exploitation of differently-abled humans in circuses (Nibert 2002). Furthermore, arrangements such as those associated with the SSR community are normalized in ways that shield humans from the oppressive nature of their behaviors in their consumption of suffering (Gaard 2012) and allows for a denial of accountability (hooks 2015). Furthermore, it enables the perpetuation of a capitalist patriarchal system of oppression (Adams and Donovan 1995; Benton 1996; Mies and Shiva 2004; Nibert 2002).

Employing an ecofeminist perspective is appropriate for putting action into motion. Smith (1987) and Gaard (2012) propose moving from theory to action. Feminist standpoint provides space for centering the voices of other animals, while material feminism offers insights regarding the material and economic challenges associated with the human-nonhuman animal relationship. Ecofeminism encompasses these realms in a way that is more intersectional, promoting action on behalf of myriad marginalized groups, including other animals. The notions of masculinity, femininity, and animality are embedded within the cultural and social norms of the SSR, which are then commodified. This in turn exploits and harms nonhuman animals, with whom we are quite interconnected, in ways similar to the exploitation and harm of other humans within the same social structures (Nibert 2002). Given that interconnectedness, action leading toward an improved relationship with other humans, nonhuman animals, and the natural
world, as suggested by ecofeminists (Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 2018), is imperative.

The Stock Show and Rodeo Community Through a Feminist Lens

Feminist standpoint, materialist feminism, and ecofeminism allow for the recognition that women (Hartsock 2004; Smith 1987), nonwhite women and men (Hartsock 2004; Hirschmann 2004), and the natural world, including nonhuman animals (Donovan 2006; Gaard 2011; Gaarder 2011; Haraway 1978; Hartsock 2004; Mies and Shiva 2004; Rose 2004; Ruddick 2004) have similar experiences of oppression within the structures that were socially constructed for the purpose of preserving the capitalist, heteronormative, patriarchal system. While Donovan (2006) encourages the notion of considering the standpoint of other animals, it is the ecofeminist theorists who acknowledge the place of feminists to work as advocates for nonhuman animals in the same way feminists work as advocates for marginalized humans. As such, ecofeminist scholars may consider the perceived standpoint of nonhuman animals in terms of the similarities and interconnected subjugation experienced by humans. Ecofeminist scholars, perhaps, have what Rose (2004) reveals as a fresh place from which to critically explore, analyze, and write about regarding the oppression of others that is removed from the universalized and male-centered notions of knowledge. Rose (2004:76) also suggests a return of “theory to practice” by feminist scholars, a position supported within standpoint feminism and ecofeminism. Stock shows and rodeos offer an incomparable opportunity for an empirical study that returns theory to practice through a feminist lens, and in a way that centers
inquiry around the experiences that directly influence the wellbeing of nonhuman
animals.

Nonhuman animals are categorized and identified as willing participants in the
SSR events and community (Serpell 1986) who are dominated by a mostly male field of
human rodeo participants. The literature on rodeos points to Benton’s (1996) means to
ends assertion and is directly associated with normalization of nonhuman animal
oppression. The general notion within the rodeo is the display of human culture
dominating nature. Nowhere is this more evident than in the bull riding events. While
Errington (1990) explains that the male bull rider and the bull are seemingly equally
masculine, the goal of the human male is to dominate and essentially feminize the bull.
Peñaloza (2000, 2001) draws connections between the marketing of cultural meanings
associated with the lore of the cowboy exposed in the human- nonhuman animal
competitions and the economic outcomes for the industry. Events such as bull riding are
indicative of this capitalist system, whereby other animals are dominated, harmed,
exploited, and oppressed for economic gain. Furthermore, this economic-based outcome
is reliant on feminizing the other animals as a presentation of that dominance, as well as
the participation of spectators to willingly consume such events.

Errington (1990) and Nibert (2002) argue that rodeos are no longer representative
of working ranches and are far removed from today’s factory farming; rather, they are a
display of commercial benefit under a capitalist system that profits off of the domination
and exploitation of other animals by humans for human entertainment and economic
value. Merchant (1980) describes the alignment of the women’s movement and the
ecology movement as one that brings liberation into focus. The liberation of women and nature from the grips of an oppressive system is core to both standpoint feminism and ecofeminism.

Nibert (2002) explains speciesism as it relates to other systems of domination, as an ideological support to protect privilege within a materialist society. Mallory (2010) and Kings (2017) maintain the ecofeminist perspective of the interconnected relationship between women and nature, whereby both are exploited, and according to Mies and Shiva (2004), the mechanism of exploitation is the same—the capitalist patriarchal system. While Kings presents aspects of universalism and essentialism, and Mallory leans on a more anthropocentric perspective, both are clear in their acknowledgement of the willingness of ecofeminists to incorporate other species into the discussion of “social categorization and identity construction” (Kings 2017:72).

Collins (2000), Hartsock (2004), and Smith (1987) introduce a foundation whereby standpoint feminists are able to apply an evolved historic materialist approach to examining the unique experiences of women, from myriad social locations, within a capitalist and patriarchal system of exploitation and oppression. Furthermore, feminist scholars are encouraged to explore the interlocking systems of oppression and embrace a feminist epistemology and methodology that is emancipated from that of male domination (Collins 2000; Hirschmann 2004; Rose 2004; Smith 1987). This approach not only helps to move away from the prioritized male narratives, but also that of the white feminist narratives historically found within sociological scholarship.
While some standpoint feminists have implied that nonhuman animals should receive consideration in sociological inquiry, others have committed to full inclusion of nonhuman animals as marginalized others (Donovan 2006; Gaard 2011; Gaarder 2011; Haraway 1978; Hartsock 2004; Mies and Shiva 2004; Rose 2004; Ruddick 2004). It is, however, the ecofeminist’s dedication to the environment, commitment to focusing on the interconnectedness of our ecological systems, and the desire to examine how our social structures are guided by capitalist, patriarchal, heterosexist, hegemonic cultural and social norms that makes ecofeminist theory inherently suited to this study of the SSR community.

This theoretical approach to this empirical study of the SSR community will help guide the methodological approach to be discussed in the next chapter. Nonhuman animals are integral to SSR events and the community, serving as athletes, entertainers, contestants, equipment, companions, clothing, and food. The literature regarding rodeos, and to a limited nature, stock shows, provides insight into the mythical nature of rodeos that elevate masculinity and Western values to a status worthy of celebration in American culture (Allen 1998; Branch 2018; Fredriksson 1985; Peter 2005; Stratton 2005). This celebration includes the unwitting and witting acts of speciesism, whereby nonhuman animals are exploited and harmed for the benefit of humans. Unwittingly (perhaps), many individuals are culturally predisposed to accept the socially constructed notions of the human-nonhuman animal hierarchy as being natural.

The feminist standpoint framework will help to guide understanding of the experiences of nonhuman animals (as well as the human participants). The materialist
feminist approach will help to illuminate the social, cultural, and economic structures that perpetuate inequalities. The ecofeminist perspective will help to uncover the culture versus nature dichotomy while exposing a need for action on behalf of other animals.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

For this study, I employed an interpretive qualitative approach examining the stock show and rodeo (SSR) community. Given the dearth of scholarship regarding human-nonhuman animal relationships, most particularly in sports, this approach is appropriate in order to illuminate—from a feminist perspective—the ways in which our existing social structures, particularly those that serve to support systems of domination, impact marginalized groups differently. In this study, the groups who served as the focus were nonhuman animals (also referred to as other animals) and the human animals who interact with them within the SSR environments. While direct observation of nonhuman animals was one area of focus, the ideas and behaviors expressed and exhibited by humans, which impact nonhuman animals often in adverse ways, served as another area of data collection. The following section presents a rationale for conducting an interpretive qualitative study.

Rationale for Interpretive Qualitative Study

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:17) state, “meaning does not exist independent of the human interpretive process.” The ways in which humans define nonhumans within the context of historical, cultural, and social events is subject to the shared meanings determined by humans. In other words, the designated meaning of interactions and relationships is based upon shared context experienced by individuals and groups within the socially constructed world (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Indeed, Mills (1940:905) expressly positions language use in terms of how it functions within “socially situated
actions.” Stock shows and rodeos bring communities, large and small, together in a way that socially situates actions in myriad circumstances that involve other animals, including food consumption, wearing of nonhuman animals for clothing and other accessories, sport and entertainment, the sale of livestock for slaughter or reproduction, and for human companionship. While these socially situated actions take place regularly every day, the SSR community serves as a microcosm of society hyper-focused around the consumption of other animals. The forms of speciesist-based consumer habits within the SSR community are reliant on the presupposition that nonhuman animals are objects (property, in fact) and/or that humans serve a higher purpose, thereby relegating other animals to a marginal status. It is these relationships about which this study is concerned.

In the hermeneutic tradition, the interpretive approach is an appropriate method by which to gain a better understanding of shared meanings humans develop around their actions, their interactions, and the objects with which they interact (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). Nonhuman animals are objectified, writ large, within the SSR community as food, clothing, equipment, athletic participants, and more. Humans also serve various roles within the SSR community, for example, as spectators, rodeo athletes, stock show participants, judges, carnival goers, attendees to various other forms of entertainment such as music concerts, and as consumers of other animals for food and of other animals to be worn for clothing. Mills (1940:904) writes, “The differing reasons men give for their actions are not themselves without reasons.” Mills (1940:907) further posits that “In many social actions, others must agree, tacitly or explicitly.” Given the numerous interactions between humans and nonhuman animals within the SSR community, and my
earlier assertion that humans within the SSR community practice speciesism explicitly and/or implicitly, the ideas conveyed by Mills served as an appropriate justification for using the interpretive method in order to better develop an understanding of the SSR community. My aim was to gain deeper insight into the attitudes about and actions toward other animals by humans within the SSR community.

While Mills (1940) is focused on the ways in which people use language as a mechanism in the manipulation of others to participate in social actions, feminist scholars are interested in understanding how beliefs develop based on cultural and biographical backgrounds (Maynard 1998). These beliefs then lead to socially situated action. From a feminist perspective—the broad theoretical framework through which this study is considered—empirical research is critical to the “construction of feminist knowledge” (Maynard 1998:127). Maynard posits that qualitative research, for feminist scholars, is meant to avoid the production of a false universalized truth about how the social world of individuals is structured. The interpretive approach allows for a better understanding of how meaning and action is constructed by individuals and groups (Charmaz 2014). Mills (1940:905) states, “Conversations may be concerned with the factual features of a situation as they are seen or believed to be or it may seek to integrate and promote a set of diverse social actions with reference to the situation and its normative pattern of expectations.” It is through conversations with SSR participants that I gained more insight into how and why speciesism is practiced both explicitly and implicitly.

My overarching interest, as a scholar interested in human-animal relations, was to examine possible ways in which speciesism is practiced within the SSR community.
From a feminist materialist perspective, my goal was to illuminate how the capitalist social structures impact the welfare of nonhuman animals. Maynard (1998:125) points out that “radical feminists have been concerned, for example, with how women’s material circumstances effect [sic] their experiences of events such as violence and abuse, Marxist feminists have focused on phenomena such as sexuality and both have prepared to theorize the need for social policies and political reform…” This point is critical to the development of feminist materialism (Hartsock 2004), especially in terms of how it fits into the broader theoretical foundation of feminist standpoint theory and the methods used to determine standpoint.

Hartsock (2004) declares that relationships between humans and the natural world may not be fully and similarly understood by those involved in social interactions. While feminist materialism relies on Marx’s (1976) assertion that existence is dependent upon one’s production abilities and their reliance upon external materialism, the perspective also relies on standpoint—or situated knowledge—of social actors (Hartsock 2004; Smith 1987). Furthermore, feminist standpoint scholars’ approach is to move away from the binary labels (e.g., women/men, black/white, them/us) that confine social actors to specified roles of engagement with others (Collins 2000; Harding 2004; Hartsock 2004; Smith 2004). While I was unable to gain direct insight verbally about the nonhuman animals from the nonhuman animals involved in the SSR community, I intended to bridge the gaps of feminist knowledge regarding other animals in the SSR community by taking an ecofeminist approach to this interpretive study. In other words, I drew from the Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia (2018) explanation of ecofeminism that is more
inclusive of other animals in the examination of how marginalized groups are exploited and harmed within the capitalist-patriarchal system of domination (Mies and Shiva 2004). I also incorporated Donovan’s (2006) proposed approach in trying to understand other animals through my repeated interactions and recognition of the similarities between other animals and humans in response to stimuli. My intent was to bridge the gap through conversations (interviews) with the stock show and rodeo human community and by observing human and nonhuman animal actions and interactions, and then analyzing the subsequent data through an interpretive lens. This approach is well suited for the theoretical framework I employ, especially that of feminist standpoint and ecofeminism.

Charmaz (2014:231) explains that “Interpretive theories aim to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them. Thus, these theories bring in the subjectivity of the actor and may recognize the subjectivity of the researcher. Interpretive theory calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon.” That understanding is predicated on the researcher recognizing the manifold experiences and perceived realities of the study participants. In particular, I gained a more profound understanding of how the social division between humans and nonhuman animals plays out in a speciesist manner within the SSR events and community as an example of how the same human-nonhuman animal social divisions play out in the larger social world.

The literature review and theory sections of this study expose sensitizing concepts that have been further revealed through this empirical undertaking. The theoretical underpinnings of the literature suggest a perception of us versus them (the ‘us’ being humans and the ‘them’ being nonhuman animals), whereby humans place themselves in a
position of dominance over other animals. The resulting hierarchy serves as justification—perhaps even a moral justification—for humans to benefit from consuming other animals in various ways (e.g., as food, as clothing, as entertainment, and as property). In this study, the overarching sensitizing concept of speciesism manifested in myriad ways given the unique field of participants involved in the SSR community. I initially theorized that stock shows and rodeos serve as a mainstay of speciesism in all realms of the event, and I used this concept as one of my “points of departure to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data” (Charmaz 2014:31). My goal was not to insinuate that all SSR participants are expressly interested or inclined to exploit and harm other animals; rather, I was particularly interested in uncovering the implicit and/or unwitting ways in which SSR community supports speciesism.

Setting and Data Collection

For this study, I conducted research on the SSR community in Central Florida and South-Central Texas, two locations that have a long history of stock show and rodeo events. In Florida each year, tens of thousands of visitors attend the Silver Spurs Rodeo, which was established in 1941. The Silver Spurs Rodeo is a biannual event, taking place the third weekend of February and the first weekend of June (https://www.silverspursrodeo.com). The Silver Spurs Rodeo also has a one-night rodeo event in October called, *Boots, Bulls & Barrels*. The San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo (San Antonio SSR), established in 1950, draws a crowd of nearly two million during its two and a half weeks run in
February (http://www.sarodeo.com), while the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (Houston SSR)—the oldest of the three having been established in 1931—draws a crowd of approximately 2.5 million over a nineteen-day run in March (http://www.rodeohouston.com). All three SSR organizations are members of the largest rodeo umbrella organization, the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA), which according to their website (http://www.prorodeo.com) “is the largest and oldest rodeo-sanctioning body in the world…committed to maintaining high standards in the industry in every area, from improving working conditions for contestants and monitoring livestock welfare to boosting entertainment value and promoting sponsors.”

Since the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the San Antonio SSR, and the Houston SSR are all members of the PRCA, I was able to observe each rodeo while considering the standards of the industry as set forth by the rodeo-sanctioning body.

Besides the history, size of attendance, and membership in the PRCA, the SSR communities in Central Florida and South-Central Texas were also selected due to convenience. I currently live in Central Florida and visit South-Central Texas multiple times each year. While I am not as familiar with the communities in Florida, I am quite familiar with the communities in South-Central Texas, having resided there for nearly twenty-eight years prior to moving to Florida. Speaking directly to that fact, the communities in Texas are steeped in stock show and rodeo life during their respective two-week events. As such, I spent one day in October 2019, during which the Silver Spurs Rodeo Boots, Bulls & Barrels took place, nearly two weeks visiting the San Antonio SSR in February 2020, and just under a week visiting the Houston SSR in March
2020. I also attended the Silver Spurs Rodeo (this also included a stock show, unlike the
*Boots, Bulls & Barrels*) during the third weekend of February 2020 for their three-day
stock show and rodeo event. These stock show and rodeos presented ample opportunities
to examine social interactions that involve other animals, providing an opportunity to
garnet a generous amount of data.

**Interviews**

Data gathering also took place in the form of participant interviews with humans (prior
to, during, and after the scheduled stock show and rodeo events) and field observations of
both human and nonhuman animal activity (during stock show and rodeo events). This
study was reliant on input from a specific population (i.e., people who actively
participate, or have at one time participated, in stock shows and/or rodeos), therefore, I
used purposive sampling (*Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011*) to gain participation for the
semi-structured interviews.

Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (See APPENDIX A), the
process to recruit participants and to conduct interviews began. Recruitment of
participants was done through distribution of a flyer (see APPENDIX B) over social
media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), by email, and in person. The study
recruitment flyer was delivered randomly; however, certain criteria limited who could
participate in the study. Participants had to be eighteen years of age or older and had to
have, at some point, attended, competed, or worked at one of the three stock show and
rodeo events involved in the study (Silver Spurs Rodeo, San Antonio SSR, and Houston
SSR). Additionally, I utilized the pages, promotion, and ad components of Facebook to narrow my recruitment efforts. That narrowing included directing promotions specifically to Florida and Texas for one campaign, directing promotions specifically to Orlando/Kissimmee, Florida and San Antonio/Houston, Texas in the second campaign, and then to people who indicate on their Facebook pages an association with stock shows and rodeos in Florida and Texas. There was a fee associated with promoting my study through ads, which I paid for out of my own pocket. I utilized this feature three times, reaching a total of 1,074 people, and resulting in a total of two interviews with individuals from Texas.

Considering the breadth of possibilities for interviews, the process of interviewing required flexibility as opposed to strictly defined parameters that would limit the interpretive process (Charmaz 2014). By developing an interview tool with room to expand in a direction suitable for interviewing various types of participants, I was able to avoid reducing unique participant experiences to specific variables (Blumer 1956), other than for comparative purposes regarding the experiences of different groups (e.g., women and men, stock show participants, rodeo participants, spectators).

The interview tool consisted of twelve broadly worded questions. For example, What’s your involvement in stock shows and rodeos? The framing of this question provided space for any of the above-mentioned participants to answer and expand within their specific area(s) of involvement. Furthermore, it afforded me an opportunity to insert additional questions depending on the participant’s answers. For instance, if the interview participant were a bronc rider, I was able to form follow up questions specific to their
area of involvement within the SSR community. See APPENDIX C for the twelve semi-structured interview questions. An additional component to the interview tool consisted of a survey instrument designed to gather demographic data regarding each participant (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, sex/gender, etc.). While this research study is predominantly qualitative, limited quantitative elements are presented for comparative purposes. The purpose of collecting demographic information was to provide a clearer image of the characteristics of study participants (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). These data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Study Respondents (N=21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of Respondent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Respondent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity of Respondent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education of Respondent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Income of Respondent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 20,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-40,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41,000-60,999</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61,000-80,999</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>81,000-99,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 100,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation in the interview process was voluntary and respondents were assured that their identities would remain anonymous. Participants were informed that they may opt out of the interview process or withdraw their interview from consideration at any time, up until the study completion (none did). Each participant was presented with a thorough explanation of the study, and participants were asked to verbally consent to being interviewed and to having their interview audio recorded, to which all agreed.

In total, 23 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, over the phone, or via Skype. Two of these interviews were conducted with experts. One interview was with Dr. Ben Espy, a veterinarian for the San Antonio SSR, who agreed to provide expert insights into the treatment of nonhuman animals at the San Antonio and Houston SSR. One interview was with Dr. Peter Scheifele, an animal audiologist, who agreed to provide expert insights into the impact of loud noise on rodeo animals. Twenty-one interviews were conducted with spectators, former stock show competitors, and current and former rodeo competitors (e.g., rodeo queen, bull riders, steer wrestlers, bronc riders, ropers) and support staff (e.g., pick up men, volunteer staff) all of whom were given pseudonyms and are presented in Table 2 below.
Table 2: Pseudonyms, Gender, Type of Stock Show and Rodeo Event Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of SSR Community Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy*</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Rodeo Queen, Rodeo Support, Prospective Pick-Up Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob*</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Team Roper, Calf Roper, Bronc Rider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan*</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Steer Wrestler (including Chute Dogging), Stock Show Competitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle*</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Stock Show Competitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly*</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Stock Show Competitor, Volunteer Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura*</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Stock Show Competitor, Horse Show Competitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Stock Show Competitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Volunteer Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participant whose primary purpose was to participate in the rodeo, stock show, or as a volunteer has also been a spectator at one or more stock show and rodeo events.

As an individual who does not regularly participate in the SSR community, and who possesses a background of professional and volunteer work in terms of animal welfare issues, it was critical for me to build and maintain a positive rapport with the human participants. This brings to light ethical considerations in terms of how my own biases might have influenced my interactions with participants—all in observation and in dialogue—and analysis of the resulting data (Krieger 1985). While stock shows and rodeos may not be considered a sensitive topic, Charmaz (2014:76) posits that, respondents may resist an interviewer who challenges their “taken-for-granted assumptions and actions.” Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) stress the importance of diminishing any appearance of hierarchy between the researcher and the study.
participants. In order to create a relationship of reciprocity, Hesse-Biber and Leavy suggest deferring to participants as the authority on the matter of their experiences. Additionally, as the interviewer, remaining non-judgmental and compassionate, while also actively listening and providing appropriate verbal and nonverbal feedback added to my credibility and helped me to build and maintain rapport (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). To gain the trust of participants, I first engaged in light conversation, eased into more difficult questions as the interview progressed, and consistently checked in with the comfort level of the study participants.

Given the array of human participants involved with stock shows and rodeos, it was important to seek out and collect relevant data that would help to enhance categories that began to emerge through the interview, observation, and analysis process (Charmaz 2014). While I came to this study with a background in animal welfare, a keen interest in improving the wellbeing of animals (human and nonhuman alike), and some preliminary ideas about what to expect after having reviewed the literature (sensitizing concepts), I remained cognizant of the possibilities for new concepts and categories to emerge, especially as they relate to the experiences of participants and my personal observations. Therefore, I engaged in theoretical sampling in an effort to move where the data took me (e.g., to seek out different interviewees, or more of a particular type of interviewee), and to bring what Charmaz (2014:192) refers to as “explicit systematic checks and refinements” into my analysis to further develop the emergent categories. This theoretical sampling also emerged through my field analysis and additional interaction with the literature (Charmaz 2014). I wanted to make sure to collect data that would move beyond
description, and that would not be perceived as being locked tightly into a specific preconceived category; rather I was interested in building solid categories based on the experiences of those who participate in the SSR community, as well as my observations and thoughtful interpretations.

Field Observations

Three sites were selected for this study of the SSR community. As noted earlier, the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the San Antonio SSR, and the Houston SSR offered three comparative opportunities to explore the SSR community, not only through participant interviews, but through observing events associated with the stock show and rodeo. Furthermore, by attending each SSR, including as many of the associated events as possible, I had an opportunity to gain a thorough understanding of how humans interact with nonhuman animals. On October 5, 2019, I attended a two-hour event at the Silver Spurs Rodeo featuring bull riding, steer wrestling, and barrel racing. This event also included food and drink concessions and a retail area that sold leather goods, pet goods, farm and ranch goods, and various other odds and ends. In February 2020, I attended eight days of the San Antonio SSR, and two days of another Silver Spurs Rodeo. In March 2020, I attended four days of the Houston SSR. During the multi-day SSR in March and February, a variety of events took place. While I was unable to attend all events, I managed to observe many over a total of approximately eighty hours of attendance between the three SSR, all of which are indicated in Table 3 below.
Table 3: Stock Show and Rodeo Events Attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Events</th>
<th>Stock Show and Rodeo Events</th>
<th>Stock Show and Rodeo Events</th>
<th>Stock Show and Rodeo Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RODEO</strong></td>
<td>SSR*</td>
<td>SASSR*</td>
<td>HLSR*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrell Racing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronc Riding</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(saddle)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronc Riding</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bareback)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bull Riding</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calf Roping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calf Scramble</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton Busting**</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steer Wrestling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Roping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STOCK SHOW</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Holding Pens</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Areas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Auction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show Arenas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CARNIVAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Rides</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton Busting**</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig Races</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petting Zoo</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rides</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOOD/SHOPPING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnival Food</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Court</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By observing the SSR grounds in general, I observed the prevalence of clothing, accessories, and other products made from the skin and/or fur of other animals. I observed the types of food derived from other animals being consumed by participants. Additionally, I was able to observe the degree to which nonhuman animals are included in advertisements and promotional gear. The SSR events provided me with an
opportunity to observe the interactions with humans and live nonhuman animals. For example, I visually surveyed the human-nonhuman animal connections between humans and the livestock they raise in preparation for showing and ultimate sale to slaughter or to stud, and I had an opportunity to witness the competition featuring humans and nonhuman animals during rodeo events such as bull riding, roping, bronc riding, barrel racing, steer wrestling, and more. In terms of the stock show and rodeo observations, I employed the standards set forth by the PRCA to gauge adherence to rules of conduct and care of nonhuman animals (https://www.prorodeo.com/prorodeo/livestock/livestock-welfare-rules). The list of observations presented here is not an exhaustive list by any means and more detailed observations will be described in the subsequent chapters. The goal with conducting field observations, along with the interviews, was to gain a deeper understanding through discourse, as to how the SSR community constructs their social reality (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011), and similar to the interview process, I consistently engaged with my surroundings and interacted with the data and emerging categories.

In order to engage with my surroundings, I documented my visits to the SSR by writing field notes, taking pictures, and recording videos. Wolfinger (2007:87) suggests that researchers conducting field observations arrive to the field with “tacit knowledge” that can influence the way notes are taken and the way observations are portrayed in a study. Referencing Emerson et al. (1995), Wolfinger (2007) presents two strategies for recording field notes that present different outcomes, each of which I found particularly useful. While a comprehensive note taking system provided a systematic way of gathering data, remaining open to the possible events—or nonevents—that took place
was helpful to developing a complete picture of the SSR community, even if it contradicted my tacit knowledge (Wolfinger 2007). In the spirit of remaining engaged with the data, I incorporated the strategy of a salience hierarchy (i.e., record what I feel is important based on my tacit knowledge), with a comprehensive note-taking strategy, in an effort to avoid neglecting the experiences that might be important to SSR participants. Taking photos and recording videos was helpful in retrospectively considering my own experiences at the SSR events and in recognizing elements of what I had observed, or perhaps even missed, in the moment.

In total 468 photographs and 189 videos were taken leading to approximately 150 pages worth of handwritten notes transcribing the events, including audio transcription. Approximately 140 pages of handwritten field notes were also taken. The collected data were coded for emerging categories and themes.

Analytic Strategy: Coding and Analysis

Drawing from Charmaz’s (2014) discussion of constructivist grounded theory, I entrenched myself in and remained interactive with the data as they emerged. As this is an interpretive qualitative study, I remained committed to expressing the data in ways that are most reflective of the study participants’ perceptions, even as they may be contradictory to my own interpretations. As such, the subsequent chapters provide necessary distinctions between participant perceptions and my interpretations based on my own knowledge as a sociologist, especially as one interested in the study of human-animal interactions.
Data collected from interviews and field observations were coded for common terms and phrases. I took an “open-ended and holistic” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:309) approach to the coding process that occurred in two stages: initial coding and focused coding. Similar to Charmaz (2014), Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:309) suggest immersing oneself in the text until “themes, concepts, or dimensions of concepts arise from the data.” Codes extracted from initial analysis helped shed light on the research problem (Rubin and Rubin 2012), while also exposing assumptions concealed within the language used by myself as the researcher and those who I researched (Charmaz 2014).

The initial coding process, especially through the use of gerunds, helped to remain closely tied to the data, relying on the actions and words of respondents in a way that “preserves the fluidity of their experience” (Charmaz 2014:121). I stuck closely to the data in the initial coding process, avoiding reliance on preconceived categories, and instead allowed the individual words and/or phrases to present actions and ideas (Charmaz 2014). In order to fulfill this, I adhered to line-by-line coding of each interview transcript as well as my field notes. By focusing on action words and implicit meanings as presented by respondents, I was able to develop insights regarding the perceptions of respondents about nonhuman animals involved in stock shows and rodeos. For example, codes relating to “animals competing,” “animals entertaining,” “treating and caring for animals,” “connecting to animals,” “animals serving a purpose for humans,” “participating in a culture,” and “commodifying and consuming” were prevalent emerging insights discovered through initial coding of interview transcripts. By comparing the interview transcripts with my coded field notes, I was able to recognize
these same emerging themes. Indeed, with regard to my field notes, in particular, I practiced the constant comparative method (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Straus, 1967) to determine similarities or differences between each stock show and rodeo site as well as the various events found at each site (e.g., bull riding, carnival, shopping areas, etc.).

Moving from the openness of the initial coding process, I began focused coding of these data. Charmaz (2014:113) explains this process as a “selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data.” This process, according to Charmaz also helps to keep in check any preconceived notions about the topic under examination. Through this ongoing interpretive process, I was able to discover codes which comparatively speaking, held greater meaning between interview transcripts and field notes. Charmaz (2014) asserts that at this stage, the researcher begins to conceptualize larger segments of data. Returning to data coded through the initial coding process, one primary theme that emerged was “consuming and commodifying” of other animals. This was prevalent, for example, in the way respondents discussed their enjoyment of watching other animals perform as athletes or other forms of entertainment, in the way they enjoyed eating food from animals, and in the ways animals are raised and sold to support the livelihood of humans involved in livestock and agriculture. A second theme that emerged was “conditioning,” whether it be how humans are conditioned to think about and care for other animals, or how animals are conditioned to behave. Lastly, the third theme about “connections and care” emerged as respondents discussed their affection for, connection
to, and care of nonhuman animals who are their competitors, teammates, commodities, and companions.

Beyond the coding and analysis of interview transcripts and field notes, there were hundreds of photos and videos, as previously stated, requiring a thoughtful analysis. Each photo and video were reviewed multiple times and I detailed the images as well as any audio recording of voices and other sounds in the immediate environment (e.g., announcers, spectators, music, etc.). While I did not engage in a formal video-analysis and photo-analysis (Knoblauch et al. 2008), I did incorporate basic video and photo analysis as a way to underscore the themes uncovered through participant interviews and my field observations. The number of stimuli taking place at a SSR event can be overwhelming. To capture as much as possible, I decided to take photos and videos as a way to capture what I may have not seen with my bare eye, and as a way to remember certain events that I may not have fully captured in my field notes. Incorporating them into the final document is also a way to tap into the tacit knowledge that may be more difficult to understand through mere words written on a page.

**Statement of Reflexivity**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:348) explain that “writing reflexively means to have a good sense of your own positionality on the research you are conducting.” Given my background as an advocate for the improved welfare and protected status of other animals, and my primary research focus of animals and society, it was crucial as a researcher to conduct myself ethically and without judging human participants in stock
shows and rodeos based on my preconceptions. Rubin and Rubin (2012:234) propose “responsive interviewing” as a way to remain open to the differences that exist between the researcher and the participants. This means respecting the views of others, and importantly, given the feminist approach to this study, it meant removing any preconceived dichotomies of right and wrong or us and them (Rubin and Rubin 2012).

I did not arrive to this study unaffected by the world or my experiences, just as the case is with the participants in the SSR community (Charmaz 2014). While my interest in the welfare of animals, human and nonhuman, brought me to this important study, I allowed the research problem to guide me through the methodological process (Charmaz 2014) and I portrayed the SSR participants as accurately as possible based on the experiences shared during interviews and my personal observations (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011; Rubin and Rubin 2012). This does not mean that my personal feelings and insights into nonhuman animals did not emerge. Indeed, there were instances when I found it difficult to hear an interviewee’s response, or to watch human-nonhuman animal interactions at the various SSR events.

The fact of the matter is, I felt great trepidation about attending stock shows and rodeos. I have spent years avoiding these events, which is a rather challenging task when you spend nearly three decades in a city that wholeheartedly embraces its annual two-week SSR. Everyone goes to the SSR, including many of the folks I worked with in the animal welfare community. They somehow managed to strike a balance I did not foresee myself being able to do. Having decided to conduct a study of a community with whom I thought I had no connection was a daunting prospect. However, after reviewing the
literature and conducting my first few interviews, I recognized a connection I have with most of the folks who attend SSR. We love and care for other animals. We just have different ideas of how conditional that love and care is. As mentioned before, I did find some of my conversations and field observations to be challenging. Keeping in my mind that the humans I was speaking with and observing were not intentionally trying to harm the nonhuman animals helped to keep me grounded in a way that allowed me to build and maintain rapport with the study participants and to embrace my field observations in a way that allowed me to enjoy the process.

The following analytical chapters follow my journey through a rich tapestry that is the human-nonhuman animal relationship, and it is done so through the lens of stock shows and rodeos. The coming chapters will expose a complex relationship between humans and other animals, one that exists at the crossroads of commodification, consumption, and care.
CHAPTER FIVE: ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE OF STOCK SHOWS AND RODEOS

Interviews with participants (competitors, volunteers, staff, and spectators) and observations at three different SSR events in two different states—Texas and Florida—presented me with unique insights into the allure of attending such events. Stock shows and rodeos are woven together through a patchwork of components that at times seem quite disparate and at other times seem quite related. The landscape of the larger SSR events is marked with days-long festivities that draw people from all over the local communities in which they are held, from across the state, and indeed, from the across the country and beyond. Human participants at SSR—spectators, vendors, volunteers, competitors—are not a monolithic group by any stretch of the imagination; however, specific events appear to draw specific types of participants who share similar characteristics.

The Silver Spurs Rodeo is a smaller event that is billed as the largest rodeo east of the Mississippi, while the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo (San Antonio SSR) and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (Houston SSR) are significantly larger. The stock show component is the least diverse in terms of human competitors and audience, while the diversity of the rodeo events expands slightly and predominantly in terms of the spectators. It is important to point out that both stock shows and rodeos consist of predominantly white competitors, the rodeo is also comprised of competitors who are exclusively men (excluding barrel racing, which is comprised of women competitors), while the stock show features a balanced mix of boy and girl competitors. The most
diversity appears within the carnival areas, where many of the attendees may not even attend rodeo or stock show events. While there are many similarities between each SSR, each event possesses an atmosphere that is also distinctive to itself. This chapter provides a comparing and contrasting journey through each SSR, exploring the sights, sounds, smells, and general feel of the various environments from the perspectives of the SSR community and from my perspective, with special emphasis on the human-nonhuman animal interaction and relationship. Furthermore, it broadly incorporates the cultural values that participants associate with SSR.

Environment of the Stock Show and Rodeo: Sights, Sounds, and Smells Abound

When walking onto the grounds of a SSR event, the senses are struck by an array of sights, sounds, and smells, all of which help to stir up a range of feelings. Immediately apparent are the odors associated with nonhuman animals, including the smells associated with the living nonhuman animals (stock animals, chickens, and exotics) and the nonhuman animals who have been slaughtered, cooked, and sold for food at the carnival. When entering the shopping areas, the smell of animal hides (leather products, predominantly) is obvious. The sounds include human chattering, people having fun at the carnival, noises associated with the carnival games and rides, the announcers, loud music at different events (e.g., rodeo, stock shows, pig races, and concerts), and the sounds of the nonhuman animals, such as pigs, cows, sheep, and horses, among others. Mixed in with these smells and sounds are the grand sights of carnival rides and enormous food signs looming over the carnival grounds, the assortment of products sold
in the shopping areas, the various displays of nonhuman animals—alive and dead—in the stock show and educational areas, and more. People near and far, who have been socialized to stock shows and rodeos in different ways, arrive to this sensory experience that is the culture of the SSR events and community. Within these various sensory realms—smells, sights, and sounds—the response or connection to the stimuli can vary widely, often depending on the amount, and types of, exposure individuals have had to this culture and specifically to nonhuman animals.

In particular, the smells have a visceral effect among attendees. For some, the smells are comforting and inviting, and for others, the smells can be unpleasant and off-putting. Becky reminisced about the time when she used to be more involved with stock animals and when she used to love going to rodeos. She said, “I’m telling you, if I walked into an arena and I smelled that dirt, it’s cold in there. It smells so good to me...Like, I love the smell of the dirt. I love it. I love the animals.” This familiarity with certain smells prevalent at SSR events is something Danielle, who has shown stock animals, also describes. She explains that when entering her town, “...there’s a dairy farm, like right as you pull in...So, it smells like cattle. Like it just, you get that kind of like poop and cow smell is what it’s basically what it is.” She continues to explain that her friend, who attends college with her, finds the smell off-putting and states:

But to me, it’s not that it smells good, but it smells like, like home, because I grew up in livestock and to me that’s like the, like you don’t even realize that that’s a smell. It just comes with, it just comes with showing, like that’s what you’re
going to go home smelling like...But to [her friend]...she’s like, ‘Oh my gosh, you know, this stinks’.

The sense of familiarity felt by Becky and Danielle created a degree of connection to the SSR events in a way that is comforting.

This is not exactly the case with others for whom stock shows and rodeos seem to be somewhat outlandish. Spectators not familiar with working on farms or ranches are often offended by the odors. Lydia, a city dweller from the northeast who transplanted to Florida, and who did not think that rodeos were a thing beyond what she had seen in the movies, was, in her own words “overwhelmed” by the environment. When asked about the different events she had attended, she focused on one issue, saying:

Um, I think for me it was just more so, it’s going to sound weird, but like, since it was my first time ever, like even being near those types of animals, okay, the smell...That was just like, what? I don’t know. Like, it was disgusting.”

Lydia experienced so much discomfort with being around nonhuman animals and their smells, that she could not even recall most of the events she had watched.

As overpowering an element as the odors are, they exist in chorus with the sights and sounds of what is taking place all around. For example, in Texas, the signage is especially a reflection of a general culture of pride that resonates with Texans. Vendors often describe their food as “Texas Sized,” which is not surprising, given one of the state’s most popular slogans is, “Everything’s bigger in Texas” (Business Insider 2014). This is a sentiment that is certainly associated with the size of a state boasting a population of nearly 30 million (www.usapopulation.org), a “major portion of the U.S.
economy” (Business Insider 2014), and a land mass of 268,820 square miles; but this sentiment is also attached to the general culture of the state. Hair is big, oil is big, high school football is big, and to be certain, food at the stock show and rodeo is big. There is no coincidence that these larger-than-life signs are hovering over the wafting smells of the food the signs so boldly represent. It is a sight to see and no wonder that attendees are willing to empty their wallets and fill their stomachs with lots of fair food. I watched as one friend who had tagged along with me purchased a cheese quesadilla for $10.00. Another friend purchased an enormous $16.00 “Texas Sized” Corn Dog and a large plate filled with fluffy sweet funnel cake, which cost just under $10.00. He didn’t finish either food item but was too tempted by the smells of food all around to not spend the money and try even a portion of the food. Coupled with the cacophony of sounds from the rides, music, nonhuman animals, and humans who are talking, laughing, and screaming, the stock shows and rodeos offer up stimulating and inescapable experiences at every turn.

During field visits to the two SSR in Texas and the one in Florida, entrances to these events were often situated near the carnival areas. The first smells experienced are typically from the carnival food including enormous turkey legs, hamburgers, sausages, an array of meats on a stick, fries, cotton candy, and fried anything and everything, like the fried chicken sandwiched between two fried donuts and served with a side of French fries, and the fried shrimp po’boy with Fruity Pebbles cereal (see Figure 1).
The shopping areas are generally indoors, just beyond the carnival and upon entry to these areas, the overwhelming smell of leather products is palpable. Saddles, chaps, clothing, floor coverings, belts, boots, and much more, made from the hides of animals are in abundance (see Figure 2).

Beyond the shopping areas, where the stock show animals are held and/or shown (See Figure 3), there is a smell of farm animals, including their waste, their bedding (straw,
hay and wood shavings), and the various food products the animals eat. Finally, this stock, or farm animal smell, can be experienced within the confines of the arenas where petting zoos are situated and where events such as pig racing, Mutton Bustin’, horse shows, and rodeos in general take place.

Figure 3: Longhorn cattle on display at the 2020 Houston SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder

During my first field visit to a Silver Spurs Rodeo event, the Boots, Bulls, and Barrels, I wrote in my fieldnotes that, I am gobsmacked by the intermingling of odors wafting in and out of my nose. As I walk into the arena smells of stock animals, animal waste, hay, leather products, and food hit me all at once. Unlike the days- or weeks-long Silver Spurs Rodeo, San Antonio SSR, and Houston SSR events that take place in late Winter and early Spring, this one-night Fall event is entirely enveloped within the confines of the arena. As noted in my fieldnotes, This experience is one of walking into a barn, a leather shop, and a burger joint all at once, and it takes me several minutes to adapt to the competing odors, especially given that these are not odors I am frequently
exposed to. These various and quite specific smells, while contained in one arena (relatively small compared to the San Antonio SSR and Houston SSR arenas) during the Silver Spurs Rodeo *Boots, Bulls, and Barrels* event, are more individually contained in areas exclusive to the specific vicinities of the carnival, food courts, barns, show arenas, and shopping venues at the multi-day events. Regardless, the intensity of the specific odors, as I state in my fieldnotes is unmistakable and generates mixed emotions for me, especially given the juxtaposition with the sights and sounds.

As previously stated, the one-night Silver Spurs Rodeo event is unique in that all elements of the environment are contained in a relatively small area. Throngs of spectators enjoy nachos, burgers, hot dogs, popcorn, large pretzels, beer, and soda (a rather limited selection compared to the multi-day events), excitedly cheer on the bull riders, steer wrestlers, and barrel racers, and shop for predominantly leather and fur products as well as other western related odds and ends. The sounds from all of this action taking place within this Silver Spurs Rodeo arena are deafening. Between the audience cheers, the announcers booming voice, and the loud music from bands like Drop Kick Murphy’s, Ozzy, Tone Loc, and Guns N’ Roses (see Media 1), to name a few, I could not help but to wonder about the effect this intense noise has on the ears of the nonhuman animals. Indeed, I quickly developed a headache after being exposed to this blaring mixture of sounds, a situation that became a recurring issue with each rodeo.

The multi-day events during February and March are not only spread out over anywhere from three to twenty days but are also spread out over larges spaces. This is helpful in being able to retreat from loud areas when necessary. During these longer events—the San Antonio SSR and the Silver Spurs Rodeo in February and the Houston SSR in March—the sights, sounds, and smells are much grander. To put it in better context, one spectator, Kevin, who has been to all these SSR events over the years described it all as “feeling like the Wizard of Oz.” When asked to elaborate, Kevin explained that:

Being at the smaller rodeo events like the Silver Spurs one in October, is like Dorothy living in Kansas. Then, when you go to these larger ones, like in Texas, it’s like stepping into Oz. Everything that you have back in Kansas is there but it’s on such a larger and more colorful scale.

I had even been told by another spectator that the stock show and rodeo in Houston is like the San Antonio SSR on steroids.

The multi-day events start off a bit quiet and become more crowded and noisier as the days progress. In the early morning, stock show competitors, their families, and staff can be seen milling around as early as 4:00 a.m. unloading, cleaning, and feeding stock animals. By 7:00 a.m., stock show events (e.g., Purebred Gilt (pigs), Beef and Dairy Cattle, Angora Goat, Breeding Sheep, Market Lamb and Goat, and Breeding Heifer, etc.) begin and last through the afternoon. These events are generally quiet, especially in the areas where judging is taking place. While the noise is understated, the smells are not. Walking through the holding pen areas felt like walking through a barn with straw.
underfoot and random animal droppings to be dodged. The differences between the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the San Antonio SSR, and Houston SSR are fairly stark as well and are certainly an indication of what Kevin described.

The Silver Spurs Rodeo holding areas for the stock show animals feels more along the lines of a county fair that draws stock show competitors from rural Florida. I wrote in my fieldnotes that:

> Everyone seems to know each other. This feels like a very tight knit community.

> The space around the pens is tight but families still manage to situate a few folding chairs and coolers with snacks in the vicinity of where their animals are held. It looks as though they settled in for the weekend.

The San Antonio SSR by comparison houses stock animals in much larger warehouses, in much larger pens, and with enough space for families to essentially camp out without impeding the walkways. As my fieldnotes indicate, *I get the sense that the stock show experience for most of these folks is a family endeavor that the entire family is committed to.* The Houston SSR is on an entirely different level compared to both the Silver Spurs Rodeo and the San Antonio SSR.

The stock show area of the Houston SSR is larger than life. The few folding chairs and coolers filled with snacks are dwarfed by the elaborate living room and entertaining unit set-ups that cap the ends of the rows and rows of holding pens for stock animals. An interviewee, Danielle, who is familiar with both the San Antonio SSR and Houston SSR and who has also competed in stock show events in many smaller venues explains that Houston is “one of the bigger shows.” She goes on to say:
I wasn’t particularly fond of showing in Houston, because when you show in San Antonio, it has that more like, like county show feel…but I like lounging around in the chairs and eating chips and stuff. And that’s, that’s the kind of showing that I like…people are a lot friendlier in San Antonio than they are in Houston. And that’s just one of the things that if you’re showing in Houston, you know, that going in, you have to, you have to pay a lot of money to show in Houston and you’re not going to be able to just get a pasture goat or you know, a cheap steer. You’re going to have to put big bucks into it to be able to participate, which is why they have like the, the fancy seating areas. Right. And it’s very cut-throat there.

Indeed, the seating areas are much fancier, as shown in Figure 4. Instead of coolers, bags of chips, plastic cups, and folding chairs, there are refrigerators, some cook tops, coffee machines, fancy glassware, bars, sofas, and side chairs. Each living area is adorned with a custom-made sign for the ranch to which the space belongs, and framed photographs of winning cattle. To say that the Houston stock show is on a different scale than the San Antonio SSR, and most certainly on a different scale compared to the Silver Spurs rodeo, is an understatement. It is evident that when you visit the Houston SSR, the level of competition is between larger ranches and families with money as opposed to the seemingly friendlier competition and camaraderie that is felt when walking through the stock areas of the San Antonio SSR and Silver Spurs Rodeo. To be clear, I am not a member of this community and therefore am simply providing my perception as an observer; however, my observations are supported by interviewees, such as Danielle.
Figure 4: Photos of bar and lounge set-ups in the stock show areas at the 2020 Houston SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.

One thing that is clear from walking through these stock show animal areas is that these animals are cared for. Their pens are immaculate, and no expense seems to be spared for feeding pouches, troughs, and in some cases, swanky harnesses and coverings. The bonds between some of the stock show competitors and their nonhuman animals are also evident. I certainly found myself warmed by the sight of goats in sweaters, pigs playing with toys, and cows being gently bathed. Also evident is the genuine support system in place between older family members (e.g., parents) and the youth who show the stock animals. During stock show competitions that take place in an arena, spectators for the most part appear to be of the same ilk as those competing. My fieldnotes reveal, I feel as though I am out of my element; however, whenever I approach other spectators to ask questions about the judging taking place, they are always gracious and affording of their knowledge. My perceptions of the stock show aspect of the SSR events is that
people take this quite seriously as a way to instill work ethic and responsibility in younger folks, and because this is a way of life and livelihood for many, if not all involved.

My interview with Danielle outlined how she had learned so much from raising goats, from animal care, to work ethic, to saving money. She explained:

Once [dad] realized I was serious about it, we opened up a savings account in my name at his bank. I started working really hard, and you know, I saved up money from those shows to buy, to actually buy my first goat. And then I just, I was on track and rolling since then. And I actually, um, when I turned sixteen, I bought my first vehicle with the money that I used that I got from my showing…it’s taught me a lot on how to, you know, save money. Um, like it just really shows you as a kid how fast money goes, and you know, the importance of really saving money too.

Danielle learned how to keep thorough records for each of her goats, including their feeding and weight, both indicators of one’s ability to perform their animal husbandry duties. The animal husbandry is something that also appeals to Jacob, an amateur rodeo athlete. While Jacob said that the stock show isn’t necessarily his world, he has many friends who are involved in that aspect of SSR. Jacob enjoys what stock shows can offer kids, saying, “Kids that are involved in the stock show are responsible for another life…there’s a ton of responsibility that goes into that and it teaches you to be accountable…teaches you work ethic.”
There are other aspects of the SSR where the significance of ranch/farm life is on display. The stock show feels like you are walking into a negotiation between those who own the livestock and those who want to purchase the livestock. While there are elements of pride, hard work, care, family, community, and camaraderie, it is patently clear that the nonhuman animals are the commodity around which those elements are developed.

Noticeable at the SSR events are the ways in which spectators are invited into the folds of the business of animal production and trade, the commodification and consumption of nonhuman animals, and the use of nonhuman animals as entertainment. In other words, there are many transitions that take place during these events that seemingly rely on the disinterest and/or short attention span of spectators over the course of a weekend or several weeks. While the stock show attracts people who are in the business of agriculture—or those who may ultimately want to base their livelihood on agriculture—other events seemingly focus on a wider array of participants and spectators (to be clear, many of these participants may also be involved in stock shows).

Events such as the rodeo, cutting horse events⁵, horse auctions, educational displays, the carnival, and shopping areas, that essentially show the importance of nonhuman as entertainers, workers, as food and other commodities, tend to draw a wider, more diverse audience. Again, the ways in which these realms are exhibited varies between the different larger SSR events. The Silver Spurs Rodeo, for example does not

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⁵ The cutting horse show, according to the Houston Livestock and Rodeo website, states that “a herd of 25 to 30 cattle are held at one end of the arena. Once a horse’s name is called, its rider will guide it into the heard toward the cow which the rider thinks will best challenge the horse’s ‘cutting’ ability,” meaning the horse’s ability to separate a cow from the herd (https://rodeohouston.com/visit-th-Rodeo/Livestock-Horse-Show/Horse-Show).
have cutting events or horse auctions, whereas San Antonio SSR and Houston SSR do. All three SSR events have educational areas, but the scale of space and presentation is quite different. While these specific events—cutting, horse auctions, and educational displays—will be further discussed in later chapters, it is important to note here that the audience drawn to these events are slightly more diverse, yet still greatly encompassing of the stock show crowd, meaning that those visiting these displays appear to have some type of investment into the perpetuation of what is gained from that which is on display (e.g., nonhuman as worker and/or commodity).

For example, while observing cutting events whereby riders (human competitors/workers) ride atop their horses (co-competitors/workers) in an effort to separate a calf/cow from the heard, I commented in my fieldnotes that the crowd of spectators is sparse compared to the number of competitors and or support staff. Cutting events generally take place during the daytime hours and unless you are seeking this out specifically or just want to rest your feet by sitting in the bleachers, you are not likely to attend this event. My observations at both the San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR is that the spectators in the stands were either there because they had a vested interest, or because they happened upon the event, or because they simply wanted to rest.

Similarly, the horse auction draws a unique crowd. Horses are on display for either their entertaining characteristics, their athleticism, or their ability to labor on a ranch/farm. The auction house setting in which these nonhuman animals are displayed is distinct in and of itself. My fieldnotes indicate, the folding chairs on the ground appear to be the hot ticket seats where the highest bidders reside, while the bleachers that fan
out are predominantly reserved for the spectators, who again appear to be composed of those who happened upon this event or who want to take a break from walking around.

The diversity of the spectators seems to expand within the realms of the education and shopping areas; although, it does appear that most of those venturing into these areas are attendees who claim some allegiance to the western, ranch/farm lifestyle. Again, the scale of what is offered is quite different between the three larger SSR events at which observations were conducted. The pattern remains the same with the Silver Spurs Rodeo having significantly less to offer than the San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR having significantly more to offer than either of the other two.

At the Silver Spurs Rodeo, vendors in the shopping area look like they have been plucked right from within the local community with booths that are far more rudimentary (refer back to Figure 2) compared to the more professional and elaborate displays erected at the San Antonio SSR and Houston SSR, where vendors from around the country set up shop. The same holds true in the food courts. Whereas the Silver Spurs Rodeo seems to rely predominantly on the carnival food vendors, which is fairly homogenous from one SSR carnival to the next, the San Antonio SSR and Houston SSR both also provide space for local, regional, and chain restaurants. In fact, there are wine and beer gardens and after-hour nightlife venues operating at both the San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR, which are not found at the Silver Spurs Rodeo.

The educational areas and petting zoos appear to try and connect visitors with other animals, albeit in different ways. The petting zoos offer a hands-on, interactive experience, aimed primarily at children. This type of encounter allows children and adults
to get up close and personal with farm animals such as pigs, goats, sheep, and interestingly enough, wallabies and deer. As I wrote in my fieldnotes, the animals selected for the petting zoos are either quite young or simply docile enough to interact in a large pen with the other, including humans, which from my observations so far fill the pen in numbers of up to thirty people. This experience at the San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR is marketed as the “Great American Petting Farm” and is decorated in red, white, and blue, as well as signage indicating that those who enter, do so at their own risk (see Figures 5). Extensions to the petting zoos and interactive experiences are pony rides (at all three larger SSR events) and camel rides at (at the Silver Spurs Rodeo) as presented in Figure 6, as well as exotic animal displays (at the Silver Spurs Rodeo), as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 5: Photos of the Great American Petting Zoo at the 2020 San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder
Besides the petting zoos, pony rides, and camel rides, access to touching the other animals is limited or simply not permitted. However, each event tries to draw the audience in, getting them as up close and personal as possible, and learning about the other animals. Like the shopping and stock show areas of the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the educational areas are also sparser and largely incorporated within the tents of the 4H judging area. For example, in Figure 8, signage created by a 4H competitor outlines some facts about rabbits, which are presented in the tent under which the rabbits are displayed. Figure 9 shows a stark difference between the Silver Spurs Rodeo, which relies on the
ability of children competing against one another to educate the public and the Houston SSR, which relies on larger nonhuman animal operations and sponsors to present the educational displays.

Figure 8: Photos of rabbits raised by a 4H competitor along with educational signage about rabbits at the 2020 Silver Spurs Rodeo. Source: Erin N. Kidder

Figure 9: Photos from “The Rabbit Hole” at the 2020 Houston SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.

Indeed, San Antonio made efforts to transport visitors to a time from which the stock shows and rodeos hail—the old West—by creating displays of wagons, campfires,
schoolhouses, a general store with a goose visiting a well, and an old west dwelling equipped with clothes hanging on a clothesline (see Figure 10).

![Figure 10: Photos from the 2020 San Antonio SSR depicting part of an old western town. Source: Erin N. Kidder](image)

This attempt by the San Antonio SSR to transport visitors to days long gone by feeds into the allure of the Cowboy culture that was presented in the literature review (Fredriksson 1985; Allen 1998; Peter 2005; Stratton; Branch 2018).

All three SSR events promote education about other animals, agriculture, and food and dairy production and consumption, the range of which differs between the three. The big-ticket item for the SSR events, however, is the rodeo, which features nonhuman animals as entertainers and athletes along with human entertainers and athletes. The rodeo events featured at each SSR include bareback and saddle bronc riding, bull riding, steer wrestling (also called bulldogging), calf roping, team roping (also roping of calves), and barrel racing. There may also be events such as Mutton Bustin’, a calf scramble, and other horse showmanship related events. Rodeos take place during the daytime and at
night. Most of the night rodeos are followed by music concerts featuring big name country, rock, R & B, and rap artists.

Rodeo for many, if not all the competitors, is more than just a competition, it is also a way of life. As I was boarding a plane in San Antonio, Texas to return to Florida after conducting field observations at the San Antonio SSR, this fact was illuminated by the presence of a bronc rider boarding the same plane (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Photo of a professional saddle bronc rider leaving for another rodeo after competing at the 2020 San Antonio SSR.

I had a brief opportunity to speak with him and learned that while he was disappointed that he didn’t do better at the San Antonio SSR, he was looking forward to the next rodeo. As I sat on the plane, just a row or two away from him, I jotted down a few notes on the off chance that he would take me up on my request to interview him at a later date, which he did not. I pondered in one of my fieldnotes, what is it that led him down this
path of self-funded travel around the country for nearly the entire year (according to him). This reminded me of an image of young boys practicing their roping skills on a small metal bull and the image of a young girl on a mechanical bull (see Figure 12), and I wondered if he had these same romantic images of rodeo as a young child.

Figure 12: Photos of children pretending to be rodeo competitors at the 2020 San Antonio SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.

The idea of interacting with the animals at the rodeo or the stock show in the ways that humans do (e.g., roping and riding) is something that many within this community learn early on. Many of the rodeo competitors look as though they almost belong on the nonhuman animals they are riding. They look like the ranch hands one might envision working on a farm/ranch, roping a calf or wrestling a steer. Rodeos, however, are big, bright, bombastic displays of interactions between humans and other animals that aren’t necessarily reflective of what actually occurs on farms/ranches. Rodeos are spectacles with loud music, bright lights, and cheering crowds. The stock shows are perhaps the most reflective of what occurs on farms/ranches; however, a good portion of the visitors
to the large SSR events are city dwellers who are not necessarily making the connections between the nonhuman animals they are entertained by and the nonhuman animals they are eating and wearing. The carnivals are the areas whereby the connections between humans and other animals, and the connections to a cowboy way of life are most lost.

Discussion

After visiting three large stock show and rodeo events in Texas and Florida, an environment and culture to which I was largely unfamiliar was illuminated. Furthermore, I was intrigued by the folks who have in the past or who continue to take part in this community. While I have attempted to look at the SSR as one large event, it became quickly apparent that each part of the SSR—the stock show, the rodeo, the carnival, and the shopping—are unique in and of themselves. Indeed, one could conduct this type of study strictly focusing on each element individually. I chose to investigate each element together, recognizing and featuring their differences and similarities.

Young (2014) presented what I consider to be a challenge to sociologists. That challenge is to investigate the “animal-sport complex” and its myriad parts that influence and are influenced by the human-nonhuman animal relationship. The primary inquiry is that of “how the use of animals in sport interfaces with culture, social class…other social stratifiers…” (Young 2014:389). In fact, Young posits that examining the use of other animals in “entertainment cultures,” as “spectacle,” as part of our “consumptive practices,” and more, is critical to better understanding this human-nonhuman animal
relationship. The SSR encompasses all realms of what Young proposes for sociological inquiry.

Young (2014) describes the “animal-sport complex” as a “human made construct” and it is clear that the SSR has been constructed by humans as a form of entertainment. Young also suggests that the “animal-sport complex” presents us with questions regarding “civility, morality and empathy” and what these traits mean for our perceptions of “acceptable leisure forms” (Young 2014:389). The SSR are festivals filled with entertainment value for humans. As described in this chapter, these events are filled with unrelenting stimuli from the sounds of the carnival to humans enjoying themselves, to the sights of lit up rides, enormous food signs, and humans and nonhuman animals entertaining, and to the smells of nonhuman animals—alive and dead.

Setting aside the concepts of civility, morality, and empathy for now, I focus here on the SSR as a form of leisure, whereby sports and entertainment are highly valued and thoroughly consumed by humans. More specifically, this discussion centers on the environment and culture of the SSR that draws participants into the community. The SSR events are constructed by humans to in many ways reflect a particular way of life—that of the western frontier. While Young includes as part of the “animal-sport complex” the perceptions of “sport as a carnivorous culture” (Young 2014:314), based on my observations and interviews, I would go so far as to say that the entire realm of sports and entertainment that includes other animals is part of an animal sport and entertainment complex. To be clear, the “animal-sport complex” is one that has thus far focused largely on “blood sports” (Atkinson and Young 2005; Kalof 2014); however, as Atkinson and
Young (2005) suggest, there are other practices associated with sports that include nonhuman animals that are considered exploitive and harmful. Similarly, I suggest that there are other practices associated with sports and entertainment that include nonhuman animals that are considered exploitive and even harmful. That said, there is also value in understanding the realms of this animal sports and entertainment complex that while still exploitive of other animals is not necessarily harmful, as others have suggested (Fjellstrom 2002; Lund 2014; Smith 2014).

The SSR are not events purposefully focused on harming other animals. Based on my observations and interviews, people are not put off by the exploitation of nonhuman animals and are in fact not recognizing the ways other animals are indeed exploited. Rather, people who participate in stock shows and rodeos do so because of a level of admiration and attachment to other animals (rodeos), to promote a way of life and livelihood (stock shows), or to simply have fun (carnival visitors and spectators to stock shows and rodeos). The SSR is designed to lure humans in and part of the enticement is the incorporation of nonhuman animals as entertainers (e.g., pig races, Mutton Bustin’), as athletes (e.g., bucking horses and bulls), as interactive participants (e.g., petting zoo animals, ponies to ride), as forms of education (e.g., stock show animals), as clothing (e.g., boots, belts, saddles), and as food (e.g., turkey legs, hamburgers, corndogs).

Errington (1990) points out that rodeos are no longer particularly reflective of current day ranching or farming practices involving nonhuman animals. While these large events are billed as “Stock Shows and Rodeos” they more closely resemble commercialized festivals for the spectators than the “romantic images of the good old
days of the wild west” (Serpell 1986:224). As Serpell suggests, my observations and associated images and videos contained in this study support the fact that these large SSR focus on commercialization of not only a romantic and nostalgic reminiscence of the old west, but also the commercialization of other animals.

To be sure, not all within the SSR community are preoccupied—whether intentionally or unintentionally—by the aspect of commercialization. Interview respondents like Becky and Danielle have spent much of their lives working with nonhuman animals on farms and ranches. They enjoy the aspects of the SSR that involve the more hands-on experiences with the nonhuman animals. They are both familiarized to the smells, the dirt, and the grittier aspects of the environment that comes with caring for stock animals. Others like Lydia merely participated in a rodeo because their friend happened to take them to one and that experience wasn’t enjoyable enough to return. Still others, like my friend who tagged along with me to one day of the San Antonio SSR, are drawn in by the glitz of the events, the smells of all the fried foods, the sounds of the entertainment, and the sights of other animals performing.

I think back to the bronc rider boarding coach on a flight from San Antonio to compete in another rodeo elsewhere in the United States, and I think about the kids practicing their roping on a small metal calf. I can’t help but to disassociate from the values connected to western culture that Rollin (1996) wrote about. While animal management may be integral to the stock show aspect of the SSR, there is little possibility of having to do so in the “unforgiving environments” that Rollin suggests are tied to that western culture that is romanticized by many in the SSR community.
Furthermore, respondents like Danielle present a side of participation as part of the stock show community that lends itself to the values Murphy et al. (1992) discussed, having to do with responsibility and independence; however, Danielle also exposed the downsides to stock shows when lots of money is involved. While Danielle may not have associated that side to the illicit use of drugs, she did make clear that larger shows where there is more money, tends to be much more “cut-throat” in terms of people’s behaviors.

My observations and discussion within the SSR community indicate that there is some adherence to the notion of values such as independence, responsibility, and animal management associated with the culture of stock shows and rodeos (Errington 1990; Murphy et al., 1992). As tied to that story as some may be, the fact that a “network of fans” (Forsyth and Thompson 2007) is necessary for this narrative to persist is emblematic of a larger more commodified and consumer-based reality.

While this chapter is meant to set the stage, to provide context to what it is like to walk through a SSR and its many associated events, the next two chapters will provide a more in-depth exploration of the commodification and consumption practices that occur at SSR, especially regarding nonhuman animals (Chapter 6), and the connections to and care of the nonhuman animals involved with SSR events.
CHAPTER SIX: COMMODIFICATION AND CONSUMPTION OF OTHER ANIMALS AT STOCK SHOWS AND RODEOS

The commodification and consumption of nonhuman animals is at the same time implicit and explicit in most—if not all—realms of the stock show and rodeo (SSR) events. From simply being displayed for observation, to being exhibited for educational purposes, to being broken down into parts to be eaten and worn, and to performing and competing, nonhuman animals are commodities meant to draw people to these events. One exception to this would be concerts, which some participants attend with little to no interest in attending any other aspect of the SSR. Although, as will be discussed later, it can be argued that by attending the concerts, sans any of the stock show and rodeo events, it is still economically supporting the SSR and the commodification of nonhuman animals.

As an observer spending weeks at three different larger SSR events for this study, and as a scholar interested in the human-nonhuman animal relationship in general, I am hyperaware of how integral animals are to these events. What surprised me most was the varying degrees of connection to the commodified animals—from total indifference to complete awareness—in terms of their commodified existence within the SSR community. While I interpret levels of awareness regarding commodification based on my field observations, I am also able to ascertain levels of awareness through interviews with various participants at SSR events. In this chapter I explore the ways in which animals are commodified and the degree to which people participating at SSR acknowledge the ways in which animals are commodified. Furthermore, I examine the
consumerism associated with the SSR events as it pertains to nonhuman animals, including the degree to which people acknowledge other animals in that process.

**Animals on Display**

Upon initial conception of this study, I envisioned observing the human and nonhuman animals involved in rodeo events and at stock shows. While these animals are indeed being observed while performing their stock show and rodeo duties, there are many other nonhuman animals who are simply displayed, much in the way that zoo animals are, for people to stare at, to learn about both in terms of their existence and their usefulness, and in some cases, to ride and/or pet. During the Spring SSR events—the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo (San Antonio SSR), and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (Houston SSR)—farm animals, wild animals, and more exotic animals are held in pens for people to admire. Longhorn cattle exhibited at the San Antonio SSR and at the Houston SSR display the magnificent size of the breed. Pigs playing with a ball at the San Antonio SSR show the playful and social nature of pigs. Bucking horses alongside their offspring at Houston SSR underscore their genetic superiority through generations of bucking horses. An array of rabbits and chickens lined rows and rows within tents at the Silver Spurs Rodeo highlighting the abilities and dedication of young 4H members to raise quality animals. Exotic animals, such as lemurs, zebras, camels, and more, who are not native to the United States, let alone Texas or Florida, are on display for the intrigued eyes of passers-by. These are just a few examples of how a diverse range of other animals and their characteristics and abilities are on display.
There are various ways in which nonhuman animals are presented, and while some presentations are seemingly less innocuous than others, the primary purpose results in the commodification of nonhuman animals. Sometimes this commodification coincides with the commodification of humans, such as during the rodeo, where throngs of onlookers have paid money to watch a competition between human athlete and nonhuman athlete, or competitions where human and nonhuman animals are essentially teammates (e.g., barrel racers and their horses). However, for the most part, nonhuman animals are the primary commodity on display.

**Animals Exhibited for Educational and Stock Show Purposes**

Critical to SSR are the educational displays. While the San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR are far more elaborate, the Silver Spurs Rodeo consists of the same essential components: the exhibition of live nonhuman animals, or at least an image of the nonhuman animals, along with informative literature and/or demonstrations of other animals displaying their behaviors and/or usefulness. Chicken eggs hatching in real time, sows nursing piglets in their farrowing crates, cow-milking demonstrations, and illustrations of the cattle body parts that turn into slabs of meat, are just a few examples of what observers in this section of the SSR can expect. There are also exhibits dedicated to the equipment used to facilitate the labor of these nonhuman animals, including but not limited to incubators, tractors, grooming products, and other machinery. As an observer with no financial or sweat equity in the agricultural field, I suspect that the point is to inform the audience of where their food comes from, how their clothes are made, and
why farms are so important; however, I am not a casual observer. Between my professional background working with animals (human and nonhuman) and my academic training, I cannot help but view the human-nonhuman animal interaction/relationship through a sociological lens, which I acknowledge may be more involved than actual casual observers of stock shows and rodeos. Furthermore, I also acknowledge that my perspective as a sociologist may be starkly different than those whose livelihood is dependent on the raising and selling of livestock animals.

The first instance of experiencing disconnect occurred while observing the process of chicken eggs from incubation to hatching (see Figure 13). Small crowds of people gather around the ventilated displays with hatching chicks, intrigued with the process of these little lives presenting themselves to the world. I wrote in my fieldnotes that I was certainly drawn in by the sight of cute little chicks breaking free from the shells that contained their developing bodies. The process is time-consuming for the chicks as well as for the audience. Several of those who gathered around the display case in Figure 13 lost interest in the many hatching eggs and wandered off to the next point of interest. Patiently I waited for approximately ten minutes to capture the video shared here (see Media 2), the last minute of a little yellow chick almost breaking out of the shell. As I watch mesmerized by the hatching, I am equally as mesmerized by the reactions of those around me. For example, in this video, a woman can be heard saying, “He’s tired. He’s gotta rest” before oohing and ahhing after the cracked egg rolls over, exposing more of the chick to the onlookers. She then says, “…all folded up inside there, like an embryo” to which another person agreed. This was followed by a “Hi” and an “Ohhh” directed at
the chick. In the meantime, I wrote about my observation in my fieldnotes, *other newly hatched chicks, still covered in embryonic fluids flail around in an attempt to acclimate to their new environment*. The woman continues, “Isn’t that something? Ahhh.” I find this reaction to be both sincerely appreciative of the event taking place in front of us but also perplexing for two reasons. First, the comment made about this being “like an embryo” seemingly avoids the reality of how other animal lives come to be—how similar it is to that of humans. Second, these ventilated glass display cases where these eggs are hatching are surrounded by illustrations and information about who these chicks are—broilers or layers (see Figure 13).

*Media 2: Spectator commenting on hatching chicks at the 2020 Houston SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.*

*Figure 13: Photos from the 2020 Houston SSR depicting the process of incubation to hatching of eggs, and of signage regarding broiler chickens. Source: Erin N. Kidder* 

The chickens at SSR are shown as being bred for food production and the displays walk the audience through the process from incubation of the eggs to the final product. Broilers are chickens meant to be eaten and layers are meant to produce eggs that are
meant to be eaten. The lives of these cute little hatchlings are predestined. As miraculous as it is to see these chicks spring out into the world and as charming as they are, the fact is that they are tasked with a job from the moment they are laid, and that job is to be part of the food chain—food for humans and food for other animals.

The chicks being hatched in the observed display cases are considered *broilers*, and as the signage indicates, they are “FAST-GROWING CHICKENS that are raised for meat consumption.” The journey follows that in approximately five to seven weeks, these broilers will weigh about five pounds, at which point they may be “harvested” (see Figure 14, photo 1), meaning that they are ready to consume. In the meantime, the audience is assured that until then, the broilers live in houses where they are “protected and fed” (see Figure 14, photo 2). Another sign outlines the nutritional value of broilers as a good source of protein, zinc, selenium, niacin, beta carotene, and vitamins E, B6, and B12 (see Figure 14, photo 3).

![Figure 14: Photos from the 2020 Houston SSR of education information regarding chicken weights, chicken housing, and nutritional value of chickens. Source: Erin N. Kidder](image)

Mixed in with the educational material about the lifecycle of a broiler and part of the process are signs with informational tidbits (see Figure 15). For example, one sign
displaying rows of chickens, declares that there are “25 BILLION CHICKENS in the world…more than any other bird species” (Figure 15, photo 1). Another sign points out that chickens are the “closest LIVING RELATIVE to the TYRANNOSAURUS-REX” (Figure 15, photo 2). A personal favorite is the one asserting that “Chickens have DREAMS while they sleep” (Figure 15, photo 3). As I wrote in my fieldnotes:

I wonder if information such as this is meant to draw some kind of similarity between humans and other animals, which seems counterintuitive to the rest of the display area which seems to connect more to the consumption of chickens.

Also, I don’t see many folks reading any of the informational signage. These people seem far more focused on the hatching chicks.

As an observer reading these informative signs, I wonder if it would make much of a difference if the signage informing the visitors of these interesting facts would have raised anyone’s eyebrows. For example, while there are twenty-five billion chickens in the world as the sign in Figure 13 states, according to the ASPCA (https://www.aspca.org/animal-cruelty/farm-animal-welfare/animals-factory-farms), nine billion of those chickens are slaughtered for food (the broilers) annually in the U.S. alone and approximately three hundred million more are egg producers (the layers) who produce eggs for food. The signs here focus on the “lives” of chickens rather than the ultimate deaths of chickens. Indeed, the cute chick hatching from the egg who charmed onlookers will be one of those nine billion three hundred million chickens in a matter of months.
As I continue to observe the educational areas, there are live nonhuman animals throughout accompanied by signage displaying information about the animals, the care that goes into maintaining the animals, the environments in which the animals thrive, and the end product of the animals. There are subtle and overt ways in which nonhuman animals are discussed that detach them from their physical being and ultimately relate them to the food product they become for the consumer. For example, in Figure 16, photo 1, Hereford cattle are considered a “Muscular, large breed that produces quality beef” while the Angus cattle (see Figure 16, photo 2) are “…among the most popular commercial beef breeds in the U.S. because of its superior taste and texture.” While these two examples are a bit more subtle, the image shown in Figure 17 more blatantly partitions the body of cattle into its corresponding product for consumption.
Figure 16: Photos from the 2020 Houston SSR regarding educational information about Hereford and Angus cattle. Source: Erin N. Kidder

Figure 17: Photo from the 2020 Houston SSR of signage displaying the cuts of beef. Source: Erin N. Kidder.

The image in Figure 17 further describes the best cuts, their marketability, the best temperatures to cook to the desired wellness, and the various cooking methods (e.g., grilling, slow cooking, and pan frying) for the consumer.

Figure 18 presents an image illustrating the detachment process of calf to consumer. This process includes the birth of the calf, when they are able to feed
themselves, their primary diet, time spent in the feedlot, the processing of their cattle body to beef, the inspection of the subsequent product, and the display of the once-calf-now-beef as a product to be purchased and consumed by humans. As an observer of this display, I find the information to be simplistic in a way that doesn’t fully capture the entire process and as my fieldnotes state, *disturbing in a way that denies the life of the animal as being anything more than a product, or products to be consumed*. While the diet might be “primarily grass and foraging” as displayed in Figure 16, according to The National Humane Education Society, “Life on the range ends at about one year of age when cattle are shipped to concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), where they are fed a diet of mainly corn” (https://www.nhes.org/animal-info-2/factory-farmed-animals-2/factory-farmed-cows). Furthermore, this “Beef Life Cycle” is commodity and consumer driven in a way that erases the *actual* life cycle of *actual* cattle. In other words, the “Beef Life Cycle” is an unnatural social construction meant to fulfill the desires of humans, rather than the lived experience of cattle.
The commodification of cattle does not stop at food. Additional signage displays, “Did you know beyond meat, cattle provides hundreds of by-products such as: Ice Cream, Soap, Lipstick, Tires, Buttons, Paper, Toothbrushes, Marshmallows & more!” further apportioning the body of the animal into products to be consumed by humans.

When it comes to cattle, their ability to breed is also commodified, and the characteristics associated with their ability to produce quality offspring is often presented in a gendered way. Another display (Figure 19) outlines what judges look for in stock show competitions that feature cattle. For example, when it comes to the muscling of a cow, “…too much muscling may negatively impact structure and balance and result in females that are not very feminine in appearance” (Figure 19, photo 1). As I wrote in my fieldnotes, *I wonder what this idea of femininity is in terms of cows?* Another example is the language used to describe “BREED AND SEX CHARACTERISTICS” (Figure 19,
photo 2). The sign indicates that “With regard to sex characteristics, bulls should appear masculine and heifers should appear feminine.” It should be noted here that the signage does not take into consideration the biological association of sex and the socially constructed association with gender when it comes to the characteristics of the animal. Also, in Figure 19, photo 3, the co-mingled messages of a living subjective animal with an objective product are presented in terms of the appropriate amount of fat a cow needs to maintain. The sign displays, “Condition is usually evaluated by looking at the fullness of the brisket, flank, and udder (female).” Additionally, the assertion that “In general, a well balanced beef animal will possess adequate muscling and depth of body…” creates this juxtaposition of an animal that is living, breathing, and being admired at the SSR events, and the food product that people consume.

![Figure 19](image)

*Figure 19: Photos from the 2020 Houston SSR showing educational information about the muscling, breed and sex characteristics, and balance of cattle raised for food. Source: Erin N. Kidder.*

Female animals bear the weight of the production in this animal-food juxtaposition. They are required to produce quality offspring before eventually be sent to
slaughter at the end of their reproductive use, which according to the National Humane Education Society is approximately three to four years long (https://www.nhes.org/animal-info-2/factory-farmed-animals-2/factory-farmed-cows/).\(^6\)

Indeed, the emphasis placed on these animals’ ability to produce is outlined, stating that “In order for cows to withstand the energy demands of the production cycle—giving birth, lactating, and rebreeding—each and every year, it is important that they are able to maintain adequate energy reserves in the form of body fat.” Even as I observe the heifers being judged, I contemplate the burden placed on the female body and the quality of reproduction. Figure 20 below shows a heifer on display with her offspring—both of whom are judged for ability to reproduce and/or provide within the food chain.

![Figure 20: Photo from the 2020 Houston SSR of a heifer and her calf being shown and judged at the stock show. Source: Erin N. Kidder.](image)

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\(^6\) While cows on dairy farms are forced to be separated from their calves immediately after birth, according to the National Humane Education Society (https://www.nhes.org/animal-info-2/factory-farmed-animals-2/factory-farmed-cows/), it is important to note that this may not always be the case on smaller farms, especially those from which many of the cows on display at the SSR come.
This burden becomes more evident when looking at the displayed information about pigs. Figure 21 outlines the farrowing of pigs, which is displayed above actual pigs farrowing in a gestation crate for the SSR audience to view (see Media 3). The process described here asserts that sows start producing offspring in their first year—an overall process that takes slightly over three months, from insemination to birthing. According to the sign, sows have “at least” two litters per year producing a total of “8-12” piglets per litter, culminating into approximately “80-100 piglets in their lifetime.” I stared at this sign for a few minutes, doing the math in my head: two litters with approximately ten piglets per litter equals twenty piglets per year, producing up to 100 piglets over a lifetime. I realized that if this is true, the reproductive “lifetime” for these sows is approximately five years. At the end of their reproductive lifetime, they are culled (slaughtered). As an observer at the SSR events, I can’t help but to wonder how many spectators, especially those with limited to no knowledge of meat production, understand the lived realities for these sows and the piglets they are being entertained by.\footnote{Domestic pigs can live up to about twenty years (give or take five years), meaning the sows—at least those whose job is to produce food—live significantly shorter lives and those significantly short lives are spent in constant reproductive mode, producing offspring for the food industry. To put into perspective the number of pigs we are talking about, the ASPCA states that “The U.S. raises around 120 million pigs for food each year” (https://www.aspca.org/animal-cruelty/farm-animal-welfare/animals-factory-farms). Envision the densely populated city of New York, with over eighteen million humans (U.S. Census) and multiply that by six. There are 1,200,000 sows producing piglets that will become food annually. As short as the lifespan is for a sow, the lifespan for her offspring is even more dismal. Once born, the sows will nurse their two to three pound piglets for up to about twenty-one days, when they are about thirteen to fifteen pounds. At that point, they move to a “nursery” for six to eight weeks, where they are fed between one and four pounds of food with a diet consisting of “corn/soybean meal” until they are fifty or sixty pounds. From there, they move to a “finishing barn” for about seventeen weeks, where they will eat almost ten pounds of food daily. At this point, their diets are supplemented with vitamins and minerals to “ensure proper health.” This entire process takes about six months, at which point the piglets are around two hundred eighty pounds and “market ready” (https://meatscience.org/TheMeatWeEat/topics/fresh-meat/article/2017/03/09/pork-production-farrow-to-finish-process). In as early as six months they go to market and ultimately become food.}
As I watch the stream of people walking by the farrowing pigs, many of whom stop briefly to adore the cuteness of the piglets and snap photos before moving on, I wonder if they are considering the fact that these animals are subjected to this unnatural process of farrowing that is so distant from the ways in which sows naturally farrow. For example, female pigs are nest builders who are keenly interested in selecting the most suitable and secluded site in which to farrow (Barrett 1978; Jensen 1986; Stolba and Wood-Gush 1989). As I look around the surrounding environment, I write a fieldnote, *it becomes clear that the sows and piglets are mere props for the farm equipment*, which is on display for the ranchers/farmers attending this event who may be interested in purchasing the equipment for their ranches/farms.

My observations of these nonhuman animals are that they are commodified and objectified products to be consumed by humans. Furthermore, these animals are part of
an unpaid labor force who are tasked with a job before they are even born. My assertions
are reinforced through interviews with people who participate in one way or another with
the SSR. Some of the respondents more explicitly recognize this fact while for others, the
connections are less obvious.

A few of the respondents enjoy viewing the nonhuman animals. Christine
describes her minimal spectating in the stock show area as briefly seeing the pigs being
shown. She said, “I enjoyed seeing the stock show, just because I like looking at the
animals.” She distinguished her feelings about watching the stock show animals being
shown compared to the rodeo animals performing, suggesting that the rodeo animals are
in more distress. When pressed to expand on this thought, Christine said, “At the stock
show, they [the animals] are just hanging out in a pen and sometimes they’re trotting
around the horses just showing them off.” When asked what her understanding of the
stock show was, Christine was unsure, explaining:

I kind of assume that it’s to sell the animals to whoever the highest bidder is, but I
don’t know what the bidders do with the animals there. I’m sure some of them are
sold as breeders and some of them are just sold as, just a cow.

Christine wasn’t the only respondent who wasn’t entirely connected to the
nonhuman animals at the stock show. Brianna considered the experience as more of a
“novelty” that loses its excitement as you get older. While she feels that it is “weird that
you come and just like look at animals and gawk at them when they’re in the little like
pens before they do their shows or whatever…” she acknowledges that she is somewhat
indifferent to the concept. Brianna, a self-described city dweller, proposes that “for a lot
of Americans, this is like a livelihood and that this is what they’re raised doing.” Like Christine, Brianna is much more put off by what she feels is exploitation of the nonhuman animals in rodeos than by the seemingly normal and innocuous presentation of animals at stock shows. When asked about her perceptions about the different treatment of nonhuman animals and their feelings between the stock shows and rodeos, Brianna explained:

So, I think the biggest one that I think of is probably like the bull riding, because my understanding is with things like that, like this isn’t the way that I view like the other ones where people are like caring for these animals and presenting them in shows. Like I think that’s what FFA and clubs like that do. Um, this seems like kind of the opposite to me because this is like taking an animal that is not, like it shouldn’t really be there. I don’t know. It just seems like kind of a weird exploitation of like an animal that clearly doesn’t want to be in the situation because they just rile it up to get it kind of like angry…I can’t defend that one in the same way that I can say some of the animals of the stock show might be genuinely, like, people like who had raised these animals on their farm or ranch or something and are really invested in them.

Brianna continues to explain her distaste for the rodeo compared to the stock show, which she had initially expressed indifference about. As she thinks through her feelings on the matter, she manages to tie her perspective more to the benefits to the human livelihood, which is held to a higher standard for Brianna than the exploitative nature of nonhuman animals used for entertainment.
Others make much more specific connections to nonhuman animals as product for human consumption. Kelly, who has raised stock animals, asserts that the Houston SSR does a “really good job of trying to educate people and get people connected more intimately with the food cycle and with agriculture.” She explains the importance of this, stating that:

[T]here are a lot of people that don’t know what a cow or chicken really look like or act like. I’m like, you’re eating hamburgers. Like, don’t you want to know like where your food comes from? Like, I think it’s really important to have that connection and not be disconnected from the food supply chain.

In a seemingly pragmatic way, Kelly also posited that people who raise stock need to distinguish the idea of these animals as pets from their dogs and cats. She states:

…you have livestock which are for food and um, it’s definitely a much more, sometimes it seems a little brutal, but very practical…it definitely blurs the lines a little bit when it’s, you know, your family breeds cattle but your six-year-old was responsible for this heifer this year. Like, people aren’t, you know, so harsh that they’re going to be that harsh about their six-year-old’s heifer, generally. Um, but they are you know, how you make your living, and you have to be a little ruthless sometimes.

Kelly is matter of fact about the purpose of the stock animals, but also recognizes the paradoxical nature of the SSR setting, suggesting “It’s a little surreal to go to the rodeo and like walk around eating a turkey leg while you’re looking at the turkeys that are
being judged or eating a hamburger while you’re watching a cattle class…but it’s the nature of the beast.”

Equally as practical, is Ryan, an agriculture teacher who guides students in choosing animals to either compete in the “market setting” or to show in the “breeding area.” Ryan considers stock shows to be the “extreme part of production agriculture” due to the level of competition involved, where, as he says, “You’re trying to get the best market animal to go in there and compete against everyone else and win.” He also points out that the stock animals, such as the bulls and cows are bred for their superior traits, saying, “they’re producing that attitude, that confirmation, that structure, whatever it is, it’s, you’re going for what you’re wanting to try to repeat, that breed.” The selective breeding, as Ryan suggests, is meant to produce better—even champion—animals for market. This aspect of agriculture is something that may not necessarily translate to general knowledge in terms of what the stock animals are meant for, at least not for the general spectators who are not directly involved in stock shows. Ryan says that over the years, he sees that:

fewer and fewer people understand it. Um, you know, so many people think, well,

I can go to the grocery store and, and uh, that’s where my meat comes from.

That’s where my eggs come from. That’s where my meal comes from.

Ryan then suggests that “during this Coronavirus, uh, I think they’re starting to realize, oh crap, we do need farmers and ranchers.” He goes on to suggest that focus once again falls back onto showing the community these types of displays to help the community gain an “understanding of where our food comes from.”
Kelly and Ryan imply that the stock shows educate people about where their food comes from and describe the nonhuman animals in a way that objectifies them as the product in the process of commodification and consumption. Revisiting my field notes and reviewing interviews, like those of Christine and Brianna, leads me to a slightly different perspective. While I agree that the nonhuman animals are indeed displayed as objects to be consumed, my fieldnotes indicate *the majority of folks visiting the educational and stock show areas are likely involved in the stock show, farming, and ranching communities*. As mentioned before, I saw very few people reading the educational material, and those who did stop merely glanced at the information briefly. The people watching the stock show competitions were people who again, are likely involved in stock shows, farming, and ranching, and that crowd was often sparse. Those walking through the rows of other animals on display (e.g., the hatching chicks, cattle, farrowing pigs and nursing piglets) appeared enamored with the cuteness of the animals while also appearing to ignore the information displayed around or above the animal pens/display cases. This falls in line with Christine and Brianna who enjoy looking at the animals but only have a cursory understanding of the fate of those animals.

Another area of the stock show is the horse auction, the purpose of which is not to sell nonhuman animals into the food chain. During the horse auction, which is much more geared toward showcasing the beauty, talent, and skills of the nonhuman animal, there is a definite monetary value associated with the horses on display. While for some the auction is entertaining, the primary purpose of this event is to auction off horses—to sell horses to the highest bidder. I happened to ask one of the respondents, Becky, *Is the*...
purpose to sell them to perform in rodeos like as barrel racers, to work at rodeos with pick-up men, to work at ranches, or to just be companions? Becky replied, “All of the above.” She then went on to explain, “If it’s a mare or stallion it could also be for breeding purposes. Yes, any of those jobs could be where they end up. They’re usually higher priced, they are well trained and worth more in people’s eyes.”

The auction room is set up with bleachers in the back, a section of floor chairs, a dirt stage on which the horses are paraded, and a raised stand where the auctioneer and staff are seated. Above the latter are two digital displays—one to the right and one to the left of the stage area—which present the current bid for the horse on exhibit. As an observer, I gather that the bleachers are for the spectators, like me, whereas the floor chairs are reserved primarily for the serious bidders, most of whom are dressed in western attire. I am astonished at the bids. In the time I observed this auction, horses were auctioned off for as low as $3,500 and as high as $18,800 (see Media 4).

*Media 4: Horse auction at the 2020 San Antonio SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.*

**Animals Performing and Competing**

The realms of sport and entertainment consist of multiple events, all involving participation from nonhuman animals—both alive and dead. That assertion may sound crass; however, it is important to acknowledge the fact that live nonhuman animals are being ridden, chased, roped, and wrestled by humans wearing the skins of nonhuman animals. Furthermore, much of the accessorizing components are made from the skin of other animals, including in some cases the same type of animal on which these
accessories are used (e.g., saddles, flank straps, etc.). During visits to each of the larger SSR events, I remained cognizant of the myriad ways other animals are incorporated into the sporting and entertainment events. These include rodeo events such as bronc riding (saddle and bareback) and bull riding—the two rodeo events I will feature here. It also includes events geared toward children and teenagers, such as the calf scramble and Mutton Bustin’ events. Also discussed here are entertainment events separate from the rodeo, but that still involve the performance of nonhuman animals, such as the horse auction, and the pig races.

The rodeo holds great entertainment value for spectators, but for the participants in rodeo, these events are a sport—a competition between humans or a human and a nonhuman animal (e.g., steer wrestling), or competition between a human-nonhuman animal pairing and another animal or (e.g., calf roping), or other objects (e.g., barrel racing). The skills of humans and the skills of nonhuman animals are on display and there are cash rewards for those who win. To be clear, there are cash rewards for the humans who win, and in some instances, celebrity status to be earned for both human and nonhuman animals. The sport of rodeo doesn’t necessarily yield the same returns for athletes in other high paying sports (e.g., football, basketball, baseball) unless an athlete is at the top of their sport; the vast majority of the competitors participate for the love of rodeo and indeed, for the love of the nonhuman animals. That said, the animals are often referred to, or at the very least, compared to athletes in other sports, and described in ways that make it seem as though the nonhuman animal athletes want to perform and compete.
While walking through the grounds of the Houston SSR, this was particularly evident when I stumbled upon the “Born to Buck” tent, where bucking horses and their offspring were on display, along with “BORN TO BUCK FACTS” and dramatic images of the horses walking through a lit-up arena (see Figure 22, photos 1 and 2 below). The Born to Buck Facts include information about just how these horses—some of whom are on display in this tent (see Figure 23)—come to be born to this athleticism. Highlighted in Figure 22, photo 3, is the fact that “Today, there are programs to breed genetically proven horses specifically to buck.” The signage goes onto assert, “These breeding programs help bring out the best in the animal athletes to compete with their human counterparts for exciting rodeo action.” Indeed, the audio and video that played on a loop in this tent, and which is displayed below in Media 5, describes the life of a bucking horse and the fact that they are genetically superior, before triumphantly stating that these “equine athletes” are truly born to buck. I made a specific fieldnote about the manipulation of genetics to create these athletes writing, it leads me to assume that the goal is to create a more challenging event for the bronc riders and a more exciting event for the audience, an audience that will return year after year to see the best athletes.

Figure 22: Photos from the 2020 Houston SSR from under the “Born to Buck” tent. Source: Erin N. Kidder.
This genetic superiority is not lost on Jacob, a former bronc rider and current team roper who got into rodeo as a result of his love for horses. After providing accolades to the horsemanship of the human athletes, he moves to discuss the horses, saying:

the horsepower is the, the breeding that has taken place over the last, you know, even fifty, sixty years. But just the, um, evolution of what these horses have become. They’re so powerful and they’re so strong and they’re so quick and fast. Um, and just they’re beautiful to look at compared to horses, you know, a hundred, two hundred years ago that were much smaller and not as strong and things like that. And then the horsemanship and the ability of the guys competing, I just still to this day get giddy when I go down to watch it.

Jacob’s excitement for the “horsepower” falls in line with Media 5 above, which states, “These equine athletes are respected by the human athletes who strive to ride them for
eight spectacular seconds.” As the music in the video comes to a crescendo and then falls into a moment of reflection, the narrator continues, “The mothers here are super star athletes in the arena, and their babies are truly born to buck.” The horses and their abilities are championed at the Silver Spurs Rodeo as well, as the announcer, speaking over dramatic music, sings the praises of the “lineage” of the bucking stock in Florida who are, according to the announcer, “bred to buck here, at the richest money rodeo east of the Mississippi” and help their human competitors reach the pinnacle of rodeo in the United States, the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada.

A point I found interesting while watching the Silver Spurs Rodeo and the display of bucking horses in the arena was the song, “Born Free” by Kid Rock that was playing. The lyrics played were, “I was born free, I was born free, I was born free, born free” as the horses are running around the arena and then guided out to their waiting stables. As I reflect on my notes, I think about these horses not actually born free; rather, I think about them being born into a system that is commodifying them, creating genetically superior horses that will buck in a way that is more challenging than ever so that the audience can get the best bang for their “buck” spent at the rodeo. The human athletes know this and while they revere the horses, as indicated in Media 5, they are looking for the ride that will give them the highest number of points in hopes of winning a higher cash prize.

Jacob says that the stock contractors essentially know the expectations of the riders and want to have the “best of the best.” He goes on, “they’re not going to have junk,” which is why it is so important for them to breed genetically superior bucking horses. The same goes for the other stock animals, who according to Jacob will be cut out if they aren’t
able to perform. He says, “And that’s going to affect that competitor, that roper, or that saddle bronc rider, that bull rider. And so that’s going to take money out of their pocket.”

Whether it is riding bucking horses or bucking bulls, the goal is to stay on for eight seconds. However, it is more than simply remaining on the horse or bull for as long as possible up to eight seconds, it is also the intensity and challenge of the interaction with the nonhuman animals that results in point increases or point deductions (see “How to Score Rodeo Events” from the Silver Spurs Rodeo, https://www.silverspursrodeo.com/scoring/). While watching a bronc riding event at the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the announcer asks the audience, “How would you like to get on about a hundred of those bad boys [the bucking horses] to make a living? That’s exactly what our professional bucking horse riders do.” This is said to a cheering crowd just as the flailing bronc rider manages to successfully stay on the bucking horse for the full eight seconds.

As excited as the crowd gets with the bronc riding, I gather through my observations that the highlight of the rodeo is the bull riding. Perhaps this is because the spectacle of the bull rider riding a bull is so unnatural. Indeed, while people will wax poetic about the rodeo harkening back to ranch life, the fact is, bull riding was never part of that life (Errington 1990). While the event appears to be a man versus bull match, I was informed by Amy, a Rodeo Queen and hopeful pick-up man (I use the term man because Amy uses this language), that the event is more of a team sport—the team being the bull rider and the bull (this same team sport human-nonhuman animal pairing goes for bronc riding events as well). Points are earned based on the performance—or
athleticism—of the bull rider and the bull. As I revisit fieldnotes from the Silver Spurs Rodeo, I see that I wrote, *The bulls are referred to as ‘athletes’ who are cared for and protected. The announcer at tonight’s Boots, Bulls & Barrels said that the best ones ‘get to go Las Vegas,’ which, as mentioned earlier, is the pinnacle of rodeo competition.* After speaking with Amy, I realize the announcer is talking about both the bull and the rider as possibly heading to the rodeo in Las Vegas.

The bulls, like the bucking horses, are revered by the human competitors and while they may not personally take a check home for their winning performances, there is a level of celebrity they may experience, adding to their value. Indeed, the bronc riders and bull riders hope to draw the horses and bulls who will provide them a more challenging ride that provides more excitement for the crowd. Kelly, a rodeo enthusiast, and former stock show competitor, provides some insight into the level of care the rough stock companies put into the rodeo animals in an effort to increase and maintain their value. She states:

Um, and as I’ve gotten older and looked more into it, like the bucking horse, the companies that own rodeo rough stock, rodeo livestock, um, I mean this is, that’s their living. Those animals are how they make their living. And those animals all have reputations and records and cowboys will like hope to draw a certain bull or a certain horse that’s known to give a more challenging ride that you can make more points or whatever.

The care of the nonhuman animals is directly linked to monetary value for the rough stock companies, the value of a good challenge for the human competitors, and to the
entertainment value for the audience. Kelly also connects a level of value for the nonhuman when she reflects on a personal experience, saying, “I got to see Bodacious one time when I was a kid. It was a big deal.”

Media 6 below highlights the celebrity status of another bull from the SSR. In this video, the announcer can be heard explaining that the sponsor’s chute gate …has a bull that’s a two-time Wrangler NFR bucking bull. He was the face and pride of the Silver Spurs string 2015-2016 when he made the trip to Las Vegas. The legendary bucking bull from right here in Osceola County, they call him Hang ‘Em High. From your Silver Spurs string, how many of ya’ll wanna see one of the best in the business in the bull fight game?

Some of the nonhuman competitors certainly gain celebrity status; however, the value of this status is limited in scope compared to the human competitors who strive for financial gain.


The stakes are high in rodeo competition (see Media 7) and bulls like Hang ‘Em High (see Media 6) provide the value of worthy adversary for the human athletes. The rider’s ability to stand up to the challenge from the bull, not only increases the audience

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8 Perhaps the best known and most feared bull in PRCA and bull riding history, Bodacious was inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1999. According to Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, Bodacious successfully “bucked off 127 of his 135 riders and became known for a bone-crushing style that sent many riders to the hospital…” (https://www.prorodeohalloffame.com/inductees/livestock/bodacious/).
response as seen and heard during the ride on the bull Fist Full of Dollars (see Media 7), but it also increases the financial gain for the rider, thereby illuminating the value of the bulls to rodeo. In Media 8, the announcer introduces the “two-time national finalist and the reserve champion of the world” bull rider from Texas, Boudreaux Campbell, who drew the bull, Bunker Hill. The announcer goes on to explain what the rider needs to do to take the lead, and states that the rider has “twenty thousand in his jeans already” from the previous day’s competition. It is important to note, according to the PRCA, in 2019, Campbell ranked second in world standings, second in the Wrangler NFR Standings, and had total earnings of $344,573. While Campbell did not manage to stay on Bunker Hill for more than a couple of seconds, the rider in Media 7 managed to meet the eight second challenge. As Def Leopard blares, and the words, “Rise up, gather round…” play, the chute opens. The bull, Fist Full of Dollars, bursts out as the rider precariously holds on with his left hand as his right arm swings around overhead. As the bull moves forward, bucking high into the air, the rider thrashes about, and the crowd’s response becomes increasingly louder with each passing second. The culmination of the genetically superior bull, the athleticism of the bull rider, the entertainment-hungry crowd, and the promise of financial gain make for exciting moments at the rodeo.


*Media 8: Reserve champion bull rider on the bull, Bunker Hill, at the 2020 Silver Spurs Rodeo. Source: Erin N. Kidder.*
Some of the field notes I have compiled at events such as the bronc riding and the bull riding leave me pondering the ways in which these animals are commodified and consumed. The horses and the bulls are often referred to as “athletes.” The humans are also athletes. The financial gains—or losses—experienced are directly related to the humans; however, the nonhuman animals are critical actors in the financial outcomes for the human athletes and for the companies that provide the rough stock animals for the events. The economic outcomes undoubtedly have an impact on the nonhuman animals, but interviews and field notes suggest that nonhuman animals are flexible commodities.

This was exemplified by Amy’s remarks about bucking horses. She said:

it’s what they enjoy doing and it’s one of those things that if they don’t enjoy doing it, the contractor definitely knows it. It shows in their score, and the contractor will sell them. Either they’ll break them out into a riding horse and sell them that way or they’ll find another path for them rather than being in the rodeo arena. Because if they don’t enjoy it, they’re not going to do well.

Kelly also alluded to this flexibility when explaining that the “…animal is there because it has a job to do. And, if that animal can’t do that job anymore, you might need to rehome it…”

The idea of nonhuman animals being athletes providing competition to human athletes and entertainment to spectators assumes that these animals have jobs, similar to the jobs that the human athletes/competitors/entertainers have. With a little less focus on the athleticism of the human and nonhuman animal “athletes,” the Mutton Bustin’ events are of great entertainment value for the audience attending the rodeo. It should be noted,
the Mutton Bustin’ events take place during the actual rodeo in the rodeo arena, and they also take place in a separate area attached to the carnival. Observations of these spectacles will be discussed concurrently.

According to the San Antonio SSR website, “The Mutton Bustin’ event is a crowd favorite! Little Buckaroos, ‘cowboy up’ and hold on for six exciting seconds! The audience goes wild as these young rodeo contestants take a thrilling ride….’” I was surprised to find out that “young” means between the ages of four and seven, and those participants must weigh under 55 pounds. They must also be “fully clothed, at the time of the competition” (www.sarodeo.com). Ages may differ between SSR events. At the Houston SSR contestants must be between five and six years of age (still weighing under 55 pounds) (www.rodeohouston.com), while at the Silver Spurs Rodeo, contestants must be under six years of age and weigh less than 40 pounds. Also depending on the SSR event, the length of time a contestant must stay on may be up to eight seconds.

What I found most intriguing about the Mutton Bustin’ event is that it mimics the bull riding and bronc riding rodeo events; however, children are not attempting to ride a bucking bull or a bucking horse. According to the Silver Spurs Rodeo website:

During Mutton Bustin’, a sheep is held still by a few of our handlers and a child is placed on top of the sheet in a riding position. Most children will wrap their arms around the sheep’s chest and hold on to the sides of the sheep with their legs. Once the child gives nod, the sheep is released and they will dart off (www.silverspursrodeo.com).
The website goes onto state “Regardless of how long each participant actually holds on for, this is a fan favorite event that brings just as many thrills and spills as the other major rodeo events.” I concur with this assertion. The audience at each Mutton Bustin’ event I attended were ravenous consumers of this entertainment (see Media 9).

*Media 9: Mutton Bustin’ in the main arena at the 2020 San Antonio SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.*

As the humans place the child onto the back of the sheep who is in the small chute situated in the arena, the crowd is quiet and waiting patiently. John Mellencamp’s “R.O.C.K. in the USA” plays loudly in the background for a second, before switching up to heavy base music. In the background, a few men can be seen struggling to get the next sheep, who appears to be resisting, moved into an adjacent chute. The chute is opened and off runs the sheep, the child holding tight, as the spotlight follows them across the arena. The sheep is moving fast, undoubtedly trying to get to their flock at the other end of the arena, and as I muse in my field notes, *This sheep looks like they are trying to shake this child affixed to their back.* As the sheep swiftly approaches their flock, the child can be seen slowly slipping to the left side of the sheep, ultimately sliding right off and under. The sheep continues to run, stumbling slightly over the child, legs buckling slightly, and then finally reaching the herd of sheep who at this point are all running away from this situation. As the successful eight seconds ride unfolds, the roar of the audience can be heard getting progressively louder. I was with a friend who also found this amusing, but my field notes reflect a concern on my part about the fear felt by the sheep and possible
harm to the child. I wrote in my fieldnotes, *What kind of harm, psychologically, if any, is this causing the sheep? Also, what would happen if this sheep were to trample this child? How is none of this a concern?* Re-watching the video causes me to ponder the value of this kind of entertainment, at the expense of the sheep who are scared and the children who can be injured.

As was done with the rodeo entertainment, announcers were apt to explain the nonhuman animals’ willingness to participate in these sporting and entertainment events. While the sheep are not referred to as athletes, the announcer did explicitly state that the sheep liked to perform for the audience. In Media 10, the announcer explains that the next sheep up, Sheepless in Seattle, is a “very nice lady” who “comes back every year” and “wants to be ridden.” He goes on to explain that they are going to put a kid on her back and that “we are gonna have some fun.” As the child is mounted onto the sheep, the announcer starts to get the audience hyped up. As the chute opens, the sheep stumbles out and after a second or so, stumbles over her two front legs and topples over onto the child who at this point has fallen off. Kids can be heard screaming in the background and the announcer is obviously concerned for the safety of the Mutton Bustin’ child contestant. The sheep appears frightened as two “rodeo clowns” rush over to pull the sheep off and tend to the child. The sheep runs off toward her flock at the other end of the arena and the child pops up. Once it is evident the child is fine, the announcer encourages the audience to applaud.

*Media 10: Mutton Bustin’ in the carnival arena at the 2020 Houston SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.*
Mutton Bustin’ is indeed a crowd favorite, as can be heard in Media 8. Another crowd pleaser for the audience are the pig races, which I observed at all three SSR events I attended. The pig races were particularly egregious in their appropriation of popular culture in luring the crowd in to consume this form of entertainment. Furthermore, the companies who provide these events are keen to rely upon the adorableness of watching pigs “compete” against each other as well as getting the audience to participate. Another draw, both at the San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR, were the “swimming pigs,” which were very young piglets who spent a few seconds swimming from one end of a large trough filled with water to the other end of the trough.

The pig races at each SSR are set up in the carnival areas and the audiences are made up mostly of carnival attendees, and mostly families with young children at that. In fact, at the Houston SSR, on the day I observed the pig races, there were hordes of school children on field trips in attendance. It was easy to get these audience members on board with the event as this is particularly a crowd favorite with the children who are incorporated into the entertainment as cheerleaders assigned to specific racing pigs.

My first encounter with the pig races was on the opening day at the San Antonio SSR (see Figure 24). Nested in among the other carnival booths and rides is a long red trailer with four checkered flags flying overhead, a graphic of two pink pigs racing, and the name SWIFTY SWINE Racing across the top. Additional graphics assure the audience that the pigs are comfortably resting inside an “air conditioned” trailer and that “Pork” is the “best kept secret in racing.” In front of the trailer is a small racetrack enclosed with metal barriers and lined with wood shavings. In the middle of the track,
there is a long trough covered in a banner, “Swifty the Swimming Pig,” and shows a graphic of a pig swimming through water wearing a snorkel and swim goggles. I was too early for the races or to witness the swimming pig, but show times were posted so I knew when to return.

Figure 24: Photos from the 2020 San Antonio SSR “Swifty Swine” pig races and swimming pig area. Source: Erin N. Kidder

Upon returning to the pig races, I was not surprised to hear the race announcer compare the pig races to car races, such as the Daytona 500. In the Media 11 clip (audio clip) below, you can hear the announcer say:

When you go out to the racetrack, like the Daytona 500, you’ll see those drivers race their cars around the track to get to that cold hard cash. But, right here at your pork chop international speedway, these little pigs don’t race around the track for the money! They cruise around the track at blazing speed for an Oreo cookie! That’s right. Right here at the finish line, on a silver platter is a delicious, delectable Oreo waiting to be devoured by the fastest swine…

At this point, the announcer asks the audience to yell “sooey” as four piglets are released from the trailer and herded into their individual race chutes. They are coaxed in by a man who sprinkles what appears to be snacks into each chute. The piglets willingly enter as they gobble up whatever the man had sprinkled into the chutes and then are adorned with a yellow, red, green, or blue cloth cover with the chute number.

After dividing the audience into four cheer sections which correspond to the pig in the same numbered chute, the announcer also tasks one child from each section to be the cheerleader. Whichever pig wins results in that child receiving a prize. With names like Jennifer Lopig, Boarianna Grande, Brittany Spareribs, and Kim Kardashiham, it is no wonder the crowd is drawn in.

**Animals Eaten, Worn, and On General Display**

The part of the SSR events that stood out to me most in terms of the commodification and consumption of nonhuman animals was the food and the clothing made out of nonhuman animals; though my observations and interviews lead me to believe that this aspect of the SSR is not as evident to others, or at least not to the same degree. Virtually every corner of SSR contains some type of nonhuman animal product. Live nonhuman animals at the stock shows are being shown, judged, and sold for their ability to become vital parts of the food production system and/or entertainment. Live nonhuman animals at the rodeos perform as athletes and support staff. Live nonhuman animals at the carnivals serve as performers. Replicas of these nonhuman animals are everywhere, from stuffed animals at the carnival, to rodeo performers dressed as other animals during interval performances,
to random inanimate objects representing some part of a nonhuman animal (see Figure 25). Still others are dead animal props sold in the shopping areas (see Figure 26).

Figure 25: Photos showing stuffed pigs at the carnival (2020 Houston SSR), rodeo clown dressed as a cow (2020 Silver Spurs Rodeo), and a trash can covered in a cow print (2020 San Antonio SSR). Source: Erin N. Kidder.

Figure 26: Photo from shopping areas of a stuffed bobcat reaching for a stuffed wild bird (2020 Houston SSR) and an alligator head (2020 Silver Spurs Rodeo). Source: Erin N. Kidder.

Some of the most prevalent, yet least obvious ways in which nonhuman animals are incorporated into the folds of the SSR are as food, clothing, and accessories.

One of my fieldnotes states, *The commodification and consumption of animals is everywhere. Even if a live animal is not performing or entertaining in some way, a dead*
animal is being eaten or worn by humans and other animals. Nonhuman animals are literally all over. People at the stock shows, the rodeos, the carnivals, and in the shopping areas are almost always wearing leather and sometimes fur. Most people are eating the flesh of cattle, pigs, chickens, and other types and forms of animals (e.g., dairy). Figure 27 below is a prime example of just how ubiquitous the nonhuman animal presence is at SSR. In this image, one woman is seen guiding a heifer past a cow print covered trash can into the warehouse where other stock show animals are held and shown. Following closely behind, another woman is pulling a wagon holding the heifer’s calf. Just behind them is a food booth where the bodies of nonhuman animals are prepared as food for human consumption. Advertisements of food that encase the booth include turkey legs, corn dogs, turkey leg tacos, sausage, and hamburgers. Indeed, a woman is also seen standing at the booth wearing a cow print coat and leather cowboy boots (as are a few of the other folks in this photo) as she applies condiments to her food.

Figure 27: Photo from the 2020 San Antonio SSR depicting nonhuman animals everywhere as food, clothing, and for show. Source: Erin N. Kidder
This is an encapsulation of stock show and rodeo events—humans caring for other animals, humans eating other animals, and humans wearing other animals. The amalgamation of interactions humans have with nonhuman animals at the SSR piqued my interest in finding out if those within the SSR community were seeing the connections between the food being eaten and the clothing being worn to the animals who were being watched for entertainment in the same way as I was seeing the connections. With the exception of those involved in stock shows, most respondents were not making the connections in the same way, and if they were, they were able to justify the use of nonhuman animals for this purpose. Adam, who has been to several SSR in San Antonio, really connected to the smells, saying, “Yeah, when you’re there and you smell everything, it’s kind of ironic when you think about it because you’re enjoying yourself.” Adam implies that you really aren’t thinking about the fact that you are eating animals who you are also watching. He goes on to say:

It’s kind of one of those things, uh, like when we consume a hamburger, like it, to be honest with you, it’s kind of like ignorance is bliss. If I really stop to think hard about what is going on around me and connect the dots, then I’m going to have a miserable time…And so I think it’s an ignorance is bliss kind of mentality. And I know it’s not politically the most appropriate thing. I also think it’s human nature. This willful ignorance was shared by others, and especially among those who are not invested in the stock shows and who are at these events more as spectators to the rodeos or visitors to the carnival areas. Marcus, for example, indicated that he “definitely notices things like that.” However, he went on to explain:
I think a lot of people can, you know, kind of blur the lines. You know, like when you look at the food, I don’t see like the little pigs and think, ooh, yum, you’re gonna be delicious. When you go to the market, it doesn’t look anything like that, you know? It’s not like, oh boy, that pork loin looks beautiful.

Hannah, for instance, said, “Yeah, I mean, I don’t know if I, if I really, really made those connections.” As she described watching the nonhuman animals perform, she did also acknowledge that the humans were wearing leather and/or fur from other animals, which caused some conflicting thoughts, especially when she would then go to the shopping areas. She described a moment when she saw a vest she was interested in purchasing:

Um, and so, even when we were shopping, I wanted this like vest thing, but I knew that it was like, um, I think it was like cow, like cow fur. It was really expensive. It was beautiful. And uh, we were looking at them. Um, but I was like, no, I’m like, like, I can’t, I can’t wear that. I can’t ever see myself wearing something like that or making, buying that, purchasing that knowing that it’s, that’s it’s an actual cow.

Hannah’s answer was filled with conflict, but in a way that as an interviewer I felt was in that moment of answering the question—as though she just realized the gravity of the conflicting thoughts she had experienced. Others shared similar experiences.

Paul, a friend who I had mentioned earlier who had tagged along with me to a day at the SSR and spent money on a “Texas Sized Corndog” and a funnel cake, said he really never thought about the connections between the nonhuman animals performing or
on display at SSR and the food he ate or clothes he wore, until more recently as a result of being married to a woman who does make these connections. He said:

[Now] I’m, yeah, I’m more aware of it, but it’s just, you know, I think about those things, you know, every day of my life…you know, being a hunter yet being against animal cruelty, you know, things like that. It’s just stuff I constantly wrestle with in my mind, you know.

Keep in mind, Paul still eats food that is derived from the bodies of other animals. We had an extended discussion about this where Paul managed to distinguish other animals as either pets or food, but even in doing so, Paul grappled with the difference on a personal level. He described this distinction as some animals are more of “something of interest versus something to be loved.” Here he is talking about how he perceives spectators to SSR make the distinctions themselves. He further explains:

I know people that have raised those [farm/stock] animals and they don’t treat them as pets…I mean, they treat them humanely, obviously, but there’s a definite difference…I guess they just view them for, they are raising them for practical reasons, you know, versus when you raise a dog you are strictly bringing in as a family member, or a cat, or a bird in some cases. But when you’re dealing with the farm animal, they view them strictly as having a, a reason, you know, like an agricultural purpose.

This was something that Paul, a meat eater, took issue with as he further explained that one of his friends and their family raise pigs on their ranch near San Antonio. He said,
“He slaughters pigs that he raises. I’m like, how can you do that? If I raise a pig, I’m in love with it, you know, and he’s like, we know that’s for food.”

Perhaps the most intriguing conversation I had about this conflicting issue of nonhuman animals as food and otherwise, was with Denise who went to her first and only SSR on a first date with someone. She described the experience in a very visceral way:

There’s food. You can smell, obviously the meats and everything…we’re kind of getting to know each other. And I remember turning my head to a stand that was selling food and I saw an entire pig roasting. And I was, I hid my eyes and I turned to my date and said, oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. And he looked and said, ‘What?’ And I’m like, ‘they’re roasting that pig. It’s a whole pig.’ And I was like, I just, I just can’t, I can’t. I can’t look over there.

Denise moved from the smell of meat, to seeing a whole pig being roasted, to explaining that she used to raise Potbelly pigs. She said, “And so right then and there, within like the first thirty minutes of arriving, I’m already turned off by this whole experience.” Denise’s connection to pigs, having raised them, created what she described as a “moral” issue of not only seeing a whole pig get roasted, but also in watching the nonhuman animals at the rodeo. She did however acknowledge the contradicting feelings she may have had if it had been a chicken roasting, saying, “I think if it were a chicken roasting, maybe I wouldn’t have reacted the same because I do eat chicken.”

While conversations with people more closely involved with the care of stock animals tend to be more aware of the animals as food and clothing, I found that those who were merely spectators had a more challenging experience connecting the various
uses of other animals in a way that didn’t create conflict. This wasn’t necessarily true for every spectator. Sandy, a vegetarian and someone who has attended a few SSR stated:

Well for me, there’s the, you know, I’m already a vegetarian. So the fact that people are walking around with massive disgusting gross turkey legs, you know, kind of grosses me out. But, I’m kind of hyper aware of the disconnect that most people have between the animals in the barn yard and that animal on their plate these days. Now that’s probably less true of participants in a stock show than your average American. Like right now, you know, we’re so, because these are people who aren’t, these are the people who have an intimate relationship with their animals. These aren’t people who are like working at a factory farm. Uh, so I guess there’s that, but I also, and maybe something that makes the connections is that I remember distinctly not really wanting to walk by, you know, the pigs and the piglets [be]cause they’re really cute and I don’t know what they’re going to be bought for.

Regardless of Sandy’s ability to connect the various uses of other animals in a meaningful way, she still managed to create a disconnect while still attending SSR and simply avoiding other animals whose fate was perhaps one of peril.

Discussion

The zoological connection that Bryant discussed in 1979 is present at just about every juncture within SSR as outlined in this chapter. Other animals are indeed part of working relations (Bryant 1979; Despret 2015), they are co-actors (Arluke 1993; Cerulo 2009;
Irvine 2004; Sanders 2003, 2007), and they serve the conflicting ideas of who is food and who is a companion (Grauerholz 2007). Most critical to the discussion in this chapter, however, is how nonhuman animals are objectified as commodities (Adams 1989, 2010) and how deeply integral they are to the consumer habits of humans (Hirschman 1994).

In the previous chapter, I presented an expansion of Young’s (2014) “animal-sport complex” discussion by incorporating entertainment as another layer of exploitation and possible harm to nonhuman animals involved in such realms. The primary reason for this inclusion is due to how I perceive SSR. Rodeos consist of athletic competitions and serve as entertainment for throngs of spectators. The carnival is essentially a large festival where attendees are entertained by music, pony rides, petting zoos, pig races, Mutton Bustin’, carnival rides, and games. While it may seem a little less obvious, stock shows are displays of animal husbandry where competitors perform in front of an audience and judges. Additionally, audiences are meant to be captivated by live nonhuman animals on display in educational areas. Furthermore, everything from live nonhuman animals to the skins of nonhuman animals to the flesh of nonhuman animals end up becoming commodified products to be consumed by an audience who wants to be entertained, and to be used by competitors who are hoping to make some money. It is not enough to discuss the rodeo from a sport perspective when indeed, along with all the other aspects of the SSR, the sport of rodeo, like other sporting events, also serves as entertainment. This is an important distinction to make because to simply talk about the “animal-sport complex” overlooks the enormous role played by the consuming audience who seeks out such entertainment.
As discussed in the last chapter, there is a romanticism attached to the way of life once experienced through westward expansion and frontier life in the United States that is promoted through SSR. Part of that romanticism is how cowboys worked with other animals on farms and ranches. Within the rodeo settings, we see cowboys competing with and against other animals in ways that are meant to mimic the breaking or subduing of other animals, or what Lawrence (1982) suggests is more of a domination of other animals by men. Serpell (1986) embraces this perception and further suggests that this domination is a means to commercialize aspects of the rodeo. The stock show is meant to not only promote animal husbandry and reward young members of the SSR community for their ability to raise quality animals, but at the SSR, it is also meant to illuminate the importance of other animals in our food production system. This is done so by way of signage and live displays of nonhuman animals who are currently in the food production system, such as chickens, pigs, and cows.

The carnival and shopping areas are more removed from the realms of the SSR that are more closely related to western and cowboy culture; however, the products that are sold at each—food, clothing, and accessories—are certainly an outcome of the commodified nonhuman animals’ slaughter. In addition, the shopping areas and carnivals are ancillary to the promoted stock show and rodeo events. In all these areas of the SSR, nonhuman animals fit neatly into the means to an end concept (Benton 1996) whereby other animals are on display in many forms for commercial benefit that is contingent on the exploitation of other animals by humans for human benefit, similar to the ways in which other humans have been exploited within a capitalist economy (Nibert 2002). SSR
events are reliant on a network of fans (Forsyth and Thompson 2007) and they are especially reliant on that network of fans buying into the culture of the SSR, or at the very least, maintaining a degree of cognitive dissonance in an effort to enjoy the entertainment.

Bryant (1979) encourages others to recognize the ways language is used, or more precisely, how animals are incorporated into society not only through our behaviors and direct interactions with them, but also through our construction of language. Indeed, Adams and Donovan (1995) posit that, women and nonwhite men historically have been pushed into the margins of mainstream society through language that relegates them to less than human status (i.e., as animals). This not only pushes women and nonwhite men into the margins of equal consideration, but it denies the fact that humans are also animals, albeit a different species than cows, chickens, dogs, cats, horses, and so on. It also pushes other animals further into the margins. Language also allows humans to objectify other animals in ways that normalize social arrangements whereby humans may exploit other animals for human benefit. More importantly, language and the construction of certain social norms can make for murky and conflicting perceptions by humans who on the one hand love other animals and on the other hand support the exploitation of other animals for human consumption, whether that be eating, wearing, or for entertainment. These connections with language will be explained in additional detail throughout the rest of this discussion.

There are innumerable ways in which the exploitation of animals is accepted and perpetuated within the SSR community. My observations indicate a normalizing of other
animals as products, despite showing and promoting nonhuman animals as cute or as athletes. For example, while attendees to the educational areas of the SSR are enthralled by the hatching chicks, commenting about them being “cute” and “oohing and ahhing” over them, much of the signage that surrounds these hatching chicks is indicative of their purpose as broilers or layers—products to be consumed rather than living beings meant to experience fulfilling lives. Similarly, yet perhaps more egregiously, cattle are objectified to a larger degree within the stock show arena.

Carey et al. (2014:213) discuss the co-constitutive nature of the figurative branding of the sporting bodies (e.g., that of the racialized human body) as being attached to acts of violence associated with the “intersecting histories of colonialism, capitalism, anthropocentrism, and racism.” Considering the inclusion of entertainment as part of the “animal-sport complex” presented earlier, I also expand the notion posited by Carey et al. here regarding stock shows, and indeed to the other realms of the SSR. The nonhuman animals at SSR are “figuratively branded” as what ultimately becomes literal products. Observations discussed in this chapter show how the bodies of cattle are clearly marked as cuts of meat for consumption by humans and undoubtedly by other animals, thereby objectifying subjective living nonhuman animals in ways that subjective living humans such as women and nonwhite men have historically been objectified in ways that justify commodification and consumption (hooks 2015).

My observations also produce elements of gendered language and behaviors that in some cases sexualizes other animals in similar ways to the sexualization of humans, and in particular, women (hooks 2015), and in other ways conflates the biological sex of
the nonhuman animals with the human construct of gender. Cattle who are being shown at the stock shows, for instance, are judged for traits associated with “femininity” and “masculinity”. For example, overly muscular heifers run the risk of being “less feminine” in appearance. Sexualized language and behaviors are also involved in the SSR; however, the degree to which it is involved depends somewhat on the event.

It is common for the Mutton Bustin’ and pig racing events to appropriate popular culture icons in a way that endears these events to young audiences, whereas events like bull riding or bronc riding often give names to the nonhuman animals that elicit of sense of power and strength—qualities associated with men more than women or even young children. While gender disparities are largely absent from the SSR community’s minds, the fact that cute events like Mutton Bustin’ and pig racing assign names such as Sheepless in Seattle, Jennifer Lopig, and Brittany Spareribs to the nonhuman animals as opposed to the names given to bulls at rodeos, such as Fist Full of Dollars, Hang ‘Em High, and Bunker Hill draws a line that is at the very least subtly gendered. After all, women have been largely locked out of events like bull riding since just after World War II (Theodori 1997). Forsyth and Thompson (2007) recognize the diminished status of women in rodeo post-World War II and in fact propose that bulls often experience a higher degree of regard than women in rodeo.

I did not hear any SSR participant make any overt comments regarding the marginalization of women in rodeo other than the acknowledgement by a rodeo queen, Amy, who has found it challenging to become a “pick up man” in the rodeo arena, a position relegated mostly to men. Additionally, while I did not observe overt
sexualization, such as Lawrence’s (1982) assertion that women are grouped with horses to be dominated, or Errington’s (1990) assertion that there is a “solidarity of masculinity” between the “oversexualized” male rider and the “oversexualized” bull, I did observe the sexualization of a sheep during a Mutton Bustin’ event. In Media 10, the announcer at the event provides subtle innuendo when talking about the ewe, Sheelpless in Seattle, who is a “very nice lady” who returns each year because she “wants to be ridden.” Thankfully the euphemism was over the heads of most of the audience who were children, but the tone and language did not escape my ears and sensibilities. The suggestion that the female ewe “wants to be ridden” seems to deny the subjective feelings of a sheep that appeared more resistant to being ridden and less apt to enjoying the experience. The assertion by the announcer qualifies as a rationalization for relegating the sheep to an inferior status (Adams and Donovan 2004) whereby in this human-nonhuman animal hierarchy, it is okay to ride another animal for human entertainment.

Whether in the stock show, the rodeo, or other events that are part of the SSR, nonhuman animals are commodified and consumed involuntarily throughout. Wade (1996) contends that this unintentional involvement in this animal sport and entertainment complex of nonhuman animals, exposes their bodies to controls and constraints that often creates discomfort. While there are certainly instances where some of the nonhuman animals appear to enjoy their performance, or instances where the rider and horse, for example, look to be moving with each other in the symbiotic ways that Smith (2014) and Lund (2014) discuss, much of what I observed indicated distress and resistance. Furthermore, it is all in an effort to provide entertainment. As Nibert (2002)
points out, rodeos were once reserved for “cattle driving cowboys” as a way to keep
themselves entertained and as a way to display their skills among their peers. This
changed, according to Nibert, once the capacity for greater profits was realized by larger
capitalist organizations.

Unlike the diminished roles of women and non-white men in rodeo, who’s
marginalization coincides with historical contexts associated with gender roles and racial
tensions in the United States (Patton and Schedlock 2011; Theodori 1997), the
involvement of nonhuman animals has perhaps increased. As stock shows and rodeos
became larger events to be consumed by the general population, nonhuman animals have
involuntarily been woven into the fabric of every corner of the SSR. Beyond competing
alongside and against humans and other animals in stock shows and rodeos, nonhuman
animals are sold as food, clothing, and accessories for humans and other animals.
Fredriksson (1985) and Stratton (2005) both position animals on a continuum of value
that lends itself to the flexible nature of humane consideration by humans. Neither is
necessarily opposed to nonhuman animals in the SSR; however, Stratton has expressed
appreciation for the degree to which humane practices have been implemented into these
events (in particular, rodeos).

This idea of degrees to which care is associated with the value of the animals is
also indicated by the interviewees that I spoke with. Indeed, the cognitive dissonance was
quite consistent insofar as respondents were more or less approving of the use of
nonhuman animals as entertainment, food, and clothing based on their knowledge of or
attachment to the particular animals. For example, while Paul was perplexed by his friend
who can raise pigs and slaughter them, he was not opposed to eating a corndog at the SSR. His rationalization was similar to others, like Denise, Marcus, and Hannah, who expressed feelings along the lines of, if they know the animal or like the animal, they could not justify eating or wearing the animal. Sandy was a bit of an outlier who is a vegetarian and therefore would not eat any of the nonhuman animals; however, she does attend and enjoys aspects of the SSR. Her approach is to simply avoid the nonhuman animals whose fate she is uncertain about.

The commodification and consumption that takes place at SSR is ever present. While walking through the grounds of the SSR, it seems as though people are simply there to be entertained, to enjoy being around the animals, and for stock show and rodeo competitors, to win some prize money or earn scholarships. There is a deeper degree though, to which people are either connected or disconnected from the nonhuman animals who are integral to SSR. In the next chapter, this relationship, including the connections to nonhuman animals and care for nonhuman animals is explored in an effort to thoroughly illuminate the degrees of speciesism that are involved in SSR.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONNECTION TO AND CARE OF NONHUMAN ANIMALS IN STOCK SHOWS AND RODEOS

Love of animals is what connects me to the people who are drawn to stock show and rodeo (SSR) events. As a person who has not sought to attend SSR events during my life, I was intrigued by what I feel are divergent thoughts about just how we (myself and others like me, and those who participate in SSR) love other animals. Furthermore, I want to understand how other humans perceive their love and care of other animals in a way that does not align with my perception of loving and caring for other animals. The idea that we claim to love our fellow creatures but might care for them in vastly different ways requires a deeper exploration of people’s behaviors and thoughts about other animals.

The SSR community offers insights that fall into a continuum of what I consider to be speciesist behavior on the part of humans, and that aligns with Fjellstrom’s (2002:65) perceptions of speciesism and “normative opinions that with regard to species favour humans.” In other words, there is a certain amount of harm and exploitation that is accepted even for the nonhuman animals we claim to love and care for. Those accepted practices are often, if not always, based on norms and values created by humans and in favor of humans.

This chapter presents elements of how we care for other animals, which is oftentimes contingent upon the value we receive from those animals. This chapter also explores how we are socialized or conditioned to consider other animals in a way that dictates how we care for them. Through participant interviews and personal field observations, it is clear our relationship with other animals is complex. The nature of our
love for nonhuman animals uniquely encompasses animals as food, animals as clothing, animals as workers, animals as equipment, animals as competitors, animals as teammates, and animals as companions. This is at least true within the SSR community; although I would argue that this complex relationship is a much larger phenomenon, exceeding the boundaries of stock shows and rodeos. Regardless, understanding the hierarchies between the nonhuman animal species can help to understand the level of care (or perceived care) the animals receive from humans, as well as the degree of concern about the care the animals receive.

**The Hierarchies of Value**

Within the SSR community, there seems to be a hierarchy in terms of the animals. To be clear, this hierarchy is created by humans and constructed in a way that places value on what nonhuman animals can offer humans. Depending on the place within the hierarchy, there is a level of care other animals receive that is also suggestive of value; however, this can differ from realm to realm within the SSR events. For example, the value of and subsequent care of pigs at the carnival may differ from the value of pigs at the stock show. A pig at the carnival may be valued for the pork rinds, bacon, and sausage its slaughtered body can produce or for their entertainment value during pig racing events that draw excited crowds, while a pig at the stock show may be valued for the sales price they can bring for their ability to produce offspring or to become food. Associated with this value is a level of care that goes into raising the pigs. This example is discussed at length later in the chapter, but suffice it to say, there are myriad complexities to the
nature of the different types of relationships we have with other animals, like pigs, that often includes the way we have been conditioned to think about the animal.

When it comes to caring about and caring for nonhuman animals, I witnessed a range of behaviors from humans at the different SSR events that display care (or lack thereof) and I observed the reactions to this care (or lack thereof) by the nonhuman animals. Interview participants also explained a wide range of caring (or uncaring) feelings about nonhuman animals and they discussed the way they care for (or don’t care for) other animals. As with previous chapters, sentiments about nonhuman animals run the gamut between the different realms of the SSR (e.g., the rodeo, the stock show, the carnival, etc.).

When I arrived at the Silver Spurs Rodeo event, *Boots, Bulls, and Barrels*, one of the first sights I witnessed was a bull cowering near the arena railing. It was incredibly loud with music and a cheering crowd who had just watched this bull be briefly ridden by a bull rider. I missed the ride but saw the aftermath, which was a frightened bull huddled up against the guardrails in a manner that I have seen with my own pets. In fact, I reflected on this in my fieldnotes:

*The poor bull appears frightened. It reminds me of when my dog knows he is in trouble, or when he doesn’t want to go outside. His ears fall back, his body becomes tense, and he sits or stands perfectly still, as if moving will give his location away. His eyes are wide and while his head isn’t moving, his eyes seemingly follow me as he waits for the inevitable—that moment when his location is exposed. This is how the bull appears to me. Stunned. Frightened.*
This was my initiation into the rodeo for this study and as I reflect on this moment, I remember also talking myself through staying to watch the remainder of the night’s events. I arrived with preconceived notions, having yet to really sit down and watch or sit down and talk with the folks who are part of this community. My thought was, *how can people think it is okay to treat an animal in this manner?*

The behavior of the bull described above seemed to be a one-off, at least in terms of my subsequent observations at the *Boots, Bulls, and Barrels* event and at the other rodeos I had yet to attend. Once riders fall from the bulls, the bulls generally keep running around the arena, being chased out by pick-up men on horseback. In many cases, the bulls appear to know the drill and exit with little to no prodding by the pursuing men and horses. While my introduction was less than pleasant for me, and as I perceived it to be for the bull, I soon came to realize that there was more to this relationship between the humans and the bulls involved in this event.

To be sure, there are complexities wrapped up in the human-nonhuman animal relationship that lead to an endearing audience or an audience that decries those relationships within the SSR community. For example, the hierarchy I created after having spent time at three rodeos and after having talked to many SSR participants is depicted in Figure 28. In this image, humans (men and women) reside at the top of the hierarchy.
You will notice that men reside in a slightly higher place in the hierarchy. This reflects the way I observed the hierarchy of who and what is important. The stock shows and rodeos predominantly feature men. This is particularly the case with rodeo, where women are relegated to participating in few events. Indeed, I only witnessed women competing in barrel racing events. While this hierarchy also plays into the other overarching theme of commodification and consumption, it also plays a part in how other animals are cared about and cared for within the SSR community. Without getting too philosophical, I want to make sure that a distinction is made between consumers and competitors, and those who depend on attracting consumers and competitors to their products (i.e., the events that draw consumers). This is an important distinction because the perceptions and
behaviors of care may depend on where humans reside within a different hierarchical structure in which corporations are listed.

Horses Rule!

Horses are a draw and an introduction for some into the SSR community. Even for those who were socialized to the stock show and rodeo events by the mere fact that they live in communities that host these large multi-day events, horses are the primary reason for becoming involved in the community. Amateur rodeo competitor, Jacob, explained how his father was a large animal veterinarian when he was young and that he introduced him to horses when he was a kid. That sparked his interest in horses and cowboys. In fact, he spoke about them almost as if they were one—both mythical creatures. For Tonya, it wasn’t so much an initial love for horses, but it was that horses were a part of the culture of her immediate community. She explains:

Well, I guess it’s just always been there, you know, you start doing as a kid. I mean, for me, you know, again, growing up with horses, that’s kind of a community, you know…I would say the vast majority of people who own horses, um, again, I know I’m generalizing, but in my experience from the start, all the people I know involved in horses, but that’s majority of supporters of the stock show and rodeo…it just, you now, just sort of went along with having a horse.

While Tonya and Jacob were introduced to horses early in their lives and made a deep connection to horses in the rodeo, for Laura, it was her daughter’s involvement with horses that got her involved with rodeos. Laura was interested in helping her daughter
find an activity that she could excel in and together they found that horses and horseback activities/competitions provided Laura’s daughter with a boost of self-esteem. For Laura’s part, she served as the supportive parent but also as the primary caretaker of their horse.

Kelly also grew up enjoying horses and rodeos. While she did work with other animals, primarily in the stock show realm, she reminisced about aspiring to be part of the rodeo performance that involved horses. When asked what she enjoyed most about the rodeo, she explained:

The horse show, the most, and then the animals. The uh, the actual rodeo events, like watching the cowboys and cowgirls do their thing. Um, Houston rodeo for a really long time, the opening act was a group called the Catalina Cowgirls who were like trick riders. It was a drill team and they came in and they were galloping around on sparkly paint horses and carrying big flags…So yeah, the Catalina Cowgirls, uh, like my friends and I wanted to try out for them and uh, we would practice our drill team moves at, with our horses, with the Girl Scout Camp that we’ve volunteered at and we did our own little flag ceremony drills. Um basically anything related to horses was my favorite. And then any of the animal stuff…It was obvious, listening to Kelly, as well as the others, that there is a deep love of animals, not just horses, although it was a love of horses that brought them into the SSR community.

As I observed the various stock show and rodeo events, it was evident that horses are perceived as the superior animals, next to humans. Horses are the primary nonhuman
animal teammate and co-worker. Even with the bronc riders, while the horses appear to be a worthy opponent, they are often described in ways that make them seem more like a teammate. For example, the PRCA webpage, Rodeo 101: Saddle Bronc Riding, describes the relationship as, “Every move the bronc rider makes must be synchronized with the movement of the horse” (https://prorodeo.com/prorodeo/rodeo/rodeo101/saddle-bronc-riding). Horses as teammates participate in several other rodeo events, such as calf roping, steer wrestling, team roping, and barrel racing. Horses are also ridden by pick-up men whose job it is to help retrieve a rider who has fallen from a bucking horse or a bull. Horses also help to wrangle and guide bucking horses, bulls, steers, calves, and sheep (animals used in various events) out of the arena. At the cutting events, which are typically presented closer to the stock show areas, horses are teammates who are in competition along with their human; however, as this event is considered a representation of how cowboys work with cattle on a ranch, this relationship can be seen as one where co-workers (human and nonhuman) are working together to get a job done.

Horses do indeed sit at the top of the nonhuman animal hierarchy and they are revered within the SSR community. They are part of the elaborate pre-rodeo festivities, such as the one described by Kelly, and they are found all over the SSR grounds ridden by staff. There are numerous other animals who experience varying degrees of reverence, but always less than horses who are tasked with enforcing the rules of conduct for other animals (e.g., helping to wrangle bucking horses, bulls, steers, calves, and sheep) along with the humans riding them.
As revered as horses are, especially at the rodeo, not all horses appear to be as equally respected. In all three rodeos that I attended pony rides were offered in the carnival area. Photos on stationary live ponies were also offered. My observations of these attractions were that the ponies were there to increase the profits of the companies offering these attractions to carnival-goers. As an observer of animals (human and nonhuman alike), it was challenging for me to view the ponies in these situations. At the San Antonio SSR, the pony used for photos was stationary in a small photo booth (see Figure 29) located under the same enclosure as the Great American Petting Zoo and a small Mutton Bustin' area. All visitors during my observations were there for the petting zoo. My fieldnotes indicate, I watched for nearly an hour as the photo pony simply stood there, prepped for a photo opportunity that never came. I did find the signage interesting that states “All of our Ponies get Rest Breaks,” and I wondered if this sign was a result of concern expressed by visitors in the past. Unfortunately, I did not see anyone tending the booth during my visit, so I did not have an opportunity to ask.
At each SSR, the pony rides were essentially the same (see Figure 30 and refer to Figure 6, Photo 1 from Chapter 5). Several ponies were fastened to a spoke of a wheel that would go round and round. My fieldnotes from the San Antonio SSR read:

This looks like a very sad existence, just having to stand there. No agency, whatsoever. True, horses can stand in a field for extended periods of time, but they still have agency to move when they want to move.

The many times I passed by the pony rides at each SSR carnival, I rarely saw children riding the ponies. Like the photo booth pony, the pony ride ponies simply stood in one place, tethered to the turning contraption and every now and then, when the booth had customers, they’d get to move around in a circle.
Don’t Mess with the Bull…or the Horse!

On my chart (Figure 28), I place bulls below horses. This has more to do with the fact that horses are relegated to a position of importance and perceived power for humans, not necessarily due to actual power of the horse by comparison to the bull, who after being ridden appears rather threatening. According to my observations, for humans involved in the SSR community, bulls are to be dominated, insofar as humans are able to ride a bull, which is not a normal behavior under most, if not any other circumstance. Also, it is rare for riders to stay on for more than a few seconds. In the rodeo arena, bulls are to be feared and revered. Since bull riding is a major draw at rodeo events, the bulls experience a level of celebrity; however, the loudest cheers from the audiences I observed were reserved for the bull rider who stayed on a bull the longest.

While in the chutes just before the ride, bulls and bucking horses are a force with which to be reckoned. Their power is evidenced by the number of men attempting to
constrain the animals’ movements so that equipment can be placed on the animal and the rider may safely mount the animal who is already trying to buck their way out of the situation. Media 12 provides a peek into what takes place in the chute before a seconds-long bull ride.

Media 12: Jumbotron view of bull and rider preparing for performance at the 2020 San Antonio SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder.

The rider is adorned in his worn jeans that are covered in leather chaps, his leather boots, leather gloves, a long-sleeved western shirt, and a cowboy hat masking the protective helmet the rider also wears. As the bull rider attempts to find a comfortable spot on the back of the bull, the bull appears to angrily nip or nudge the rider’s left leg. At that moment, a cowboy offering support—the flankman—reaches into the chute and lightly scratches the bull's back, an action that appears to agitate the bull, as his head snaps back toward the man’s hand. The bull then begins to buck and thrash about inside the chute as the flankman moves to support the rider by throwing his arms around his chest. My fieldnotes indicate that this reminds me of when I was a kid riding in the passenger seat, when my parents would throw their arms across my chest when having to slam on the breaks. Meanwhile, the rider is grasping onto the chute railing with his right hand while the other holds firmly to the “riggin’” (the apparatus they hold with their dominant hand while attempting to stay on the bull for eight seconds). During this interaction, there are two other flankmen placing the flank strap—a leather or cotton ropes lined with neoprene or fleece—around the bull’s flank, which is between the bull’s hind legs and their penis.
The flankstrap does not exist without controversy. For rodeo opponents, the perception is that the flankstrap constricts and produces pain to the testicles of the bull or bucking horse. This issue will be discussed later in this chapter.

**The Strong, the Meek, and the In Between.**

The bulls, the bucking horses, and the working horses seem to be the most highly regarded. I had initially intended on including barrel racing horses in the same category; however, in rodeo, women—the barrel racers—are not as prominently featured. While women once regularly competed in rough stock riding events (bull riding, bronc riding) prior to World War II, women since that time have largely existed in the margins of these events since (Patton and Schedlock 2011; Theodori 1997). Women participate in perceptibly less dangerous competition, such as barrel racing, and they are part of the pageantry that takes place during the rodeos. Indeed, being a rodeo queen is not dissimilar to other more recognized beauty pageants. To be clear, the horses who are ridden by the women barrel racers and rodeo queens are highly regarded; however, by their mere attachment to the women competitors and based on my observations, I have included them as an “in between” group in terms of the hierarchy of nonhuman animals within the SSR community.

Within the realms of rodeo, I place steers within the “in between” group as well. Men are meant to display their ability to dominate a steer by jumping from their horse, grabbing the steer’s horns and wrestling him to the ground in a very specific manner; however, there is a challenge that many times favors the steers ability to escape the grips
of the human competitor. This is also the case with the steers who are part of the team roping events, whereby one human team member on a horse, lassos the horns of the steer (the header) and the other human team member on a horse, lassos the back heels of the steer (the heeler). It is important to understand that steers are castrated bovine who are not as large as uncastrated bulls and therefore are relatively easier to dominate compared to bulls. I place sheep and calves at the bottom of this hierarchy at the rodeo. Sheep are used in the Mutton Bustin’ events, where children between the ages of four and six try to ride the sheep for up to eight seconds (much in the same vein as bull riding or bronc riding). Calves are used in roping events, where a cowboy on a horse is meant to display his skills by lassoing the calf and then jumping from the horse so he may run to the calf to further restrain them. These events will be further discussed later in the chapter. The point for now is to understand the hierarchies I observed. Sheep and calves are more docile animals and the events in which these animals participate are ones where humans also dominate. Sheep are placed in a small chute and a child is placed on top of the sheep. Once released, the child tries their best to ride the sheep for as close to eight seconds as possible and the sheep is simply trying to run as fast as possible to get to its herd at the other side of the arena. In calf roping, the calves are trying to flee a situation where they are being chased by a horse and human. In both situations, the nonhuman animals are attempting to get to a place where they feel safer.

The rodeo is one aspect of the SSR where animals are part of the entertainment, but there are other places throughout these large events where other animals are still farther down on the hierarchy, such as the stock show. Cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens, and
an assortment of other nonhuman animals are presented throughout the stock show areas. By and large, these animals are shown as a display of human ability to care for them in a way that increases their value as either food or for breeding. Depending on the location of the SSR and in particular, the stock show, a nonhuman animal’s place within the hierarchy may vary. For example, Ryan explained that at the rodeos in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston especially, it’s all about the cows. Uh, for that kid that showed it, for daddy that paid $50,000 for the kids, that’s bragging rights. In San Antonio, that’s more you’re getting into the sheep and goat world down in South Texas. And so, if you can win San Antonio, uh also San Angelo, with the sheep and goats, that’s kinda been, that’s kinda been a really big deal.

My observations support the assertion made by Ryan about cattle, especially in Houston, being the “major draw” for the market shows. As mentioned in Chapter 5 about commodification and consumption, framed photographs of winning heifers, bulls, and steers were prominently exhibited in most of the family and/or ranch booths located near the animal pens. This was not a ritual I observed for any other show animal.

At the carnival, shopping, and food areas, other animals are less obviously participating in the action despite their prominence. Most of the food at SSR is animal based; although, I was pleasantly surprised to see numerous booths dedicated to or at least offering vegetarian options at the Houston SSR. For the most part, food was offered to humans at the expense of nonhuman animals. Turkeys, chickens, cows, and pigs were slaughtered for the meat their bodies could provide. The nonhuman animal food products can be found throughout the grounds of the carnival and in designated food court areas.
While humans are carnivorously consuming the flesh of nonhuman animals throughout the SSR events, the skin of nonhuman animals is being worn by just about all within the SSR community and is also being sold within the shopping areas as clothing and accessories for humans, and as items to be worn or used on other animals (e.g., saddles, leashes, whips, etc.). The only nonhuman animals living to participate at the carnival are those involved in the pig races, pony rides, camel rides (at the Silver Spurs Rodeo), petting zoos, and other types of no-petting animal displays.

The previously described hierarchy of animals within the SSR community, while perhaps debatable, is based off my field observations at the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the San Antonio SSR, and at the Houston SSR, as well as my interviews with participants within the SSR community. It is through the observations and interviews that the wide ranges of love, care, exploitation, and harm are exposed.

I Value You, Therefore I Care for You

A complex and conflicting narrative continuously presents itself within the SSR community. Humans love other animals, and those other animals are indeed cared for in an effort to increase and preserve their value to humans. Interviews with rodeo competitors, stock show folks, and spectators expose the paradoxical nature of the human-nonhuman animal relationship. Humans love nonhuman animals for their unique qualities as living beings and appreciate them for their ability to entertain. At the same time, humans enjoy nonhuman animals for their qualities as nonliving beings—food and clothing—in a way that seems antithetical to loving those same animals when they are
living. My field observations produced mixed emotions even for me as there were times when I was excited by the rodeo entertainment, laughing at the “cuteness” of the pig races and Mutton Bustin’, and awed by the beauty of the many nonhuman animals penned up who I do not regularly encounter. The varying degrees of connection and disconnection with nonhuman animals, how one is socialized to think about certain animals, and the perceived value of other animals are all aspects of observations and interviews presented here in a way that illuminates the love and care (or lack thereof) for animals.

The range of responses regarding the love, care, and treatment of nonhuman animals were diverse. It was particularly intriguing to discover how people compartmentalize their feelings about nonhuman animals. Sometimes this compartmentalizing pertained to animals someone raised and showed at stock shows to sell for market or breeding purposes. Others compartmentalized when it came to animals as food compared to animals as entertainment. Still others compartmentalized their feelings for nonhuman animals based on the type of animal or because the animals at the SSR were not their companion animals.

The Four-Legged Athletes

Make no mistake, rodeos are athletic events. There is a physicality required of the human participants and the nonhuman animal participants that is awe inspiring. When it comes to rodeos (at least, those sanctioned by the PRCA), animals are held in high regard,
including their health, despite what some may think. Dr. Ben Espy, the veterinarian for the SASSR stated:

So about 25 years ago we had a lot of animals rights issues with pro rodeo, um, and we actually had an injury in the arena. Um, and the, at the time, every performance—we have 21 rodeo performances during this two week period—and so at the time, the veterinarian that was responsible for the pro rodeo performance was a small animal veterinarian, um, and she was actually in the stands and so she was wearing a dress and so she was self-conscious about climbing over the fence. And so, she ran around the concourse and, um, it took her about ten minutes to get to the animal and so it turned into a huge media problem. Uh, the T.V. cameras were there and recorded the whole thing and it turned into a gigantic problem. So, industry-wide, because of that incident, San Antonio, some 25 years ago, PRCA made it a rule that all PRCA sanctioned rodeos have a veterinarian in the arena.

Dr. Espy went on to explain that he must be “literally on the dirt” in case he is needed. He also needs to be able to take three weeks from his practice during the San Antonio SSR in order to focus on the health and well-being of the SSR animals.

While Dr. Espy is the veterinarian for the entire San Antonio SSR, his primary veterinary focus in general is horses. In fact, most of the horses at the San Antonio SSR and the Houston SSR are clients of his. In explaining the level of care for the rodeo horses, Dr. Espy stated:

I can basically do anything I want to a horse, as much value as the horse has. For instance, in horses, you know, we use MRIs, you know, we use chemotherapy, we
use, um, stem cell therapy. I mean, you’re never going to take platelet rich plasma and put it in a cow. You’re never going to slide a cow into an MRI machine or do a CAT scan on it. But I do that all day long on horses because the horses, the value of the horse determines the value of the therapy…So you know, when you have a $150,000 horse, if it gets injured, sliding it into an MRI for $1,800 is inconsequential. You know, you would never do that for a cow, just because it’s value is not there.

This ties back to the hierarchies discussed earlier, whereby the value of horses is often prioritized over other animals. Indeed, my understanding from my conversation with Dr. Espy is that the level of care a horse receives is also tied to their value relative to other horses. Of course, Dr. Espy is also responsible for the care of the other animals involved in rodeo at the San Antonio SSR. He explained that compared to other sporting events, where sports medicine doctors such as himself are responsible for the care of athletes, the exposures (number of possible patients) he manages for the duration of the SSR events are approximately 10,000. Out of those, he stated that the injury rate is “tenths of a percent” and much lower than other major sporting events, like football.

The nonhuman animals at the rodeo are cared for. It is clear that Dr. Espy loves what he does and in fact stated, “I love how the people treat their animals.” A point of frustration for Dr. Espy is when people—animal rights advocates/activists—assert that the nonhuman animals are purposely being harmed. One of the biggest issues surrounds the bucking or flank straps that are placed around the bucking horses and the bulls. Dr. Espy shares that:
Pretty much every single person I talked to thinks that it’s touching their testicles. It’s about a foot and a half in front of their testicles…everybody thinks the flank strap is cinching their testicles tight. Well, 85% of bucking horses are females. So, I explain to them that that’s pretty impossible to cinch down a testicle on a female.

Dr. Espy, as well as others, describe the flank strap as being more annoying than harmful to the animals. Kelly, a respondent who has spent time around rodeos explained:

So, since I grew up going to rodeos and I grew up knowing things like, the people involved really care about their animals’ welfare, and the horses buck because they’re wearing bucking straps, which are just soft straps that go around their loins that are kind of annoying, but they don’t hurt. They don’t do anything to them. It’s just kind of a little irritating. Um, and then as soon as the rider, the cowboy is off, or the eight seconds is up, someone rides up and takes that strap off. And if you watch the horses and you know, horses, the bucking horses that are on these pro circuit rodeos, know their job. That is what they do. And as soon as the strap comes off, they’re like, okay, cool.

Kelly pointed to the fact that she has never been bothered by the rough stock events because there are always veterinarians on hand, and everyone is taking exceptional care of the rodeo animals.

My own observations support Kelly’s description of what happens once a rider has fallen from the horse, or the eight seconds is up. Media 13 shows a bareback bronc ride. The cowboy manages to remain on the bucking horse for the full eight seconds.
Once the buzzer sounds, the horse continues to buck. As horse and rider make their way around the arena, two pick-up men on their horses come into view. Their task is to safely retrieve the rider and to remove the bucking strap from around the horse. In this video, one of the pick-up men is seen removing the strap before retrieving the rider. Once the strap is released, the bucking subsides. I watched bronc riding event after bronc riding event and bull riding event after bull riding event. Removing the bucking or flank straps was something that the pickup men seemed to prioritize.

*Media 13: Video showing a bronc rider and pickup men removing flank strap from horse after ride at the 2020 San Antonio SSR. Source: Erin N. Kidder*

Others, like Amy, the rodeo queen, explain that animal welfare is a priority for people involved with rodeo. She explains that as a rodeo queen, it is important for her to be informed about animal welfare laws, and in particular, the PRCA standards of animal care. Like Dr. Espy, Amy has experienced push back from animal rights advocates/activists and in fact explains how the push back from these groups has actually resulted in changes to animal care within the PRCA. While discussing these changes, Amy says:

> Um, so like there’s like the jerk down rule, which is new…Um, so you can’t split the calf over backwards, otherwise you get a fine…there’s certain places you can’t, um, shock animals or like rough stock. You can only get them on the meaty part or like their shoulders. Uh, like your spurs, you can’t wear sharp spurs [be]cause you don’t want to injure the animals.
Both Amy and Dr. Espy assert that general spectators are ill informed about how these nonhuman animals are treated, and both suggest that animal rights groups focusing on the rodeo as a site of harm for the animals are missing the fact that practices like calf roping are taking place across ranches and farms every day.

As an observer, the events that caused me higher degrees of anxiety were the roping events. Logically I understand that calves are roped on ranches daily, as Amy and Dr. Espy both mentioned, but I am not there to be entertained by those daily rituals, and given that I am not a meat eater, I don’t feel conflicted about my feelings of anger while watching the calf roping events. I was happy to learn that a “jerk down” rule was put into place by the PRCA, but Amy’s explanation suggested that it had less to do with minimizing harm to the calves than to appeasing vocal opposition. My interview with Amy took place prior to attending any rodeo events where calf roping or team roping was taking place. While finally observing these events at the San Antonio SSR (see Media 14), I wrote in my fieldnotes, The calves look scared as they try to outrun the horses and riders. As the lasso makes its way around the calf’s neck, the head snaps back and the calf’s entire body is lifted off the ground, flipping around and landing in the opposite direction. This looks like a frightening experience for this calf.


After watching many of these events take place, I had an opportunity to interview Jacob, an amateur team roper and former calf roper. He echoed the sentiments shared by
Dr. Espy, Kelly, and Amy regarding the fact that the rodeo animals are well cared for. He also tied this care to their value as animals who support the livelihood of the stock contractors who own them. Jacob did deviate a bit from the others by acknowledging that calves may experience fear during these types of events. He stated:

I’d be lying to you if I said oh yeah, they love being roped. I mean, I couldn’t imagine that they would be overly thrilled about that. I think most of them are just, just trying to run to get away…when they get roped enough, they’re just kind of like, well I know what’s fixing to happen and they just sit there and take it…I mean, they’re the ones getting chased every time. So, it’d be hard for me, I would not say that they enjoy it. I don’t know if they necessarily hate it, but I’d be hard pressed to sit here and tell you, oh, you know they absolutely love being chased down a pen and putting a rope around their neck or their horns or their feet.

This admission surprised me, considering how there are often suggestions that the rodeo animals love doing what they do as athletes according to other respondents such as Amy, Kelly, and Amy.

I also found that some of my respondents who have been spectators to rodeos find the calf roping to be the most off-putting portion of the rodeo. The reason for this is the seeming cruelty involved in chasing down a calf for sport. Jim, who has attended many rodeos said he didn’t find issue with most of the events, however he followed up with,

The calf roping really, is obviously the most, uh, stressful and it’s really not that accurate in my opinion. It’s done, which like, you know, much of the other things, they’re done just for sensationalism. It’s just become a hybrid sport.
Another respondent, Kevin, perceived the calf roping to be “cruel and unusual punishment” despite not finding any issue with the way other animals in other events were treated.

Perhaps the most egregious treatment was described by Becky, who has had horses and who spent many years around stock shows and rodeos. Becky explained that the horses who belong to competitors, like the barrel racing horses, are loved and cared for. They have a bond with their humans. The animals owned by stock contractors, like the calves used in calf roping or team roping, are another story. She said, “They are just stock animals. They literally travel in trucks, they’re put into pens and they’re run out there as long as they are healthy.” She also explained that if they are unhealthy or get severely injured, they are “discarded.” She said that her perceptions about rodeo changed a few years ago when she witnessed callous treatment of bucking horses. She described an encounter with a bucking horse she had witnessed behaving in a way that was unacceptable, saying “If [the horse] jumps, they’ll pop it on the face with a, with a stick. And I’ve seen it…That’s what changed my, my thought process if you will, or my perception of a lot of this stuff. You know, it is one of the most sensitive areas on the horse.”

Jacob also helped me to understand the lengths that some rodeo professionals will go to in order to care for their horses. One of my biggest concerns while at the rodeos was the intense noise levels of the music, and the thundering booms created during pyrotechnic pre-rodeo shows. I personally did not attend one rodeo where I did not leave without a headache from the noise. After attending the Silver Spurs Rodeo Boots, Bulls,
and Barrels one night event in the Fall of 2019, I was alarmed at how loud the music was. I wrote in my fieldnotes, *Very loud atmosphere! So loud I can barely hear my husband who is right next to me. My head hurts from the noise and stress.* This got me to wonder about how the noise might be affecting the nonhuman animals who do not have the option of walking outside where it is quieter. This led me to reach out to an animal audiologist, Dr. Peter Scheifele, to question Dr. Espy, and to ask interview respondents, like Jacob, about their perceptions of the noise on other animals.

It is important to first understand that there are not many veterinarians who specialize in the hearing of other animals. After spending a good amount of time searching the Internet for animal ear specialists, I finally happened upon Dr. Peter Scheifele, or Dr. Pete as he refers to himself. Dr. Pete, an impressive individual whose personal and academic accomplishments are too numerous to list here⁹, is an expert in animal audiology. Similar to Dr. Espy, Dr. Pete indicated that veterinarians are not necessarily trained to detect hearing issues with other animals in a meaningful way. Dr. Espy asserted, a veterinarian who tells you they can test the hearing of animal “is not telling you the truth.” Dr. Pete said that veterinarians are not taught audiology and:

if you went in with your pet and to the vet and said I don’t think my pet can hear, you know, the vet would do something like use a clicker or jangle some keys or something like that to see if the dog reacts. But that’s not a good hearing test because you don’t really know um, whether they are reacting to the sound or the

⁹ Profile of Dr. Peter M. Skip Scheifele, PhD, LCDR USN (Ret.) from the University of Cincinnati Research Directory, https://researchdirectory.uc.edu/p/scheifpr.
vibration or, or whatever the case may be. The only way that you can truly test the animal would be to do what we do, which is, which is what we call a hearing test or an audiology. They call it an ABR, auditory brainstem response, which gives us a more or less objective view of, of what’s happening in each ear.

Dr. Pete was a wealth of information and by the end of our conversation, and certainly by the end of my study, it is clear that we have a long way to go in terms of being able to test the hearing of other animals exposed to the same noises that can have adverse impact on the hearing of humans. Like Dr. Espy pointed out when I asked him about the possible loss of hearing for rodeo animals, “Well, you can’t really ask animals if they didn’t hear. Yeah, so that’s not a fair question, nor is it a fair answer.”

One point that Dr. Pete continually made throughout our conversation was that there are behavioral outcomes that other animals will exhibit under stressful circumstances, such as being exposed to noise that meets or exceeds an animal’s threshold of pain. While explaining this through the lens of work that his team does with marine animals at the Georgia Aquarium, he explained that it is important to “constantly monitor the noise in those tanks so that I can see when the noise level is arriving to the point that it is liable to have some impact on them.” Dr. Pete referenced work by Heffner and Heffner (1983) that tested the acuity of hearing (i.e., frequency at which sound is detected) for horses and cattle but did not engage in understanding thresholds of harm. As part of ongoing research into this area, Dr. Pete and colleagues (Pond, et al. 2010) are exploring equine vocalization of stress and eustress associated with sounds and noise, but there is no literature to date that explores these issues for rodeo animals.
After speaking with Dr. Espy, my impression was that the hearing of nonhuman animals subjected to the incredibly loud noise at rodeos was simply not a consideration. Perhaps this isn’t surprising given that the hearing of humans attending the events also does not seem like a consideration. That said, Dr. Espy stated:

I mean, people by choice are walking into the arena and being exposed to loud bass music and rock music. I mean, that’s the human’s choice. And granted, we are putting animals in the arena and it’s, and it’s not their choice, so you could spin it that way. Um, but as far as like, you know, what an animal can hear and what an animal can’t hear, I mean, the only way you could really evaluate that is testing them at birth and then testing them when they are seventeen and seeing if they lost hearing.

Dr. Espy also suggested that hearing loss in an animal may or may not be associated with loud noise, referencing deaf dogs and cats he has treated who have never been in rodeo arenas. Consent aside (for now), this is where Jacob comes back into the picture.

As I am thinking about the lack of consideration about the sensitivity to sound and other stimuli, such as the pyrotechnics that go on at some of the rodeos, I thought I would ask Jacob about this, given that he has spent a good amount of time at rodeos as a competitor. I explained how I had been at the Silver Spurs Rodeo and watched a thundering and very bright pyrotechnics show at the start of the rodeo that was paired to loud music. While I could not fully observe all the behavior by all of the nonhuman animals, I was able to observe the response from those who were near me. When there were loud snaps of noise, such as a fire work going off, some of the horses momentarily
became startled. The humans who were with these horses had a range of responses, including no response at all or a calming and reassuring stroke against the horses’ bodies.

I asked Jacob if he has ever noticed similar reactions and he said:

Oh, a hundred percent. Yeah. There’s, so you’ll notice a lot of guys, um, and well of course when they’re doing the pyrotechnics, it’s just, there’s no time to clear the arena. Um, but yeah, there’s, I mean, it’s a lot of those bucking horses and stuff. But they’re seasoned by then. They’ve gotten kinda used to it. But, if you ever go back and watch, um like if you watch video from the National Finals Rodeo, NFR…what you’ll see is, you’ll see rodeo contestants will, for the ropers anyways, and I think probably for the barrel racers too, is they’ll actually take tampons and stick tampons inside horses’ ears to shut down all the noise, because it does distract them. Um, absolutely they’re gonna be sensitive to it, you know, an animal’s hearing is going to be better than ours, at least the horse and whatnot. So yeah, there’s absolutely no doubt that it affects them, but they get quote unquote, broke over time.

Jacob’s response speaks to the care that rodeo contestants have for the nonhuman animals they are working with; although, I will point out that Jacob is only referring to horses, who, as pointed out earlier, reside at the top of my hierarchy in terms of nonhuman animals. After speaking with Jacob, I understood that everyday observations of the nonhuman animal needs are met with concern and solutions, at least on a micro-level.

Jacob described a more caring reality, whereby the humans try to protect the nonhuman animals from intense stimuli. Ryan, a former amateur rodeo competitor and
current teacher in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry, was perhaps a bit more pragmatic about exposing nonhuman animals to the loud stimuli. He explained that:

[U]h, you know, one thing to keep in mind is those animals have been to more rodeos than you have to a certain degree…you have one that’s skiddish and every time it goes off, the pyrotechnics and the music…you either get used to it or you don’t, and it’s just one of those learned behaviors…

Another respondent, Laura, also explained how she and her daughter, who showed her horse, would put earplugs in their horse’s ears to protect him from the noise. She said, “otherwise, he would freak out and run.”

This care, or seeming lack thereof, is also exhibited within the stock show portion of the SSR; albeit for purposes of raising animals who will bring the most value to the humans who raise them for either slaughter or breeding.

Raising Our Food

The part of SSR that is perhaps the most perplexing to me is the stock show. In the rodeo, competitors love their nonhuman animal teammates. They rely on those teammates to wholeheartedly co-compete for a win. In rodeo, competitors respect their nonhuman animal competition as worthy adversaries. In rodeo, human spectators are entertained by humans and nonhuman animals who will in most cases walk out of the arena to compete another day. Stock shows on the other hand are a more complex reality where nonhuman animals are for the most part raised by a human who cares for the animal—literally and figuratively—only to sell them off into the food production system as actual food which
requires slaughter, or for breeding purposes which results in offspring meant for slaughter or additional breeding.

Kelly is a respondent who expressed her love of other animals as a reason for getting involved with stock shows and for attending rodeos. She explains that she “really enjoys the craft and competence” associated with raising pigs and steers. In an earlier chapter, Kelly acknowledged the dichotomy of loving our food. When asked about whether she or people she knows makes the connection between the food, the clothing, and the entertainment provided by animals, she said:

It’s a little surreal to go to the rodeo and like walk around eating a turkey leg while you’re looking at the turkeys that are being judged or eating a hamburger while you’re watching a cattle class. It’s a little surreal, but it’s also the nature of the beast.

Not long after our interview, I was at the San Antonio SSR watching a heifer presentation at the stock show and as my fieldnotes describe, Two guys, dressed in cowboy attire, including leather boots and belts, sat down to watch the judging of cows, while eating hamburgers. I wonder if they see the connection? Even Ryan, who teaches agriculture and whose daughter raised goats to show at stock shows said:

I’m guilty of this, and I kind raised my kids this way. We’ll go through, we’ll look at them, and I’ll say, man, I bet that one right there would be great on a barbecue pit. Yeah, I try to do that so they’ll understand what’s gonna happen to that animal.”
Kelly, who raised pigs for a time, explained that some kids she knew who were involved in raising stock, “named their animals after what food product they would be.” She continued, “So, one of the pigs were named Jimmy Dean.” She described this as a “dark humor way of coping with” the conflicting feelings of loving an animal who will be sold off for slaughter. Indeed, I detected a coping mechanism that Kelly employed, whereby she objectified the very living animals she was talking about when she made comments such as:

Like, this is an animal that is live, that you will inevitably form some sort of connection with, because that’s what humans do. We love to make connections with inanimate objects, much less living creatures. Um, we love to ascribe emotions to things that do not actually have emotions.

As I listened to Kelly describe living animals as inanimate objects, I recognize that she likely developed this perceived detachment of a living being from its subjective form was a way to rationalize the animal’s fate.

I had an emotional response to another part of Kelly’s interview, where she described, in so many words, her connection and disconnection from one of her pigs, Godiva, who she sold off for slaughter. She explained:

Um, but the reality is, at the end of the season, that animal is going on a truck and going to a slaughterhouse to be humanely slaughtered for food. Um, and I remember my first pig…I was in my freshman year in high school, so about 14, and I knew that going in rationally. And then it came to the night after the auction…So we were at auction and I had sold my first pig and I went to load her
on the trailer and I’m starting to tear up [be]cause oh, Godiva is going to be sausage. And I was starting to get sad and then Godiva heard the pigs on the truck screaming because the pigs did not enjoy being loaded onto the truck and they didn’t know what was going on. So, the pigs were screaming. So, my pig turned around and ran the other way, and knocked over my ag teacher’s very pregnant wife. I was like no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, that’s not what we’re, and I was just completely over it. I forced her to go on to the trailer. I was like, nope, that is what you’re doing. Sorry. Goodbye. Um, and then after that, it never bothered me [be]cause I was like this, this is just how it is. Um, if you are raising animals that are meat animals, that’s, that’s how it goes.

This statement was a bit traumatic to hear, but at the same time, I didn’t doubt Kelly’s love of the pig she named Godiva. Ryan, the agriculture teacher at a high school, teaches his students how to care for the nonhuman animals they will eventually let go to slaughter. Ryan stated that “If the student has done what they’re supposed to do, it shouldn’t be easy…If they are out there every day and spend time with that animal, then it should be tough to get rid of it at the end of the run.”

Stock show participants are invested in their nonhuman animals. They are invested in the animal, but they are also invested in the product. They know the only way to create a good product is to raise a good and healthy nonhuman animal. Danielle talked about the process of producing a good product at length. From the moment she decided to invest in goats, she took the process seriously. There is a record keeping system in place for stock show participants who are members of the Future Farmers of America (FFA)
and the 4H, both of which Danielle belonged to. She credited this system, her dad, and her own drive to her success in raising goats and in developing a sense of work ethic and responsibility.

Personal accountability aside, Danielle’s devotion to caring for her goats was not lost. She pointed out that because of the care she put into raising her animals, others in the stock show community looked up to her. She even took issue with the larger SSR events, like Houston, where participants were not entirely familiar with their stock animals. In describing this scenario, Danielle also exposes the level of value placed on the nonhuman animals. She is clear that it is important to form a bond with the animals, saying, “I mean, my dad’s not gonna let me get in the ring if I haven’t touched my animals.” She went on to describe some differences between her and others and her reasons for not liking the larger shows like the Houston SSR and San Antonio SSR, saying:

[U]m, and one of the things that I learned, like growing up, is not everyone is like me. Like, I work hard and I know what I’m talking about and doing my work, and I had to learn like people have trainers or fitters and that was one thing that didn’t, that I do not agree with. I still don’t agree with it, but um, people will hire fitters that’ll feed and work their animals. And then they’re just given the animal to go into the ring and they have no clue what they’re doing or you know, like no clue at all about the animal.

Forming this bond with her animals is important, and Danielle said, “I personally am partial to naming my animals because I feel like that’s gonna connect, like have a
stronger bond.” She is bothered by some of the competitors at some of the larger shows who don’t know their animals, but whose parents might spend lots of money for animals they know will “sweep everybody else out” of the competition.

When walking through the pens holding the stock show animals, it was clear to me that these animals were well cared for. Their pens were kept clean, and the animals appeared to have adequate space. When I speak to people like Kelly, Ryan, and Danielle, I don’t doubt their love for and their ability to really care for the animals who they inevitably sell for slaughter. For better or worse, they are connected to the food chain in ways that most people aren’t, and they take that connection very seriously. For others, it took a bit longer to make those connections. Becky had spent many years around stock show and rodeo animals. She said that for a long time, she:

never thought about the treatment of them, never thought about anything beyond my own satisfaction of getting to pet a horse or feeding a pig…Like, it just, it was exciting. I loved the animal interactions…and didn’t realize it’s something that I, that bothered me until a lot later in my life…a couple of years ago, I was like, this is not for me.

For Becky, her perception is that the stock show animals are “treated very well because they’re being shown.” She understands the benefit of caring for the animals ties directly to these animals as products. She said, “So, you treat them very well, very gingerly.”
The most remarkable form of disconnect regarding the nonhuman animals at the SSR events resides amongst the spectators, and in particular those who primarily attend the carnival. The carnival is a festive and colorful area, with rides, games, food and drinks, petting zoos, pig racing, and Mutton Bustin’. One of the questions I asked interviewees had to do with whether they, or people they knew, were making connections between the animals they were wearing, the animals they were eating, and the animals they were being entertained by. While the folks within the stock show community are for the most part making these connections, most other respondents have not. As I observed the various areas of the SSR, I noticed the greatest lack of care when it came to the nonhuman animals in the carnival areas. Attendees seemed to compartmentalize nonhuman animals in ways that allowed them to enjoy them as entertainment, to eat their slaughtered bodies, and to wear them as clothing or accessories without really considering that oftentimes, they are the same type of animals.

Take pigs, for instance. They entertain crowds of people at pig races, which also feature a swimming pig, are won as cute stuffed animals in the game area and are eaten by hungry carnival attendees. The pig Godiva, who Kelly lovingly raised, could very well have ended up as pork rinds or sausage on a stick at a SSR event, but my observations and interviews led me to believe that most spectators aren’t fully understanding this connection. In fact, the irony to me seemed most lost on the audience of the pig races.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the pigs who are part of the racing and swimming pig shows are kept in a large trailer just to the side of the racetrack (refer to
Figure 24, photo 1 from Chapter 6). The outside of the trailer indicates that the inside is air conditioned, and the pig handlers appear to treat the pigs with respect and gentleness. I did ask Dr. Espy if the pigs who are part of the pig races fall under his care and he said:

[T]hat’s not really our jurisdiction…that’s what we call display animals, and so, um, that’s concerning…the USDA, they have [jurisdiction] since they’re interstate commerce…um they have different rules…the USDA sends their own veterinarian down here…

He went on to say that “they have very wonky oversight.” He expressed concern about the racing and swimming pigs and was clear to point out that the lack of consideration for the entertainment pigs was nowhere near the relationship that the pigs he cares for have with their humans, even if they are sent to slaughter.

Not only did I not see the same type of bond I saw with stock show pigs and humans, but I felt the pig racing/swimming audience were completely disconnected from the lives of pigs. This was a space for entertainment and the pigs are cute to watch. Indeed, many of them are named after the food their bodies produce, such as Donald Rump Roast, Shakin’ Bacon, or Pork Chop Pam. As I sat and watched the pig races, and I thought about Godiva, I could not help but to wonder if the cheering crowd of onlookers recognized the irony of the names. My fieldnotes indicate that at the time, I wondered,

*Will these people think about Lindsey Lo-Ham when they are eating their sausage on a stick later, or when they are walking through the stock show pens?* In other words, do they care about the lives of these animals on a deeper level than just being momentarily
entertained, fed, or clothed? Dr. Espy even stated, “It’s like, it’s like the ultimate irony. It’s like the people that raise their animals for slaughter are better animal owners.”

Study respondents in general who primarily attend the carnival or concerts, shared their thoughts in a way that supports this same disconnect and lack of care about the animals who are entertaining them, who are feeding them, and who they are wearing. Brianna stated:

I think, again, most people, it’s just more for like entertainment. There’s people I know and I definitely don’t think that they’re cognizant of that at all, myself included.

Brianna considered the question and ultimately acknowledged that even though people might have their opinions about the nonhuman animals, ultimately, she feels that it isn’t enough to overshadow the contribution SSR make to the community, such as an economic boost for the city or scholarships for kids.

Like Brianna, Christine grew up attending the SSR in her community and when asked about these connections, she explained:

Yeah, I do [now], but I didn’t at the time. I don’t think we really did, um because the way that they’re already set up, you’re already, you know, directed towards not really connecting anything, anything at all with the animals that you’re seeing. I don’t think we were connecting, you know, oh, I’m eating a hamburger and watching this, you know, something with a cow that’s a stock animal that is going to get sold, or that I’m eating a hot dog and all of these pigs are about to go to a slaughterhouse. Um, no I don’t think we did. Um, at the most it might be that, um,
you know, a lot of people were wearing leather that’s in shops and stuff, like oh, those are made out of the animals that we’re currently watching. But that was about it.

Christine, who now advocates for better animal welfare is much more aware of these connections. Still others, like Dean, who in recent years attended the rodeo, still do not necessarily make the connections. He told me:

Um, honestly, I didn’t think of anything. I didn’t think anything like that as far as like what I was eating and what I was watching. Um, as far as other people, I don’t think they really noticed or cared about those connections…They’re there to enjoy themselves and not think about, uh, what they’re doing. They’re just there to have a good time.”

This relates back to the hierarchy shared earlier in the chapter. Animals like pigs, cattle, or even chickens, who end up on the plates or bodies of humans are valued less in terms of their living selves—unless they are serving as entertainment—and are instead valued more for the products their dead bodies produce. In response to my question about whether people are making the connections, I felt one interviewee, Oscar, best articulated this disconnect and prioritization of value. He said:

Not necessarily…it’s kind of like, I guess, right in front of your face, but, um, not necessarily just because I think that, um, well I mean to me, I guess it seems like there’s a little bit of a difference and it’s you know, like when I, you know, buy clothes for example, like I didn’t have a relationship with, you know, the animal that ultimately made those clothes or anything. Um, versus the one that’s right in
front of you. So not really, probably just because you don’t see the whole picture, I guess…Like, you don’t know that individual turkey, you know, that became the turkey leg.

Like Dean, Oscar suggested that people who are at these events simply “don’t think too deeply about it…you’re thinking more about the entertainment and thinking about the people you’re there with, spending time with.” Others, like Hannah, said they thought about it a little, however, as she put it:

I also kind of just pushed it away…if I think too much about it, then I’m not going to want to eat…I tell people, like don’t tell me what it is. Like don’t tell me what I ate because then I imagine the animal and then I’m like, it’s an animal.

This idea that many of the respondents do actually care about other animals but don’t want to think about other animals as food or clothing was most prevalent among study participants who are not working directly with the types of animals they are eating and wearing. The fact that attendees to these SSR events can watch a pig race, for example, with pigs named after their associated food products, and still experience a disconnect between the cute, live, entertaining animals and the dead, partitioned animal as food is something that continues to perplex me.

Discussion

The culmination of what I observed and the conversations I had with interviewees result in a realization that humans have constructed an existence where connections to others and care for others is contingent on the value others may offer. I’ll preface the remainder
of this discussion with an acknowledgement that I do not believe the humans I spoke with or observed intentionally practiced speciesism, deliberately exploiting or harming other animals. Rather, it appears that humans’ regard and/or disregard for other animals (arguably, this includes other humans) underscores Fjellstrom’s (2002) assertion about degrees of speciesism. Bryant (1979) implored other sociologists to delve more deeply into the zoological connection, and that includes the ideological conflicts that humans have when it comes to the relationship with other animals. While Gilbert and Gillet (2014) propose that there are interpersonal and institutional challenges regarding our relationships with other animals, especially in terms of how we love them, (ab)use them, and dispose of them, I cannot help but wonder if these challenges are truly considered important enough by the general population to change the relationship we have with other animals in a large and meaningful way. Indeed, Brennan’s (2003) humanist approach places humans above other animals in a way that discounts speciesism as a discriminatory practice and essentializes the behaviors of humans as more important or necessary than the wellbeing of other animals. However, in speaking with and observing folks in the SSR community, the issues are far more complex than simple acknowledgement of loving other animals, using other animals, and/or prioritizing humans over other animals.

I created the animal hierarchy for SSR (Figure 28) as a means of understanding the ways in which animals are prioritized in terms of consideration and care. Aside from horses, the other nonhuman animals—primarily pigs, cattle, and goats—are discussed more as objects, even if there is a measure of affection afforded to the animals. For
example, Tonya, Jacob, and Kelly all got involved with SSR as a result of their love of horses. Laura got involved in SSR because of her daughter’s love of horses and in turn fell in love with her daughter’s horse, who she considered part of the family. When discussing the wellbeing of the rodeo animals, for example, the only animals whose care was highlighted by the interviewees were the horses. While these respondents certainly love horses and speak of them affectionately, the level of regard decreased when talking about other nonhuman animals. For example, Kelly’s concern for her pig Godiva seemingly ended once it was time to sell the pig off to slaughter. Perhaps that assessment is unfair, however, Kelly exercised a level of flexibility of care and concern for the pig’s life once her use for the pig ended and the pig’s intended use as food came to fruition. In other words, the pig’s exchange value (Morris 2014) became more valuable than the pig’s companionship. This idea of exchange value posited by Morris (2014) was also presented by Dr. Espy, who also underscored the value of horses compared to other animals like cattle when it comes to the amount of money afforded to the care of horses.

This is not to say that other animals, besides horses, are not cared for or loved. Indeed, Danielle made it a point to spend time with her goats to bond with them in a meaningful way. She prides herself on creating those bonds and explained how her father instilled the importance of doing so. In fact, her father, the agriculture teacher, taught his students the value of knowing their animals. Not to diminish the efforts in any way, but my conversations with the respondents like Danielle, Ryan, and even Kelly always ended up ultimately focusing on the anthropocentric human values that stemmed from these human-nonhuman interactions. Murphy et al. (1992) outlined values such as leadership,
responsibility, independence and self-worth as resulting from raising and showing livestock. Indeed, these are values about which Danielle spoke of at length. Others, like Jacob, expressed his admiration for kids developing these values through raising livestock.

Perhaps for Jacob, these values are something he can associate with his affinity for cowboy culture. Fredriksson (1985) asserted love for animals as the primary reason cowboys became cowboys. Yet even Fredriksson acknowledged the flexibility in the relationship between cowboys and the animals they apparently loved when it came to the economic value of such nonhuman animals. In fact, Fredriksson suggests that the care of the nonhuman animals improves based on the economic value of the nonhuman animals for the cowboys.

Along with economic value, aesthetics and keeping up appearances seem to dictate level of care with nonhuman rodeo animals as well. Dr. Espy pointed to an event that occurred twenty-five years ago where an animal was injured, and it took the veterinarian ten minutes to get to the animal to tend to their care. He noted that the event drew media attention and as a result, a veterinarian is required to be more readily available. Amy, the rodeo queen, discussed the jerk-down rule, which was implemented due to audience perceptions that calves were being harmed during calf roping events. While neither Dr. Espy’s nor Amy’s care about other animals is called into question, both strongly suggest the changes to the care and treatment of the nonhuman rodeo animals was due in large part to human perceptions of events that took place. In other words, humans are once again prioritized.
Conceivably, by prioritizing humans over other animals, people are able to better compartmentalize their feelings and behaviors regarding other animals. When presented with questions that challenged respondents to consider the connections between live nonhuman animals and the slaughtered animals who are eaten and worn, I found that people talked themselves into a corner of recognizing their conflicting feelings about these connections, or they figured out ways to avoid those conflicting feelings. For example, Dean, Christine, and Brianna all suggest that people visiting the SSR prioritize their personal entertainment, and that if attendees allowed themselves to critically consider the connections, it would put a damper on that good time. Oscar asserted that it simply boils down to knowing the animal who becomes your food and clothing. For Oscar, if he doesn’t know that animal personally, then eating the animal is not a problem. The same goes for Hannah, however, Hannah was more sentimental and suggests that if she thinks about the food she is eating as having previously been alive, she feels guilty. In other words, humans care about the other animals insofar as their behaviors of eating and wearing them aren’t impeded by considering the animals as having lived at some point.

Wade’s (1996) claim that nonhuman animals have been co-opted for sport can be expanded to include entertainment. To be sure, there are many ways beyond the realms of sport and entertainment for which nonhuman animals have been co-opted. For the purposes of this study and the early suggestion to develop the concept of the animal sport and entertainment complex, focus will remain on sport and entertainment. Respondents like Dean, Christine, Brianna, Oscar, and Hannah may not be considering the food they are eating or clothes they are wearing as being bodies and lives of once subjective
animals controlled and constrained (Wade 1996). The same is largely true when it comes to the animals used in the sporting and entertainment events associated with the rodeo, stock show, and carnival.

When it comes to the nonhuman animals placed in an arena where the expectation is that they perform for an audience, my observations indicate some resistance by the nonhuman animals. There was the bull that had been ridden at the Silver Spurs Rodeo Boots, Bulls, and Barrels who appeared frightened and didn’t want to move. There was the bull in the chute thrashing about as the bull rider was getting situated on the bulls back at the San Antonio SSR. There were the horses who responded in an agitated manner to the loud and bright pyrotechnics show at the Silver Spurs Rodeo. There were the calves and steers running to get away from horses and humans giving chase at each SSR. There were sheep who ran as fast as they could, trying to shake the kids riding them, just to get to the safety of their flock at each SSR. As an observer, I witnessed numerous behaviors by nonhuman animals that were indications of resistance to the control and constraint by humans.

Respondents for the most part perceive these behaviors differently, or at the very least, suggest that the nonhuman animals have agency in these situations. Kelly posits that the horses and bulls know their jobs. Ryan and Jacob suggest that the nonhuman animals get used to these environments with Jacob stating that the horses become “seasoned” and Ryan proposing that the animals learn to behave accordingly in such environments. It should be noted that Jacob does acknowledge the resistance from the calves, who he agrees are “not thrilled” to be chased and roped. That said, he did also
imply that some just understand what is going to happen and simply “just sit there and take it.” Calf roping, in fact, was the one event that most respondents, such as Jim and Kevin, could agree seemed the most stressful and cruel.

When it comes to these nonhuman animals in sport and entertainment, it is perhaps Wade’s (1996) contention regarding the involuntary nature of their participation that has stuck with me most throughout this journey of observing and interviewing. Wade proposes there is “discomfort” for the animals and that their welfare is “at risk” in sports that feature nonhuman animals. Given the conversations I had and the observations I made, these points can certainly be debated. Indeed, Dr. Espy acknowledged the involuntary nature of nonhuman animals at the rodeo but was adamant that the utmost care is taken to make their participation safe. For Dr. Espy, there is a philosophical discussion to have here regarding who makes what choices for what animals. He stated, “In other words, my judgement about what a horse wants is not any more fair than you making a judgement about what your dog wants or your cat wants, or whatever.” In further conversation with Dr. Espy, he divulged his own introspection and time spent considering the ethics of nonhuman animals in the realm of sport and entertainment, at least in terms of the SSR. At the end of the day, Dr. Espy is there to care for the nonhuman animals and this is undoubtedly what he does, he cares for them.

That care is something that those involved with the rodeo and the stock show discussed at length, not only their care for but also their care about other animals regardless of the fate of those nonhuman animals. There is a connection to these animals that seems to be missing for people who are merely spectators to the SSR. When I think
about the hierarchies of animals, as I perceive them, I find that greater connections exist between humans and horses, which is perhaps one of the reasons horses are the only nonhuman animals who are not also eaten or worn. Generally speaking, as the level within the hierarchy decreases for a nonhuman animal, so too does the level of consideration and care—at least care in terms of caring about the animals. One exception may be calves who are subject to roping, although, given that the event is still widely performed at SSR, the distaste for this event doesn’t seem enough to end the practice. It is evident that there is a degree of “line drawing” when it comes to speciesist behaviors (Fjellstron 2002; Morris 2014). How nonhuman animals are valued (or devalued), cared for and about (or not cared for and about), appreciated, loved, or prioritized (or not appreciated, loved, or prioritized) is subject the lines drawn by humans. While this chapter explores the more interpersonal perceptions of the human-nonhuman relationship, the next chapter—the conclusion—expands the discussion to the institutional level as a way of illuminating the complex nature of the crossroads of commodification, consumption, and care of nonhuman animals.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

The stock show and rodeo (SSR) community of human and nonhuman animals is intriguing and multifaceted. The human-nonhuman animal relationship is more complex than I had fully considered going into the study. Furthermore, the different realms of the SSR provide insights specific to the communities focused within specific areas (rodeo, stock show, carnival). While Chapter 5 focuses on providing readers with insights into the environment and culture of the SSR, Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the interpersonal relationships between humans and nonhuman animals within the SSR community, especially regarding commodification, consumption (both in Chapter 6), and care (Chapter 7). This chapter ties the interpersonal level relationships to the structural level relationship between humans and other animals, a complex relationship that Gilbert and Gillet (2014) present in their anthology. This complex relationship is one that Bryant (1979) elucidates and one that Young (2014) attempts to explore through the lens of nonhuman animals in sports. Both Bryant and Young submit recommendations for areas upon which to expand in sociology and few sociologists have done so since 2014, let alone since 1979. Before moving on, it is worth mentioning that it is not for lack of interest by some sociologists in exploring the human-nonhuman animal relationship; rather it has more to do with the broader push-back from the discipline of sociology to include other animals into the folds of the sociological inquiry (Arluke 1993; Grauerholz et al. 2020; Irvine 2008). Therefore, in expanding upon the area of nonhuman animals in sports and entertainment, I also make the case for greater incorporation of nonhuman animals into the discipline of sociology.
The SSR community resides at a crossroads of commodification, consumption, and care when it comes to interactions with nonhuman animals. Furthermore, there is a range of speciesist behaviors by humans that are associated with those interactions. This is a challenging space to be in as I can attest from my field observations and as I think is exemplified through interviews with people involved in one way or another with the SSR community. Social and cultural norms and values regarding the exploitation of other animals by humans that have stood the test of time have been in place for longer than most of us have been on this planet. While the previous chapters have exposed the interpersonal relationships people have with other animals, these relationships reside within larger structural settings. It is more than an “us/them” dichotomy; rather it is an oppressor versus oppressed or dominant versus dominated relationship, co-constitutive with other types perceived dichotomous relationships in society (e.g., men versus women, white people versus people of color, able bodied folks versus folks with disabilities, etc.). As such, a feminist theoretical lens is used in order to better understand this human-nonhuman animal relationship. Just as voices of other marginalized human populations have been muted to prioritize the voices of dominant groups and perspectives (Collins 1987; Hartsock 2004; hooks 2015; Smith 1987), so too have the voices of nonhuman animals.

By employing a feminist standpoint perspective and engaging with an interpretive qualitative methodology, I was able not only to gain insights from the experiences of humans within the SSR community, but I was also able to observe and connect to the experiences of the nonhuman animals within the SSR community. Donovan (2006:306)
suggests this approach as a way to center the voices of those whose lives have been “ignored, trivialized, rendered unimportant.” While most of the humans I spoke with profess their affection for the nonhuman animals in the SSR community, the actual experiences of the nonhuman animals are often ignored, trivialized, and in many ways deemed less important in reference to humans. Whether it is human livelihood or human entertainment, the human experience is consistently prioritized in explicit and implicit ways.

The environment at the SSR, as presented in Chapter 5, is filed with nonhuman animals. From the moment I entered the grounds of the SSR, the smell of cooked nonhuman animal flesh was wafting all around. Large signs displaying cooked nonhuman animal flesh such as turkey legs, sausage, hamburgers, chicken, and more loomed overhead. Live nonhuman animals are featured in rodeos, stock shows, and are showcased as entertainment for children and adults in petting zoos, pig races, and Mutton Bustin’ events.

Gaard (2012) suggests that as consumers of other animals, humans are complicit in the suffering of nonhuman animals, a proposition with which I am keen to agree. For example, the use of other animals for food and clothing explicitly exploits nonhuman animal bodies. While most of the folks at the SSR are not explicitly slaughtering the nonhuman animals they are eating or wearing, they are implicit in the ongoing practice of slaughtering other animals for food and clothing by the mere fact that they desire to eat and wear those other animals. As such, vendors who sell food at the SSR are explicitly exploiting this desire by enticing humans with large advertisements for the food being
cooked throughout the grounds of the SSR. Vendors in the shopping areas present clothing and accessories for both humans and other animals made from the fur and skin of nonhuman animals. The fact that most humans are not personally slaughtering animals for food or clothing allows for a high degree of disconnection from the nonhuman animals they are eating and wearing. The experience is one that literally centers the voices and desires of humans over that of nonhuman animals whose labor makes possible the human experience of eating and wearing of other animals (Donovan 2006; Harding 2004).

The labor of other animals is exploited in other areas of commodification and consumption at the SSR. Nonhuman animal labor is prevalent at the stock shows, where their bodies are commodified, judged, and sold for slaughter or breeding within the food production system. Nonhuman animal bodies are also exploited at the rodeo and other areas at the SSR where humans are consuming sport and entertainment events (e.g., bull riding, bronc riding, calf roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing, pig racing, Mutton Bustin’, petting zoos, etc.). In speaking with study participants who have been or who are involved in stock shows and rodeos, it is clear their goal is not to purposefully harm the nonhuman animals. In fact, all respondents spoke of having a deep connection and admiration for the animals with whom they work and compete, and with the ones they raise in an effort to eventually sell for slaughter or breeding within the food productions system. The interactions between humans and nonhuman animals within these realms exposes a complex relationship, one where the material and objective reality of the
nonhuman animal body is conflicting with the subjective and discursive discourse from the humans.

The complicity of humans to consume the suffering of other animals (Gaard 2012) is done so in a way that denies accountability (hooks 1992) and supports Hirschmann’s (2004: 324) assertion that an underlying force, or “invisible harm” is at work. As discussed in Chapter 3, adherence to social and cultural norms that define other animals as less than human and as property, allows humans to minimize or ignore the subjective experiences of nonhuman animals involved with SSR. In other words, exploiting the bodies of other animals for human use is normalized in such a way that lets humans off the hook for any actual harm to other animals, whether it is intentional or not.

If we can think about nonhuman animals in terms of their subjective selves as well as their materiality (Harding 2004) within the human-nonhuman animal relationship, then as feminist scholars have suggested, sociologists can indeed better inform theories of knowledge in ways that move beyond the Marxist or even feminist theorizing that focuses on class conflict or the conflicts that feature only human relations (Collins 2000; Gaard 2012; Hartsock 2004; Smith 1987).

The challenge issued above may be a difficult one. As Gimenez (2000) posits, material feminism, similar to Marxist feminism runs the risk of reducing the examination of relationships solely to one of economics. On the one hand, I find this concern to be a legitimate assessment as my perception of the SSR community is one where economics is a primary concern for the vendors who want to make money selling animals as food, clothing and accessories, for the human rodeo competitors who want to win prizes by
competing with and against other animals, and for the stock show competitors who want to sell the animals they have raised for money. Furthermore, there are economic contracts in place in each of these realms that rely on interested humans to spend money, and more importantly, these contracts rely on the exploitation of nonhuman animals. On the other hand, the assessment by others, such as Landry and McLean (1993) recognize that culture is also an influencing factor, separate from economics. Based on my observations and interviews, I suggest it is almost impossible to separate the two. While many respondents directly connect nonhuman animals involved in stock shows and rodeos to economic benefit for humans, there is also an association of nonhuman animals as athletes or as having jobs, implying some level of equal grounding between the human athletes/workers and nonhuman animal athletes/workers. Much of this has to do with the ways in which humans use language and perceived cultural norms as a way to normalize the use of animals in situations constructed by humans (e.g., as athletes, competitors, food, clothing, companions, etc.). The differences being, nonhuman animals do not volunteer (Wade (1996) their bodies, time, and emotions to stock shows and rodeos in the same way as humans, and besides possible celebrity status, are not paid in the same ways as humans.

Consideration of the material feminist and standpoint feminist perspectives are enveloped within the ecofeminist perspective in a way that first allows for centralizing the voice of specific and largely marginalized groups, and second, provides space for understanding the material realities of those groups in contrast with the dominant groups. Ecofeminism, however, expands the examination of the human-nature-nonhuman animal relationships in a way that is intersectional (Adams 2010; Adams and Donovan 1995;
Gaard 2011) and political in the sense that action is necessary for moving from theory to action in creating more equitable relationships (Estévez-SAá and Lorenzo-Modia 2018; Gaard 2012). The challenge is convincing others that a more equitable relationship with other animals is important, and within the discipline of sociology, worthy of space within the sociological imagination.

As theoretically grounded as this study is, the challenge of convincing others of the importance of recognizing other animals as subjective beings worthy of a long (relatively speaking) and satisfying life on par with other animals, such as humans, is difficult. That said, humans have made some progress in clearing the hurdles of understanding that other marginalized humans are indeed worthy of long (relatively speaking) and satisfying lives on par with self-proclaimed and self-appointed dominant humans. We can think about racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and other isms in this regard.

Ryder (1970) and Singer (1975) promote the concept of speciesism as a concept on par with racism, sexism, and classism and assert that equality between groups is violated when one group prioritizes their interests over other groups. Moreover, the prioritization of one group often leads to diminishing the capacity of the subordinate group to achieve the equal ground. This has historically been the case, for example, with men who have prioritized their interests over women, or white men who have prioritized their interests over men and women of color, or able-bodied people prioritizing their interests over people with “disabilities,” or upper-class people/people with more money over lower-class people/people with less money. Scholars such as Ryder (1970), Singer
(1975) and others have argued that the same is true for humans prioritizing their interests over those of other animals.

For Ryder (1970) and Singer (1975), there is a philosophical imperative that requires humans to never engage with other animals in a way that creates a divide or power imbalance (e.g., people owning pets) similar to the ways humans have engaged other humans that creates a divide or power imbalance (e.g., white humans owning black humans). Others, such as Brennan (2003) and Fjellstrom (002) take issue with this perspective. Brennan takes a humanist approach that infers a natural and moral imperative that humans prioritize themselves over others. As a result, speciesism is essentially unavoidable. Fjellstrom, on the other hand, recognizes that speciesism is more of a continuum, whereby some elements of the human-nonhuman animal interaction is not necessarily harmful, and some elements of the human-nonhuman animal interaction is clearly exploitive and harmful. Herein lies the SSR community.

The environment and culture of the SSR harkens back to the days of westward expansion, of cowboys and cowgirls working the land with other animals, and of humans utilizing the resources available to them (the land and other animals) for survival. That said, the ways in which SSR invoke this nostalgia is far removed from the frontier days and early rodeo. As one point of comparison, women and non-white men were integral to western expansion, frontier life, and early rodeo just as nonhuman animals were (Pearson 2004; Penrose 2003; Stratton 2005; Theodori 1997). The rodeo is hardly representative of cowboys/cowgirls of diverse races and ethnicities working with nonhuman animals on a farm or ranch. Events are timed, there are monetary prizes to be earned, and nonhuman
animals are non-consensually subjected to being ridden, chased, roped, and more, unlike their human counterparts who can provide full consent. Furthermore, while women and nonwhite men are at the very least marginally acknowledged within the rodeo literature, nonhuman animals are not propped up for their enormous contribution in the same way humans.

The environment and culture of SSR is largely contingent on the commodification and consumption of nonhuman animals. From the food to the clothing, to the accessories, to the equipment, to the entertainment, and to the support staff, animals are indeed integral to every aspect of the SSR. Vendors cannot make money from the flesh and fur of slaughtered animals if attendees are not willing to spend money on the food, clothing, and accessories. Human rodeo athletes could not win prizes and recognition if they didn’t have nonhuman animals to ride, chase, rope, and wrestle. Stock show competitors could not win money or scholarships if they didn’t have nonhuman animals to raise and sell into the food production system. There is a motivating capitalist agenda propelling even the most compassionate nonhuman animal loving folks within the SSR. Indeed, even Dr. Espy, who has considered his own ethical responsibility as a person who loves and promotes SSR, recognizes that if it weren’t for the unwitting throngs of spectators who are truly disconnected from the explicit use of animal bodies to feed them, clothe them, and entertain them, perhaps we would have a much different relationship with nonhuman animals.

Fjellstrom’s (2002) continuum of speciesist behaviors is fitting for the SSR community. While I observed resistance from animals involuntarily placed into positions
of having to entertain humans, mostly while competing against each other or against humans, I also witnessed great care and concern for their wellbeing from their human co-competitors, their human competition, and indeed from those humans tasked with their care, like Dr. Espy. While I spoke with people within the SSR community who lovingly raise nonhuman animals just to sell them off for slaughter and/or breeding within the food production system, I also witnessed a deep connection and appreciation by those folks for the animals they lovingly raise. Ultimately, it is the spectators who have no meaningful connection to the nonhuman animals at the SSR in the same way as stock show and rodeo competitors do. There is a lack of connection for most of these folks when it comes to the animals by whom they are entertained, the animals they are wearing, and the animals they are eating. If there is a population for whom increasing awareness of these connections is most important, it is the folks who are part of the capitalist system as consumers of others in a very abstract way. In this sense, I conclude that while stock show competitors are sending their nonhuman animals off to slaughter or for breeding within the food production system (part of the capitalist system), they take their roles as caregivers seriously and indeed, take care of their animals for the time they have them. The rodeo competitors, while enmeshed in competition often pitting humans against nonhuman animals as entertainment for an audience (part of the capitalist system), are considerate opponents to nonhuman animals who in most cases are physically superior. I also conclude that these capitalist endeavors would exist much differently, if at all, if the population of spectators were better informed and better connected to the nonhuman animals providing their food, clothing, and entertainment.
This study exposes the levels of connection and disconnection to nonhuman animals involved in stock show and rodeo events. Given that speciesism is the violation of the “principle of equality” (Singer 1975) by giving greater weight to the interests of one species (humans) over other species (nonhuman animals), this study illuminates the degrees to which humans practice speciesism based on a number of factors, including connection or disconnection to certain nonhuman animals, willful ignorance to the ways in which our food and clothing is produced, and adherence to social and cultural norms that suggest that humans are superior to other animals. Additionally, this study theoretically connects aspects of speciesism to other systemic issues such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, as a means of pointing out the interconnected nature of our existence and the purpose of further incorporating other species into the sociological discussion. Ultimately, this study builds upon the scholarship regarding the human-nonhuman animal relationship. While the focus of this study is on the animal sport and entertainment complex, the fact that SSR are encompassing of many other areas of our social lives, such as food, shopping, play, and more, this study exposes other areas of possible examination regarding the human-nonhuman animal relationship.

To be clear, while this study adds to the sociological scholarship in the area of human-nonhuman animal studies, this large undertaking of exploring the entire SSR community is not without its limitations. I could have easily focused my attention on one specific area of the SSR, such as just the rodeo, or just the stock show, or just the carnival, and while the outcome would have largely been the same, I believe, I could have spent more time delving deeper into the topics of commodification, consumption,
and care. I could have also delved deeper into aspects of learned helplessness or habitualized performance (as alluded to by Ryan, one of the respondents) and the techniques of neutralization employed within the stock show community. All things considered, these areas are ripe for further consideration and more in-depth research. As a result of my interviews and subsequent observations, I feel that future research will consist of an improved interview tool that will take a deeper dive into the care and concern humans have for other animals, and especially the degrees of concern humans have for other animals depending on the capacity with which the animal is used. Future research should also explore the deeper connections between the exploitation and minimization of nonhuman animals within SSR to that of women and people of color. This would entail an expansion of the literature review as well as greater long-term engagement with the SSR community. Lastly, a future area of exploration is to focus more exclusively on the nonhuman animals. In other words, one goal is to engage more through the lens of animal behaviors. In this study, I combined human perceptions with that of my perceptions of nonhuman animal behaviors. While I did try to reach out to animal behaviorists, to no avail, I will spend more time in the future to educate myself more about animal behaviors so that I can better capture the standpoint of other animals.
APPENDIX A: IRB HUMAN SUBJECTS PERMISSION LETTER
EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

September 20, 2019

Dear Erin Kidder:

On 9/20/2019, the IRB determined the following submission to be human
subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

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<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study, Exempt Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Exploring Perceptions of People and Animals in Stock Shows and Rodeos through a Sociological Lens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Erin Kidder</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB ID</td>
<td>STUDY00000867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
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<td>Grant ID</td>
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This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission
and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and
there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the
human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your
research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be
accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or
irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all
correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Kamille Chaparro
Designated Reviewer
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER
SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS FOR STUDY

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS IN STOCK SHOWS AND RODEOS THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS

Have you been to, competed in, or worked at either the Silver Spurs Rodeo in Florida, or the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo or Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in Texas? Are you at least 18 years old? Would you be interested in talking about your experiences?

WHAT TO EXPECT:
Complete 3 minute demographic survey asking general questions about age, income, education, etc.
Participate in face-to-face, phone, or Skype interview that lasts approximately 1 hour. The duration is largely up to you.

OTHER PARTICIPATION DETAILS:
Interviews may be conducted at a date, time, and location convenient to participants and researcher.
Participation is completely voluntary. Personal information will not be shared or published.

TO PARTICIPATE, OR FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS, CONTACT:

Researcher: Erin N. Kidder at erin.kidder@knights.ucf.edu
Faculty Advisor: Liz Grauerholz at elizabeth.grauerholz@ucf.edu

University of Central Florida / College of Science and Department of Sociology
4000 Central Florida Blvd., Orlando, FL 32816 / (407) 823-3744

IRB# STUDY00000867
APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR
STOCK SHOW AND RODEO COMMUNITY

1. What’s our involvement in stock shows and rodeos?
   • Examples may include rodeo events, stock show events, carnivals, trade shows, concerts and other entertainment, etc.

2. What first got you interested in stock shows and rodeos?

3. How long have you been involved in stock shows and rodeos, and in what ways?
   • Examples may include competitors, spectators, staff, etc.

4. What do you enjoy most about stock shows and rodeos?

5. What purpose do you feel the stock show and rodeo holds in your life and in this community?
   • Examples might be a fun time, a way for the city to make money, to showcase animals, etc.

6. Are you involved in or attend any of the events with animals? If so, which ones?

7. How do you think the animals feel about participating in the stock show and rodeo events?

8. How do you feel about the animals participating in the stock show and rodeo events?

9. Do you think there are any differences in how animals are treated, depending on the events (e.g., calf roping versus barrel riding)? If so, can you explain what you think those differences are?

10. What are your thoughts about how the animals are treated in the different types of events they participate in? Explain differences, if any, that you think might exist from event to event.
    • Examples might be the difference between calf roping, barrel racing, and bull riding

11. What kinds of distinctions are there between the ways we use animals in stock shows and rodeos and our companion animals (our pets)?
    • For example, what makes the food (e.g., burgers, turkey legs, chicken) we are eating, the leather we are wearing, the animals who are competing, different from the ones we consider as “pets” that we don’t eat, wear, or make work?
12. There may be people who don’t really understand this culture, especially how animals are used in stock shows and rodeos. How would you want to represent the stock show and rodeo community to those individuals?
   a. Follow up: What do you want them to know about the interactions with the animals involved in stock shows and rodeos?
REFERENCES


