

# **Females in Veterinary Medicine: Why the choice?**

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## Abbreviations

'A Level:	Advanced Level
AVMA:	American Veterinary Medical Association
BERA:	British Educational and Research Association
Ch.:	Chapter
CXC:	Caribbean Examination Council
Dr. X:	Veterinary faculty at St. George's University
Dr. Z:	Community clinic veterinarian
DVM:	Doctor of Veterinary Medicine
Ed.D.:	Doctor of Education
et. al.:	and others
GPA:	Grade Point Average
GCE:	General Cambridge Examination
IRB:	Institutional Review Board
MBA:	Master of Business Administration
Med/Vet:	Medicine/Veterinary Medicine
'O Level:	Ordinary Level
p.:	Page number
p.x.:	Page number unknown
RCVS:	Royal College of Veterinary Surgery
SAT:	Scholastic Assessment Test
Stat.:	Statutory

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

S.G.U.: St. George's University

UCLA: University of California, Los Angeles

UK: United Kingdom

US: United States

USD: United States Dollars

USC: United States Constitution

UWI: University of the West Indies

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge St. George's University for supporting my continued professional development and allowing me to complete the Ed.D. programme together with my co-academic responsibilities as a faculty.

## Declaration & Disclaimer

I the undersigned confirm that the work that I have presented as my thesis is entirely my own work. Reference to, quotations from and discussions from the work of other persons have been correctly acknowledged within this thesis in accordance with the University guidelines for the production of a doctoral thesis.



.....  
Satish Bidaisee

## **Abstract**

Title: Females in Veterinary Medicine: Why the Choice?

Veterinary Medicine as a profession has undergone a change from a male-oriented one, to being predominantly female. The increase in female students is a reflection of the increasing interest in veterinary medicine by females. This study focused on reasons for the specific choice of veterinary medical education among female veterinary students. A life history approach was applied in order to explore the lives of six female veterinary students from St. George's University, School of Veterinary Medicine in Grenada. This methodology involved using interviews to collect personal accounts of students' life experiences that provided data about the reasons for the choice of female students to pursue veterinary medical education. The theoretical framework that served as the base for this thesis was grounded theory. Interviews were transcribed, exerted to concept identification, data reduction, and thematic representations for analysis. The study revealed that life experiences as well as socio-cultural realities surrounding the lives of the students were crucial in understanding the influences and reasons for their choice of veterinary medicine. A Life Stages Theory emerged from the use of grounded theory approach to data analysis which identified personal, financial and academic needs as primary to create interest in veterinary medicine. The experiential enquiry into the students' lives also recognized pet ownership, exposure to knowledge of veterinary medicine as well as positive perceptions of veterinarians and veterinary medical practice as reasons for the choice of veterinary medicine. The final choice of veterinary medicine by females was found to be based on their personal interests, their ability to overcome financial and academic barriers and receive opportunities of alternative academic pathways. The new insights created on reasons for the choice of veterinary medicine can be applied to student career advisement and review of applicants for admission into veterinary schools.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This thesis has as its core, my observations regarding the increased number of females pursuing veterinary medical education and in veterinary professional practice. I sought to explore the factors that have influenced the choice of veterinary medicine by female students.

Pursuing, conducting and writing life history research for the first time proved to be a challenging experience. However, the approach to understanding life experiences, exploring historical and socio-cultural realities seemed almost a natural and daily activity. Natural in the sense that the tools used and tasks performed were no different to my customary activities such as enquiring, reflecting and resolving questions. Daily in the sense that I have engaged life history as a methodological approach for more than two years during my doctoral training so that it has become intrinsically part of my daily functions.

This chapter introduces the research question, provides a context for the work conducted and will include the following:

1. The Research Question
2. Aims and Objectives
3. Context and Background
  - St. George's University
4. Significance of the Study
5. Positionality and Ethical Considerations
6. My Life Story
7. Thoughts and Interpretations
8. Thesis Structure

### **The Research Question**

The primary research question that drove the study of the life history of female veterinary students was: why the choice of veterinary medicine? In answering the primary research question, I sought to understand what life experiences informed student's choice of veterinary medicine?

## **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this thesis is to present the life experiences of female veterinary students at St. George's University (S.G.U.), Grenada, in order to identify the reasons for their choice. Using the life history interview process, I was able to learn about the life experiences of each of the six students with regards to their social, economic, cultural and personal life circumstances that influenced their present position as students of veterinary medicine. Six students were identified, one from each of the six academic terms offered at the Grenada campus. S.G.U., as an international academic institution, provided the opportunity for the students that participated in the study to also be international in their geographical location, socio-cultural background and life experiences. The research further allowed for me to refer to my own life experiences through personal reflections in order to identify the influences of family and my personal decisions in my own choice of veterinary medicine as a career myself.

The process of life history interviewing provided personal and historical insights into the educational development for each of the students. I was able to recognize specific experiences that related to their choice of veterinary medicine as well as their personal struggles and opportunities that created pathways for the student's choice for veterinary medical education. The life history of each student covered the student's unique and diverse experiences, but also included collective themes that existed across all of the students' lives. These experiences and themes are a reflection of the social and individual lives that were shared by the students. The life experiences shared by the students were invaluable in assisting me to work on the main objectives of this thesis which included:

- To identify the reasons using life history methodology that influenced the choice of veterinary medicine for education and career among a group of female veterinary students.
- To examine existing reasons from the literature for females choice of veterinary medicine in their education and career including:
  - Equal admission criteria
  - Improved veterinary technology and practices
  - Increased number of female veterinary role models

- Caring image of female veterinarians

## **Context and Background**

This section provides a brief historical review to show how the student and professional population of veterinary medicine has transitioned from a male to a female dominated career over the past few decades. The increase in female veterinary students is a reflection of the increasing interest in veterinary medicine by females. Miller (2012, p.6) in her thesis entitled "Man's Best Friend Trending Towards Women" recognized that the 75% women and 25% men average percentages for entering veterinary students in the US is a reflection of the percentages in the applicants' pool. Miller (2012, p.7) further assessed the percentage of practicing veterinarians that are over the age of 45 years which was found to be in favour of males. This indicated that the gender transition which originated in the 1970s led to the stage today where the age profile of female veterinarians is lower than 45 years of age. The experiences of female veterinarians in the US are also echoed in Europe, as the UK's Royal College of Veterinary Surgery (R.C.V.S.) reported a 77% female population among their veterinary students (R.C.V.S. Facts, 2011). The increasing number of women and decline in the number of men enrolling into veterinary schools is a trend that is recorded. The numerous social and cultural changes over the past few decades can also be considered significant as they explain some developments in the education system that made education for female students more accessible. Many of the social and cultural changes were influenced by political and policy shifts, as well as social movement within societies in relation to the roles and functions of women in developed countries (Stockemer 2014, p.x). A description of S.G.U. and the veterinary student population relates the background and context of the study site and of the nature of the student population where participants came from.

One of the developing interests in this thesis began with my personal observations regarding females and their choice of veterinary medicine. As a child, in the period of the 1980s into early 1990s, I was influenced by an agricultural environment where it appeared to me that all veterinarians were male. However, when I entered veterinary school in 2001, the majority of students in my entering cohort and indeed the majority of the students in veterinary school were females. This significant female presence in veterinary medical



education has continued through to today among veterinary colleagues and entering and graduating veterinary students at S.G.U. As a veterinarian, observing the gender shift that has occurred raised the question for me regarding why there was an increase in female students in veterinary medicine and what was the reasons for their choice?

My reference point on the history of women in veterinary medicine is Aleen Cust, Britain's first female veterinarian. Nolen (2001, p.x), in an extract from the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, described Cust's experience as follows:

*"In 1894 at the age of 26, Aleen Cust enrolled in the New Veterinary College, Edinburgh, as A.I. Custance to spare her family embarrassment ... when she was to sit for the first of her professional examinations in 1897 the Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) declined her application. As the governing body for the RCVS, the Council defined the word "student" as "male student", therefore, the Council ruled, the RCVS lacked authority to admit a woman to the examinations"* Nolen (2001, p.x)

The experience of Cust demonstrated the challenges of social norms at the time, including family expectations, legal restrictions, professional marginalization and the reflections of male dominance in the veterinary profession. In fact, in 1922, 22 years after completing her veterinary training, Cust was then awarded her diploma in veterinary medicine.

From the perspective of the United States (US), Helen Richt from Kansas State College of Veterinary Medicine began the female legacy of veterinarians many years after Cust in 1934 (Centennial Feature, 2008). While the experiences of Cust and Richt were the genesis of females in veterinary medicine and the development of women in veterinary medical education, careers for female veterinarians did not take place until the 1960s. Even in the 1960s, only seven females graduated across all veterinary schools in the US (Chernesky 1974, p.23). By the 1970s Chernesky reported just over 30 women entered veterinary colleges.

During the period 1960s to 1970s in the US, social movements and legal reform substantially changed the presence of women in education and professional development overall. A major influence on women's increasing involvement in veterinary medicine was the

women's movement, as this organized political action coincided with enactment of laws and opportunities (Slater and Slater 2000, p.477). Legal reform such as the Federal Equal Pay Act of 1963 (977 Stat. 1409 27USC 2000), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (79 Stat. 253 43USC 2000e), the 1965 repeal of the 1870 law that permitted observation by offering equal pay to female federal employees (79 Stat. 9875 USC 33 Section 165) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 (86 Stat. 10342USC 2000E), were all landmark legal reforms and allowed for affirmative action plans favouring women in higher education (Slater and Slater 2000, p.472). Additionally, women benefitted from access to federal funds and grants for higher education as well as revised admission policies based on merits of each student through the Educational Amendment of 1972 and the Women's Education Act of 1974 for the first time (Slater and Slater 2000, p.473).

The political, legal and social transformation that took place during the period of the 1960s and 1970s reduced barriers for women to access higher education in general and in context of my enquiry, for veterinary medicine also. This transformation was exemplified by Slater and Slater (2000, p.472), who reported on the successful competition by women in veterinary schools as well as their increasing numbers from the following comments of a female veterinarian and academician:

*"... the flood gates opened, and we moved in on what were then untested waters"* Slater (2000, p.472)

The post 1970s era resulted in a gender transition in veterinary medicine. Lincoln (2011, p.x), citing data from the US Bureau of Census, reported 98% of veterinarians were male, which was followed by the unprecedented shift resulting in more than 70% of all students entering US based veterinary schools in 2000 being female (Slater and Slater 2000, p.473).

### St. George's University

It is important to provide a contextual background into S.G.U. ([www.S.G.U.edu](http://www.S.G.U.edu)) and its veterinary students, which served as the site to assist in exploring the research question: why the choice of veterinary medicine? S.G.U. was established in 1976 as a School of Medicine and began enrolling students mainly from North America in January 1977. In 1999, the School of Veterinary Medicine was established and by this time, S.G.U. was an

international institution with its faculty and student body originating from several countries around the world. S.G.U. has graduated more than 12,000 students, including more than 1000 veterinarians. The size of the entering class is on average 100 students, with two intakes per academic year. In addition, more than 45 countries are represented among veterinary students, and more than 85% are females.

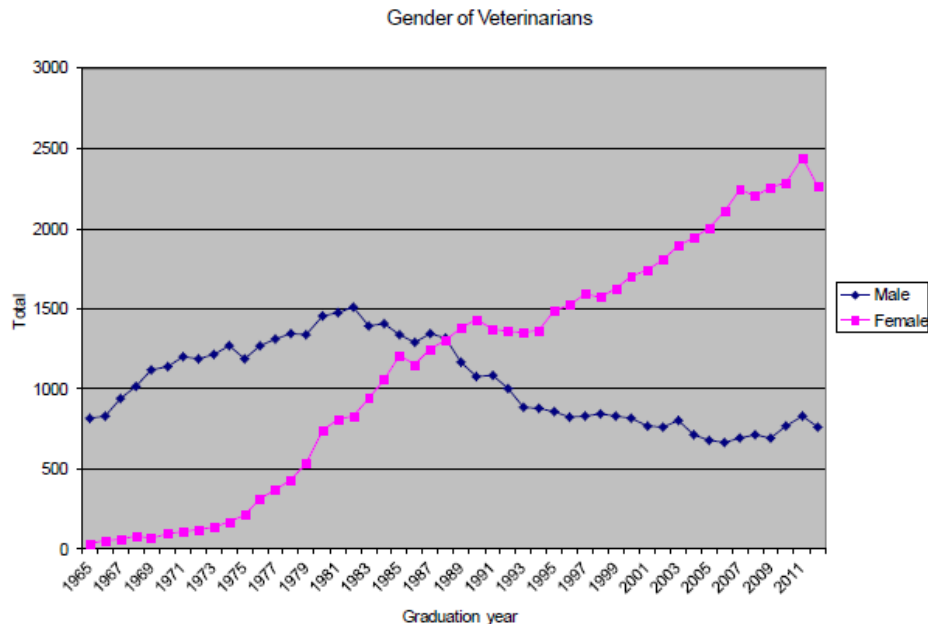
The veterinary programme at S.G.U. is a four-year professional degree which is accredited by the US-based, American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). The first three years of the veterinary programme include six academic terms delivered on the Grenada campus and the 4<sup>th</sup> or final year of clinical training is conducted through placements in more than 29 sites in five countries around the world. Veterinary students at S.G.U. also receive more than 90% first time pass rates in veterinary board examinations in the US, which is higher than the average for US-based veterinary schools.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study recognizes the significant increase of females in veterinary medicine, which I have observed in my experience in veterinary medicine. Figure 1 below represents the gender distribution among veterinary graduates from 1965 to 2012 reported by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) in 2013, collated from schools accredited by the AVMA which include US based veterinary schools.

Figure 1: Gender of Veterinary Graduates, 1965-2012 (AVMA, 2013)

## Gender of Veterinary Graduates 1965-2012



The data in Figure 1 reflects a predominantly male representation in the graduating class for the years 1965 to 1975. The female presence began to emerge from 1976 to 1985 to where there was an equal gender distribution from 1988 to 1989. Since 1989, females have continued to increase significantly in numbers. The increasing number of female graduates has resulted in a gender shift from a predominantly male veterinary graduate population in 1965, to a predominantly female population of graduates today.

This study focused on exploring the reasons for the specific choice of veterinary medical education among female veterinary students. The approach to employ life history methodology as the tool to explore female life experiences and identify reasons for their choice was also a specific choice of methodology for this enquiry. The life history methodology allowed for my enquiry, the collection and interpretation of personal histories, and testimonials to provide a holistic understanding and explanation of social observations in the lives of students (Roberts 2002, p.4,5). The life history methodology was considered the most appropriate approach to engage in a personal reflection, analysis and critical discussion to retrospectively reveal the reality of each student's mental process and

corresponding social environment. The significance to study the reasons for females' choice of veterinary medicine and the use of the life history methodology is explained as follows:

Some literature exists that relates to the increasing role of women in professional careers in general, but there are limited records that relate specifically to women in veterinary medicine. I recognize this gap in the knowledge as an essential component to understanding the increase presence of females in veterinary medicine. The gender enrolment success of females in higher education is linked to equal admission opportunity noted previously by Slater and Slater (2000, p.472) as well as a higher level of performance by females, which creates a gender divide (Lewin 2006, p.4). With specific reference to veterinary medicine, advances in the use of pharmaceutical agents to restrain animals, diagnostic technology and the expanded veterinary team including technicians and animal handlers are noted as reducing barriers to women physically working with all species of animals (Crosby 2008, p.x). Also, as described earlier, the case of Cust and Richt as female pioneers in Britain and the US, as well as several others since that time, serve as role models for future veterinarians (Nolen 2011, p.x and Chernesky 1974, p.23). This point is also shared in a study among female Australian veterinary students who recognized female veterinarians as role models to whom young female students can aspire (Lofstedt 2003, p.533). Lofstedt (2003), as part of the referred Australian study, highlighted the caring image of veterinarians projected by the media as having a particular appeal for females.

The aforementioned points derived from the literature reflect some influences for females in choosing veterinary medicine for their career. These characteristics are based on the veterinary profession itself as well as higher education opportunities that exist. My research explored if these personal and social influences existed for female veterinary students at S.G.U., and whether or not they contributed to their decision to pursue veterinary medical education.

Comprehensively understanding the personal and social influences that exist called for an in-depth exploration of the lives of each student. An exploration of the student's life experiences required my active involvement in a discussion of their lives. My involvement included questions and discussions on their beliefs, values and actions in the present and

past social context which as noted by Sikes (2006, p.x), is provided by the life history methodology.

## **Positionality and Ethical Considerations**

As a researcher having queried, discussed, and reported on the lives of the female veterinary students, I recognize that I inevitably applied my own subjectivity in terms of my beliefs, values, positionality, experiences and a priori knowledge to the analysis and reporting in this thesis. I can recall when I first joined the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) programme at Sheffield University, I had difficulty recognizing research methodology as being linked to interests and preferences by the researcher, having originally trained and practiced quantitative research exclusively. However, understanding the philosophy which underpins applied qualitative research methods has helped me recognize what Stanley (1993, p.43) proposed, in terms of positionality being inevitably implicated in research.

For this study, my position makes reference to the previously male-dominated access to higher education and professional careers. I consider the previous female-limited presence in higher education and professional careers as a consequence of the socio-cultural barriers that women faced and which continue to pervade many societies today. These barriers for females included the traditional family care and child rearing roles; roles which have not changed but have been expanded to include higher education and professional careers.

I assume that there was no dividing line between myself as the researcher in the discussions I had with each student during the life history interviewing period of this study. As a faculty member at S.G.U., I found my academic position to be critical in gaining access to students, and my role as an Ed.D. student gave me the ability to interact with the students and gain their confidence and support towards participation in this study. Finally, my value considerations are based on Rokeach's categorization of values and includes moral, competency, personal and social values (Greenbank 2003, p.791). The competency value I associate with my training and experience that I have in using the methodology I employed in this study. My own personal and social values I believe served as a bias and the most significant positional elements that I applied to this study. Most notably, as a veterinarian, my own individual and social realities and how it influenced my choice of veterinary medicine was a consistent reference point for me during this study.

In conducting this study, there were some ethical issues which emerged that I had to address. The first issue was declaring, on my part to each student, my role as a student in the research for which I was seeking their participation. This first point was crucial as I did not want my position as a faculty member to coerce students into participation based on any feelings of obligation on their part. The explanation of the study and the informed consent prior to the study, were part of the approach I used to establish my role as a student researcher and not a faculty member. I did, however, sense that based on the level of co-operation and participation by the students in this study, my role as a faculty member may have influenced the decision students took to participate in this study.

The second issue that I faced in this study, possibly due to the nature of the study, was the recording of interviews. I spent a considerable amount of time at the informed consent phase, as well as on the day of the scheduled interview with each student, clarifying the measures that I took to secure and maintain confidentiality in their responses and discussions during the interviews. I reminded students that the interview recording would be stored in a secure location, and the interview site was in my office at S.G.U., which is a secure location for an interview. I further made clear that all reporting related to the students' personal identification would remain confidential.

Thirdly, because S.G.U. is a relatively small community with students having unique backgrounds that make it easier for them to identify each other, students also expressed concern that any presented information may be linked back to them. I responded to this concern by stating that while there was a small risk of association to students based on my reporting, I was committed to masking personal identities as much as I could without compromising the reporting of the study data, its analysis and findings. Participant masking was achieved by the creation of alternative names and identification to reflect each student's life history. Chapters four through nine contain the alternative personal identification for each of the students interviewed.

Finally, I acknowledged that the interpersonal nature of the life history research contains inherent ethical issues. As part of exploring the life experiences of students, I discovered that some of their responses to questions as well as their discussion of personal life events were sensitive and uncomfortable for me to record. While I found the personal discussions

to be a challenge, I recognized it as a sign that I had succeeded in providing a level of comfort and confidence for students to share their life experiences with me in an uninhibited manner, which augured well for the study.

## **My Life Story**

I was born and lived my early years in a rural, agricultural village of Biche in the south-eastern region of Trinidad. Cocoa farming was the common practice in the region, and my first memory, which was around the age of four years old. My father worked on a large scale-acreage estate, and employed traditional methods of drying cocoa using retractable roves for sunlight exposure. The community did not contain many of the typical social infrastructures, apart from a Presbyterian church and a primary school. The majority of the village was comprised of clusters of different families, mainly of East Indian descent. Each family unit would routinely include the parents with grandparents, and a large number of children. Each family also worked in the large cocoa estates as contracted workers of estate owners who were from a different part of Trinidad, and occasionally even abroad.

The cluster of families in the village also included my family cluster, which comprised several closely located homes with paternally related uncles, aunts as well as cousins, which formed the main group of persons that I associated with at that early time in my life. My uncles and aunts were all workers in the cocoa estate that my father worked on as well. My mother worked out of the village with the Ministry of Agriculture as a scientist/entomologist. I had one sister, who was three years older than I was and she attended a school out of the village, in a neighbouring town. My father worked on the cocoa estate and looked after the household as well as after me, prior to my enrolment in primary school. In addition to working in the cocoa estate, my father, in a private capacity, reared animals including chickens, ducks, sheep and goats, which I particularly enjoyed participating in. I can recall my father looking after the animals early in the mornings and in the evenings as he worked on the Cocoa estate during the day. My father and I also periodically visited the market area in the neighbouring town to sell animals to the butchers. I always participated in the feeding of the animals, especially the young, as we would at times be allowed to bring the young lambs and kids into the house to bottle feed them. I guess looking back, the life that my family lived at that time may have been considered simple, however, that was never



apparent to me. In fact, I always felt very comfortable and always received whatever I wanted.

Around the time when I was five years old, our family relocated to the neighbouring town of Sangre Grande. This relocation was also for me to start primary school, the same school that my sister attended. The relocation to Sangre Grande saw us moving into a town with a business centre as well as organized neighbourhoods. Our new residence was a home with other houses close by. There was neither agriculture practiced nor space for planting of any crops or rearing of any animals. However, our pet dogs from our home in Biche came with us to Sangre Grande. In Sangre Grande, my mother used to take my sister and I to school on her way to work, while my father departed the house early in the morning to attend to the animals that he reared, and to go to work in the cocoa estate in Biche. The relocation also meant that I was not able to assist my father in attending to the animals, which was a very sad realization and period for me.

At Sangre Grande, my mother ensured that my sister and I attended school every day. My mother also took us to school on time and was there to meet us after school. At primary school, I was able to meet new and different people, however, I always thought about what was occurring with the animals at our home in Biche. In the evenings after school, my mother supervised any homework assignments and also ensured that she provided additional work in the form of reading or activity books for me to complete. The weekends were the best of times for me. I developed a habit of waking up early on Saturdays and Sundays, after seeking an agreement from my father that if I completed all my homework on Friday evenings and I was awake on the mornings of weekends, he would take me to Biche with him. I cannot recall ever missing a weekend opportunity to make the trip with my father to Biche.

During this period of time when I attended primary school, my father consistently increased the number of animals that he reared, as well as added poultry houses to rear chickens while maintaining his work on the cocoa estate. This change occurred because my father purchased additional land close to our home in Biche and expanded the animal production into a small business. We routinely supplied poultry processing companies with live chickens and retained the other reared animals for sale especially around the Christmas season. This

increase in farming animals also led to workers being employed, and I particularly enjoyed the bustle of having all the animals on the farm. On reflection, at that stage in my life experience, I aspired to become a farmer rearing animals just like my father. I also recalled when asked about my career ambitions sharing my interest in farming animals.

The period of summer vacation from school was the best time for me, as I usually went to the farm with my father on a daily basis and even began a routine of daily responsibilities. My father would assign me to specific tasks such as feeding the young animals, I helped in the catching of animals intended for sale, as well as when they needed their medication. My main focus was working with my father on the farm, and it did not hurt that he provided me with an extra allowance for my work. This routine of school and farm work continued for three years until I moved into the penultimate class in primary school. I was eight years old at the time, with a projected sitting of the common entrance examination pending in the next two years.

Performance at the common entrance exam determined the placement into a secondary school. With the common entrance exam preparation starting, my mother focused my school time with even more extra classes after school and on weekends. My sister at this stage was already enrolled into a secondary school of her first choice and had gone through the preparation stage that I was now being exposed to. As a student, I would describe myself as average, as I was certainly not on the list of the top performing students. At this time in my preparations, my focus was on completing all the items in the syllabus a number of times, and this structure, under my mother's supervision, continued for the two-year period. This period of exam preparation, however, meant that my time spent on the farm was reserved to rare occasions when the entire family visited the home at Biche. The exam preparation period was difficult as I spent my time involved only in school work and not being able to visit the farm and work with the animals was also difficult for me to accept. The examination finally occurred and I obtained the placement of my first choice at St. Mary's College in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad. St. Mary's College was an all-boys catholic secondary school where many of my mother's male relatives, including some of my cousins, attended.

Having successfully sat the common entrance examination, I was finally given the opportunity to spend some time on the farm with my father. On returning to the farm after a long period of not visiting, I observed the significant expansion my father did to the farm houses and the number of animals that were now being reared. By that time, my father had also stopped working on the Cocoa estate and worked exclusively on our personal farm. Being 11 years of age at this time, I was given more responsibilities, and I particularly enjoyed seeing the expansion carried out on the farm, as I looked forward to working on the farm after completing school. The farm was separated into various units with young animals in a nursery section, the mothers in separate pens, and different sizes and ages of animals housed differently and the males being held separately. The farm was also serviced by a veterinarian who would routinely visit the farm at the end of each week and also if called in for a sick animal. I enjoyed working with the veterinarian and I looked forward to observing the medical treatment of animals as well as when procedures were performed, including caesarean sections and castration. I also admired how successful the procedures performed by the veterinarian were for the well-being of the animals.

The start of secondary school at St. Mary's College came at the end of the summer period of 1992. The school was located in Port of Spain, to the North West of Trinidad, some distance from where we lived at Sangre Grande in the East. Attending school required about one and a half hours commute in both directions early in the mornings and in the return on evenings. The next five years of my life at St. Mary's College was a methodical pattern of waking up at 5:00am every morning for the commute to Port of Spain. At the end of the school day, I would return home after 5:00 pm. I only had sufficient energy to complete homework assignments when I returned home. My weekends were spent reviewing and studying materials that were presented during the week as that was the only time available. At St. Mary's College, I became focused on school work. The standard of my classmates was very high and I had to perform to my full potential in order to remain competitive. My separation from the farm was less obvious to me at this point as I was always busy, tired and focused on performing well at school.

After three years of schooling in St. Mary's College, at age 14, it was time to select subjects to prepare towards my Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and General Cambridge Examination (GCE) Ordinary Level ('O Level) sitting at the end of the next two years, and by

extension, to consider a career path. Subject selection was critical, as it determined future opportunities for further education. It was my mother's understanding that I would pursue a medical career since the majority of her relatives were medical professionals. I also had some maternal cousins around my age who were pursuing subjects linked to careers in medicine. From my father's perspective, all he knew was farming and never indicated any preference regarding a career choice for me. I maintained at that time that, I wanted to pursue farming in the family's farm upon completing school. I associated rearing animals with an every day fun exercise and enjoyed the work with farmers and veterinarians. I also thought about the development of the farm that I had observed from my father's work, and wanted to continue the expansion. At this time, my sister was in the G.C.E. Advanced Level ('A Level) class studying subjects towards pursuing a degree programme in psychology. The divergence between my mother's expectations for me and my childhood and continued desire to work on the family farm created a mental dilemma for me. My mother eventually chose the subjects that I would study for the next two years for the C.X.C./G.C.E. examinations. These subjects included Mathematics, English Language, English Literature (which were school requirements) and Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Additional Mathematics, Geography, Social Studies and Computer Science. The group of subjects selected was the required science-based subjects needed for 'A Level study and for admission into the medical school.

In preparation for C.X.C./G.C.E. 'O Level exams, my efforts were once again methodical and supervised by my mother. My mother also had competencies in the subjects that I was studying and played an active role in tutoring and reviewing my work. I also prepared by practicing with past-paper examinations from the previous ten years and was able to review the subject syllabi multiple times before the examinations. After the two year period of examination preparations, I was successful in each subject earning passes with distinctions. Immediately after receiving results from the C.X.C./G.C.E. 'O Level examinations, my mother once again selected Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Further Mathematics as my 'A Level study for the next two years of school also at St. Mary's College.

One week after classes as an 'A Level student at St. Mary's College, my mother, my sister and I were involved in a vehicular accident. My mother died in the accident and my sister and I sustained multiple injuries. The next 18 months of my family's life involved my father

ceasing all activities at the farm and focusing on the medical and surgical procedures that my sister and I underwent. With the passing of my mother, my father was with my sister and I throughout the day and night in the hospitals and at home. Following a long and intense period of recovery and therapy, my sister returned to her psychology training and I resumed my 'A Level studies. My father transported my sister and I between school and home and looked after all of the daily household responsibilities. Eventually, I completed my 'A Level examinations successfully and enrolled into the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Agriculture at the University of the West Indies (U.W.I.). This decision I took as I wanted to pursue and resurrect the farm especially as my father had to discontinue his work. While studying Zoology and Botany at U.W.I., I reflected on my mother's desire for me to pursue medicine and reviewed my academic ability and growing academic interest. After a long period of contemplation centred towards meeting my mother's expectations as well as my personal desire to work on the family's farm, I decided to pursue veterinary medicine as my career choice. I thought the choice of veterinary medicine would meet my interest in restarting the animal production on the family's farm, and meet my late mother's ambitions for prestigious higher education for me.

My choice of veterinary medicine is where I will end my life history narrative, as it was the point to which I also engaged the female veterinary students in my study as well.

### **Thoughts and Interpretation**

As I reflected on my life experiences including the journey that led me to choose veterinary medicine, I recognize the significance of my family and the social and cultural factors that interplayed. As a child, I was heavily influenced by my father's work in agriculture and farming, which positioned itself as my early career interest. The choice of agriculture I associated with admiring my father as a role model and wanting to continue the work that he did. My mother as a scientist influenced my educational experience, which promoted the need for higher education with a particular emphasis on medical education. The members of my mother's family were all educated professionals and her influence was very clear in the manner in which she focused my sister and I in school and particularly in preparations for examinations. I suspect that my childhood interest and desire to pursue farming interacted with my influenced educational experiences to remain committed to agriculture

but also to engage in higher education. With the passing of my mother at the point of 'A Level training, I was sympathetic towards medicine for a period. However, upon completing 'A Level examinations, the merger of agricultural interests in farming animals and the medical and higher educational interests influenced the decision of Zoology and Botany at the undergraduate level and veterinary medicine as my career choice. The choice of veterinary medicine seemed to be a need on my part to satisfy my father and linked with that, sustaining his work on the farm and the expectations of my mother for the prestige of higher education. Veterinary medicine, for me, served as a meeting point or intersection between achieving my childhood dreams and my mother's ambitions.

## **Thesis Structure**

This study sought to explore the life history of female veterinary students with the aim of understanding the reasons that contributed to their choice to pursue veterinary medicine. Conducting this study has allowed me to interview and chronicle the life events and their impact on student's choice for their higher education and careers. I will present the life history as a recollection of student's lives (Chapters 4-9) based on questions asked and discussions, in order to identify and understand the reasons for their choice.

The thesis is structured into twelve chapters. Chapter one, the current chapter, focuses on the introduction to the thesis, setting out the establishment of the research question and contextual framework for the study. Chapter two presents a discussion on the body of literature surrounding the research. Chapter three describes the methodology employed to explore the research question as well as other topics/areas related to the research design. Chapters four to nine provide interview data in the form of six life histories, one for each female veterinary student who participated in the study. Chapter ten provides an analysis of the student interviews through interpretation and an extraction of summaries of the general themes. Chapter eleven forms the discussion based on the analysis of the students' life histories, and chapter twelve is the conclusion of the study, with a presentation of findings and contributions of the thesis to knowledge, as well as recommended application.

This study experience has allowed me to develop a greater appreciation for life experiences as critical components to understanding decisions related to education and career choices by students. I have also recognized the value of life history research, which I will discuss as

the methodology that I employed for this study. The involvement of females in veterinary medicine is a relatively recent occurrence as its genesis has only been within the last one hundred years. Over the last century, however, numerous transformations in the political, social and educational landscape have significantly increased the access, enrolment and number of females in veterinary medicine. As the trend of females in veterinary medicine continues to increase, it is incumbent to engage in research to understand the reasons for their choice. One way of doing this is by examining and learning from the experiences of these females themselves on the experiences that led to their choice of veterinary medicine. This thesis, through the life history of female veterinary students, will attempt to provide the knowledge and understanding on the choice of veterinary medicine by females.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

The topic of educational and career choices is an actively researched one. Harrison et. al. (2011, p.281) examined students' exposure in classrooms and their selection of career pathways. Purcell et. al. (2009, p.2) studied the post university employment experiences of graduates, while Mann et. al. (2013, p.8) explained the alignment of career choices with the demands of the labor market. Various educational backgrounds and career choices have also been researched in different parts of the world. Specifically, there is work related to the increasing number of females in veterinary medicine and the factors that determined their choice of veterinary medical education. A review of available scholarly literature revealed gender-specific and socio-cultural life experiences as issues that can be correlated with an individual's choice of education and career. Analysis of the literature revealed the following themes as representative of the scholarly body of knowledge related to this thesis:

- Females in Veterinary Medicine
- Role of Gender
- Education and Career Choices
- Determinants of Choice
- Life Experiences
- Theoretical Background

### **Females in Veterinary Medicine**

This thesis explores the reasons for the choice of female students of veterinary medicine for their education and career. This study is also in response to an observed increase in the presence of females in veterinary medicine. As a profession, veterinary medicine has undergone a gender shift from being male-oriented to predominantly female. The increasing number of female students that are observed enrolling and graduating from veterinary schools will further promote female representation among veterinarians. The gender transition in veterinary medicine has been described as 'a rapid feminization' and is considered the most feminized of the comparable health professions (Vermilya 2010, p.62). The gender shift towards females in veterinary medicine has occurred at the levels of the applicant pool, entering classes and graduating classes. Among 694 veterinary medical



school applications, with more than 75% being female, veterinary practice experience and animal ownership were identified as the main reasons towards their choice of veterinary medicine reported by (Amass et. al., 2011, p.1437). The practice of veterinary medicine has also fundamentally changed as a result of the increase presence of women in the profession. The increased number of women graduating into veterinary medicine has seen a small number entering food animal practice and more than 75% moving into small animal practice (Christopher and Marusic 2013). The focus on companion animal veterinary practice has also led to a shift in educational and research programmes with a consequential shortage in laboratory animal medicine, food animal practice and public health. Christopher and Marusic (2013) also referred to the research and clinical trends and priorities of the veterinary profession based on bibliometric data of scientific publications which also represents the focus on companion animal medicine.

The 'feminization' of veterinary medicine is discussed in the literature in terms of occupational sex segregation. Lincoln (2010, p.1969), noted a reduction in male graduation at the undergraduate level and suggested that men chose to avoid career development dominated by women. The role of decision making in pursuing veterinary medicine by females is also important to understanding the reasons for their preferred choice. The increase in female students in veterinary medicine is frequently explained in terms of higher female student graduation rates in high schools, better academic performances by females when compared to males and life experiences such as veterinary practice experience and pet ownership as consistent for female students. The issue of increases in female students in veterinary medicine is such that an understanding of the life experiences of students is important to understanding the reasons for their choice. The life history approach used for this thesis is an effort to understand the experiences of female students towards their choice of veterinary medicine. The reasons for females' choice of veterinary medicine will be the focus throughout this thesis.

## **Role of Gender**

This thesis specifically refers to the exploration of the lives of female veterinary students towards their choice of veterinary medical education and career. There exists a growing body of literature on the gender discussion related to education and career paths.

Historically, gender inequity for women throughout the world is known especially as it relates to educational opportunities, occupational distribution and even the wage gap which still persists today. Institutionalized discrimination as part of a social inequity is manifested with gender inequalities across the world. The depth and breadth of gender inequality is acknowledged across many studies as noted by Bimrose et. al. (2014, p.77).

Females make up the majority of practicing veterinarians and this outnumbering of men is a fairly recent development, as reported by Slater and Slater (2000, p.472). With regards to overall occupational sex segregation, Stockdale and Nadler (2013, p.212) describe a progressive shift in attitudes towards the employment of women. The gender shift in occupations is also being observed in the educational experiences of students. In particular, women are increasingly being represented in academia, including medicine and life sciences, which were traditionally male dominated. Bagilhole and White (2013, p.3), in the book entitled "Generation and Gender in Academia" referred to the over-representation of women in academia, as women continue to gain higher education. The gender presence of women in education is further discussed in terms of their greater ability than males in scholarly attainment. A pattern of gender differences in academic performance does exist. Wang, Eccles and Kenny (2013, p.774) noted in a study of mathematics and verbal ability that females had a greater representation of high ability than males. Mathematics and verbal ability is linked to the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, which suggest that with higher abilities, females have greater access to employment and careers in STEM fields compared with males. The gender transition is being observed in the STEM careers linked to the increasing involvement of women in higher education. The presence of female professors creates a greater influence for female students to pursue science education and careers. The greater presence of females as educators informs the education choices and career paths for female students. In a study of college students enrolled in science and engineering courses, the views of professors as positive role models were automatically identified by female students regarding their female science professors (Young et. al. 2013, p.292). The consequences of greater motivation and abilities by females are the deteriorating employment prospects for males, in particular, unskilled males. The increase in women's educational attainment and career growth and development was also observed in Germany where women found their first jobs faster than men (Jacobs, Kleinert

and Kuhhirt 2013, p.54). A large difference in career paths was found among US college students where females were found to be more attracted to careers in health and medicine which occurred during their high school years (Sadler et. al. 2012, p.421). The reported gender dynamic between male and female educational attainment is the observation for veterinary medicine.

Gender differences in career preferences was analyzed to be related to aspect based career preferences of income, teamwork, professional advancement and length of training according to Gati and Perez (2014, p.63). Gati and Perez (2014) conducted a twenty year assessment of career guidance applications comparing those of 2010 with 1990. The career preference differences identified more women participated in career guidance and the differences in applications favoured women with career interests with a greater level of income and professional standing. The gender segregation noted by females and males in career preferences is noted in the workforce. Sex typed personality traits and gender identity in predicting sex typed careers was noted by Dinella, Fulcher and Weisgram (2014, p.494) to include gender typicality, contentment, pressure to conform and intergroup bias. The sex typed traits derived from the study of men and women identified that gender was a determinant of career interest and gender was considered the strongest influence of career choice. The gender typicality for men was noted to include career interest based on their masculine traits, whereas for women, their career interest was based on need to match expectations and intergroup biases for females. Gender identity was identified to serve as a predictor of career interests and paths undertaken by both men and women and as such represents a role in the choice of education and career.

The gender preference of women towards science and technology can be considered linked to career preferences for higher income and professional standing which is part of the gender transition that has occurred.

The role of gender in education and career plays a significant part in the transition from male to female dominance in higher education levels and professional career paths. The effect of gender is noted at the start of school, during school and in higher education settings. The gender divide is also reported in post graduation and employment applications and attainment. Veterinary medical education, which forms part of the careers in health and

medical sciences as well as holds professional and high income status, is included in the career preferences for females.

## **Education and Career Choices**

The first educational experience for a student bears a significant influence on their educational interests and choices. The development of education choices and those towards a career is considered to be part of the schooling process for students. The exposure of students in the classrooms provides the knowledge and interests for students to select their preferred educational and career pathway. Harrison et. al. (2011, p.281) noted a change in student interest as a result of classroom-based exposure to science and how it is practiced. The progression that occurs between education, employment and career planning is one that may be a natural process but it is a relationship that is based on a systematic structure of the educational system. The emphasis on higher education additionally is limited to career paths, as it involves specific training for a career-relevant skills set. The education and career link is highlighted in a longitudinal study of students who entered undergraduate study in the UK noted student's choice of institution, attitudes to money, career services and post-university employment experience to be related (Purcell et. al., 2009, p.2). The learning environment that education provides can also correspond to career learning with the development of career interests and career competencies by students. Aspects of the learning environment of schooling is described by Kuijpers, Meijers and Grundy (2011, p.23) as involving career reflection, career forming and networking as observed among students aged 12-19 years in the Netherlands. This research provided the educational and career choice relationship among students who were not in higher education.

The career paths of STEM in particular seem to be closely connected with students' educational experiences. This thesis which explores female student's choice of veterinary medicine is part of the science career area that STEM covers. The relationship of STEM education and careers was studied by Xu (2013, p.356) who noted a positive career association between individuals occupation and their college majors. The career outcome choice of students can be described as an extension of their educational experiences. Building on the influence of STEM related careers, the perceptions of careers is formed from the educational influences. A study by San Miguel et. al. (2013, p.27) demonstrated the

formation of perceptions by elementary school students about veterinarians after being exposed to a veterinary medicine activity book. The students' depictions of veterinarians were altered by the use of educational materials in the classroom. The role of education at all levels of schooling demonstrates a pathway to careers based on the influences, perceptions and knowledge that is gained. However, the progression of students from educational focal points to relevant career paths did not apply to everyone. For students, the question may be based on availability of employment opportunities after graduating from school. The matching of education, career and the labour market is an important consideration in explaining the role of education and career choices. For some students, the demands of the labour market drive their education and career paths. Other students enter into the labour market at times disconnected from their educational experiences. The alignment of career aspirations with the actual, current and future demands of the British labour market was explained by Mann et. al. (2013, p.8). The results of the review among British students identified a misalignment in the ambitions and availability of realistic employment. The result is a rough school to work transition that disqualifies the linkage between education and career within the limits of the job market availability and accessibility.

### **Determinants of Choice**

One of the main tasks of this thesis was to explore the life history of female veterinary students to identify any influences or reasons for their choice of veterinary medical education. The established interconnectedness between education and career suggests that what motivates one would influence the other. Based on analysis using a range of attitude questions, career orientation and social orientation were identified as relevant to educational choices (Humlum, Kleinjans and Neilsen 2012, p.40). The implications of career and social orientations refer to students applying an identity to their career interest and choice. The issue of identifying a particular choice of career for a student is derived from knowledge and understanding of persons who are in the particular careers of interest. The influences of significant persons in students' lives are documented as a source of inspiration. Sjaastad (2012, p.1622) reported students descriptions of parents and teachers as their influences in STEM related educational choices. The influence of persons as role models for students through positive experiences has major roles in determining the nature of student

choices. Career identity and roles of significant persons in influencing students' choice of education and career represents socio-cultural characteristics and experiences of students' lives. Gender roles noted earlier contributed to career choices or the lack thereof in the case of girls who were socialized to taking care of families, however, emerging trends observed in the last three decades have more girls accessing higher education and career opportunities.

The choice of level and nature of education attained is also influenced by the socio-economic status of persons. Gitonga (2013, p.100) noted the influence of socio-economic status in determining the education and career choices in particular for women in Kenya. The social context of career choice is an important component for students around the world and for different career paths. A longitudinal study of STEM tertiary students in Denmark identified a series of interacting sets of values, interests, identity and orientations towards the directions of the students' education and careers (Krogh and Andersen 2013, p.717). The interacting factors noted in the Denmark study suggest that multiple factors along the social context of students' lives are involved in informing students' choices for their education and careers. One theory that incorporates the multiple social factors identified in the choice of education and career is the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). SCCT which examines the relationships between contextual (social class, learning experiences, proximal support and barriers) and person cognitive (self efficacy, outcome expectations, interests, goals) factors found both to be related for students with math and science career goals (Garriott, Flores and Martens 2013, p.203). The behavioural aspect of educational and career choices was also identified as an interaction of various social and individual characteristics. The reality however with regards to veterinary medical education for students is the barrier of the high cost of education. Lack of access to personal financial resources and reducing governmental and private investments into veterinary education and research creates a barrier for students even after making the choice of veterinary medicine for their education and career (Lloyd 2013, p.90). The financial disincentive for students to pursue veterinary medicine is however tempered by viable repayment options with income and employment opportunities for veterinarians.

## **Life Experiences**

The social aspects of the choice for education and careers, the role of gender and in particular the increased involvement of females in professional careers and the interacting socio-cultural and economic factors that influence students choice refers to the life experiences of students. The early interest for students in science suggests a family influence in parental occupation as a primary source (Dabney, Chakraver and Tai 2013, p.405). Parents' occupations served as the initial influence in their pursuit of science education and careers. Extending beyond the parental and family aspects of students life experiences is that of the community realities and the identities associated with culture and ethnic beliefs. Ethnic and cultural traditions extend into pursuing or not pursuing higher education with particular preferences for specific careers. With regards to female students, these ethnic and cultural traditions remain strong in their life experiences. A study that investigated the background of adolescent girls towards their career planning recognized gender-based traditions of career choice and aspired educational level to contribute the most (Novakovic and Fouad 2013, p.239). The traditions associated with gender are a result of ethnically derived roles and positions in a particular society. A high school survey noted boys who responded in Spanish reported more likely to work full time and not plan continued education as opposed to those who responded in English and planned to work part time while continuing their education (McWhirter, Luginbuhl and Brown 2014, p.4). The issue of being Latino and male reduced the likelihood for the young male students to aspire towards higher education. The experience of the Latino culture and ethnic identity in the US is one of a growing minority population that is disproportionately affected by socio-economic disparities compared to the Caucasian ethnic group. The life experiences of the young male Latino high school students project their post-high school experiences to be work related and income earning rather than the ambitions of higher education and professional career opportunities.

The African American ethnic group represents another disproportionately affected population group in the US society through socio-economic disparities. A further dissection into the African American community reveals the social reality of single-mother families. A study of seventh and eight grade children from African American single mother families showed for boys the understanding that they need to pursue labour work and for girls the

need to work hard in school (Toyokawa and McLoyd 2013, p.180). The perception among African American adolescents is that they need to work harder than their Anglo-American counterparts who create a disparity in how these students approach choices in education and careers. The perception of being less than qualified reduces the need for high levels of education and career attainment for these students.

There are also an increasing number of ethnic migrants from across the world into developed countries of North America and Europe. Abel and Sander (2014, p.1521) reported that since 1995, 0.6% of the world's population were living outside of their country of birth. However the largest movement was reported to occur from South and West Asia, Latin America to North America and Europe. One study explored the experiences of skilled ethnic migrant workers in France and Germany which revealed a high level of similar skill and common career choices and outcomes of the particular ethnic community (Al Ariss et. al. 2013, p.1246). The experience of persons within an ethnic community also forms part of the life experiences that influences the outcomes of educational attainment and career paths. The life experiences of students based on their family, gender, ethnic, cultural and economic context are relevant environmental factors that influence career choices. Data from a survey of 1600 independent professionals in the Netherlands in combination with 51 in-depth interviews concluded that the external environment in the lives of these professionals was the most important factor that determined their career success (van den Born and van Witteloostuijn 2013, p.37). This study underscored the relationship between person's life experiences with their environment and how that informs the educational, career choices and the success of the choices.

## **Theoretical Background**

Providing a theoretical background in research is important as it provides an understanding of the body of knowledge that this thesis represents. There are several theories related to the social and cultural aspects of education and career choices that are considered in this thesis. These theories include childhood development theory, historical, political and economic considerations and Bourdieu's *habitus*.

Hartung, Porfelli and Vondracek (2005, p.385), as part of a childhood development theory, suggest middle childhood in the early teenage years as being the beginning stage of



vocational development. The term “vocational identity” as a concept was developed by Hartung, Porfelli and Vondracek (2005, p.385) where personal identity is related to work and by extension the choices made to pursue the work. This concept is supported by Erickson (1968, p.23) and Vondracek (2001, p.265). “Vocational Identity” can be regarded as the applied process in childhood which supports making education and career decisions.

A historical context suggests that changing economic and political practices in society would also change the opportunities that exist for training and education towards particular employment. Dumont and Carson (1995, p.377) noted an adjustment of career opportunities in the US with a shift from agricultural based activities to manufacturing and industrialization. This change represented an economic and political change towards urbanization, creating different educational and career opportunities. Connected to political considerations for education and career opportunities is the economic position of a country or a political alliance. The social needs, political directive and economic position of a country are therefore inter-related factors that result in different outcomes in terms of opportunities for education and career development. The converse can also be the case, when due to unfavourable socio-economic and political situations the educational and career opportunities may be limited.

The theory that I have chosen as the main theoretical focus for this thesis is the concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986, p.242). I would propose that the term *habitus* is connected to the word “habit”. One meaning of habit is a behaviour or activity that is repeated or an action that is imitated. *Habitus* relates to the common practices of persons based on their experiences in the society they belong to. The concept of *habitus* relates to the common practices of persons based on their experiences in the society to which they belong. In the context of education and career choice, *habitus* relates to the experiences of others in the community and the education and career informed choices made by others. Bourdieu (1986, p.242), in the discussion on *habitus*, describes the involvement of family and society as significant and explains the influence of society and culture as persons reflect the practices, values, beliefs and behaviours of those around them.

The experiences of society refer to the cultural factors that influence the practices of persons. In the context of education and career choices, *habitus* relates to the experiences

of others in the community, whether it is the choice of school, the level of education, or the preparation towards a particular career destination. In another discussion by Bourdieu on habitus, the involvement of the family and society is significant when regarding choices made towards education and careers. This position explains the influence of society and culture as persons are essentially reflecting the practices, values, beliefs and behaviours of those around them in their own educational and career choices.

“Habitus is the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured properties to think, feel and act in determined ways, which then guide them”

The above statement by Wacquant (2005, p.316) cited by Navarro (2006, p.16) highlights the creation of habitus through a social rather than an individual process. Navarro (2006, p.16) analyzed habitus by describing the relation between social and individual characteristics as transferrable from one context to another. For the purpose of my enquiry, the social and individual processes that interact would have accounted for the choice of veterinary medicine by female students. Bourdieu (1984, p.170) himself commented on the interplay between society and individual processes and added that both are shaped by past events and structures which ultimately shape the current practices and choices. This discussion regarding habitus as being a result of personal choice in relation to social determined structures does reflect social determinants and the socialization processes as collective. It is my interpretation that Bourdieu’s habitus suggest that behaviour or individual habits have a position in a group context which situates individuals into their social hierarchies. For this purpose, my enquiry will need to explore female veterinary students in terms of how their choice of veterinary medicine is positioned in their family, community and overall social structures. Also, the social strata students belong to prior to their choice of veterinary medicine are equally significant in the discussion and to identify as part of the enquiry.

Another perspective of habitus is put forward by Wolfreys (2000, p.x) where the note is made of social constraints which are incorporated by individuals. This position by Wolfreys further characterizes the interplay between the social structures and individuals as noted by Bourdieu earlier. The social structure as referred can not only serve as an influence towards

a particular choice but in a different context, serve to restrict the realities of people leading to set forms of behaviours. From this perspective, my enquiry will also seek to determine through the socio-cultural experiences of female veterinary students, if any identification can be made with restrictive characteristics that contributed to their choice of veterinary medical education. These two perspectives of habitus i.e. supporting and restricting social structures suggest a contradiction that exists in the interpretation of Bourdieu's habitus. This contradiction can be compared to Marxist's dialectic as Marx and Bourdieu's habitus views the world as paradoxes between the dominant social structures and the actual experiences of persons.

An additional analytical commentary on Bourdieu's habitus is provided by Murphy and Stillman (2007, p.x) who both noted that Bourdieu through habitus sought to bridge subjectivism (the individual) and objectivism (society) with a perspective called constructivist structuralism. According to Murphy and Stillman, constructivism in the context of looking at the social genesis of schemes of perception, thoughts and action and structuralism focusing in the objective structures of language and culture is what gives shape to human action. This standpoint emphasizes how people perceive and construct their own social world which requires for a mental framework or a habitus. Habitus which is constructed as a result of experiences in the social world is what produces actions and at the same time is produced by the actions done in the social world. This analysis of Bourdieu's habitus reemphasizes the point of the interplay by Navarro earlier. For the purpose of my enquiry, I will investigate the mental framework or habitus of each female student as only through the identification and understanding of each student's habitus, I believe I can gain the required insight of how each student's social and individual processes resulted in their choice of veterinary medicine. Therefore, as part of my enquiry, a clear description of each student's individual and social experiences will be reported and will also serve as the guide to constructing and interpreting the respective life histories that I receive.

Critiquing Bourdieu's *habitus*, Reay (2009, p.77) referred to the practice of higher education by middle class families as an influenced action from the experience of family members. Reay refers to the practice of higher education by middle class families as an influenced action from the experience of family members. From an interview with a parent on the question of choice for higher education, Reay reports:

*“Choosing was a very unscientific process actually. My father went to Trinity Cambridge to do law and he was always very keen to show her Cambridge and his old college, which he did when she was probably about thirteen. And she fell in love with it. And she decided that was where she wanted to go there and then”*

The response above from a parent highlights attending university as a family practice as well as attending even a particular institution. The young adolescent made a decision at an early age to accept the educational and career pathway that was shown to her by her grandfather. This practice, however, is a combination of the role of social influence from the income class level, as well as the ‘cultural capital’ concept of an imitated or repeated behavior on the part of the student in reference to the experience of the grandfather. The habitus theory is therefore relevant to this case presented by Reay.

Familial habitus acts by creating a pathway based on expectations towards education and career. This is related to the concept of a social pathway which was discussed earlier. However, I would argue that the presence of a strong family influence and the construction of a pathway are not sufficient to determine the choice for education and career. I would propose that the act of personal choice by an individual whether or not to accept the pathway created should also be a consideration. I am also certain that in any given family structure, social class or group in society, there are individuals who do not conform to the educational and career expectations or habitus of their family. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p.226) best notes this argument in this statement:

*“Depending on whether access to higher education is collectively felt, even in a diffuse way, as an impossible, possible, probable, normal or banal future, everything in the conduct of the families and the children will vary, because behavior tends to be governed by what is reasonable to accept”*

Bourdieu (1984, p.170) himself commented on the interplay between society and individual processes and added that both are shaped by life history events which ultimately influence current interests and choice. Bourdieu’s primary thinking included the concepts of practice, *habitus* and social fields which Rawolle and Lingard (2008, p.730) referred to as ‘Bourdieu’s conceptual triad’. The practice referred to by Bourdieu related to the everyday lives of people be it meal customs, marriage strategies or other customs. The *habitus* is described as

a pre-disposition towards a choice or behaviour based on predefined rationale on the account of practice. The third part of Bourdieu's conceptual framework refers to social fields which describes the interaction of practice and *habitus* in a given environment. Bourdieu's concepts therefore offer thinking tools for researching and understanding the education and career choices of female students towards veterinary medicine.

The theoretical backgrounds referred to childhood personality and characteristics, historical, political and economic factors and socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices in a family and the community as factors that determine the choice of education and career development. The individual and societal interplay that are suggested by the various theories recognize the complexity that exists in identifying factors towards education and career choices. Bourdieu (1986, p.47) described these individual and societal interplays as capital in his book "The Forms of Capital". His use of capital is a system of exchange which includes all goods material and symbolic which are worthy to be acquired and sought after. Harker (1990, p. 13) described a system of exchange which includes the accumulation of knowledge that confers power and authority. The knowledge is thought to be derived from cultural practices and traditions. In this thesis, I have interpreted cultural capital to be resources obtained, inherited and shared among persons of a particular socio-cultural grouping. Bourdieu himself described capital to include economic, social, cultural and symbolic towards the ownership of assets, within a particular group or relation, based on knowledge and skills and carries prestige and honor.

The socio-cultural background and theoretical framework focused knowledge base is a consistent trend in the literature and was also well represented in the life experiences of the students by the outcomes of the analyses and the study findings to come in Chapters 10 and 11. The next chapter however will focus on the methodology applied to conduct this study.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

*“Is there a specific age when you chose to pursue veterinary medicine?,  
What were your childhood impressions and that you held of veterinarians?,  
What opportunities were presented to you that influenced your choice of veterinary  
medicine?”*

The questions noted above underpin my thesis regarding the choice of the veterinary medicine by female students. To respond to these questions, students were required to recall their past and explain the significance of events towards the choice of veterinary medical education. This methodological approach is often defined as a *life history* approach, and for this study was a natural one, as it allowed me to explore the past experiences in students' lives. A female veterinary student was chosen from each of the six academic terms of the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) academic programme that is delivered at the Grenada campus of S.G.U. Each of the six female veterinary students were selected through a referral process, including recommendations from student class representatives as well as consultations with faculty members prior to identifying students to consider for participating in this study.

This chapter focuses on the life history methodology employed for this thesis and will explore the following areas:

1. Choice and Description of Life History
2. Application of Life History in Education Research
3. Theoretical Framework: Grounded theory
4. Discussion of the Methodology Used to Conduct this Research
5. A Synopsis of My Experiences during the Research Process
6. Data Recording and Analysis
7. Description of Scenes

## 1. Choice and Description of Life History Research

There are many methodological approaches that could be used towards my enquiry as to why females chose veterinary medicine. From my quantitative background, I would note that female veterinary students can be randomly sampled to participate in a survey to determine based on their responses what are found to be statistically significant as reasons for the students' choice. As part of my Ed.D experience however, I felt committed to apply qualitative research methodology to my enquiry. The Ed.D program as part of the training exposed me to content and tutors in qualitative research that I wanted to explore and experience as a researcher. My interest to pursue qualitative research towards my enquiry drew my attention to auto/biographical research as it is directly connected to the understanding the experiences of persons in their lives and provide interpretations of the accounts which are given, of the past and present, and how they can inform the future (Denzin 1989, p.27). Denzin further provided examples of the scope of auto/biographical research when he wrote:

*“A family of terms combined to shape the biographical method...life, self, experience, epiphany, case, autobiography, ethnography, auto-ethnography, biography, ethnography, story, discourse, narrative, narrator, fiction, history, personal history, oral history, case history, case study, writing presence, difference, life history, life story, self story, and personal experience story”*

The examples of auto/biographical research in Denzin's writing above highlight the numerous approaches that can be applied. Other authors have also identified additional techniques that are employed as part of auto/biographical research. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p.417) includes annals and chronicles, photographs, letters, conversations and other personal and family artifacts as material relevant to auto/biographical work. Sikes (2006, p.x) also adds testimonials, performance ethnography, participatory action research, confessional tales, socio-poetics, collective autobiography and diary research as other techniques that are used. Auto/biographical works are therefore very diverse and can be referred to as any production which is a reflection or representation of life. Sikes (2006, p.x) did note that, in the 1940s, the auto/biographical research method experienced a decrease in its use, due to an emphasis on statistical methods, large scale surveys and abstract

theories in sociology. But, the post-modernism era, and the focus on the individual and understanding of life's realities, has positioned life history as an increasingly common research approach today. This change is associated with the post-modernism influence, which critiqued dominant ideologies and social theories, and, at the same time, offered possibilities for new accounts of the individual. The new approach developed the narrative aspects of research, which also includes the dimensions of story and time. Roberts (2002, p.5) citing Goodson (1995) notes the increased interest in personal knowledge within the context of cultural restructuring in contemporary society. I associate the interest with one's personal life experiences as a result of the societal interest that exists, as reflected by the representations made by persons from the life history methodology.

Life history research in education has also contributed significantly to the understanding of the nature of schools, schooling and educational experiences. Goodson (2003, p.4) emphasized how the life history approach can make a contribution to the development of teachers' professional knowledge and practice. This can be achieved by connecting teachers' lives and work to the wider social structures, processes and relationships which exist as part of their educational environment and also their overall experience in life. Generally speaking, Goodson holds the position that life history research with educators makes an important contribution to how they develop professionally, as well as, to affect the nature of their experiences in schools. While auto/biographical research is my general interest, as I develop my competency in educational research, I specifically advanced my understanding of life history as the approach of choice in my research emphasis for this thesis. I will explore descriptions of the life history approach and give a detailed review and critique of its methodology.

Life history is a diverse approach for qualitative research which explores the experiences of persons towards developing an understanding of a particular phenomenon. As an approach to research, life history is suggested by Monchery (2010, p.52) who cited Sikes as credited to the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) as making sense of human experience and social life. Cohen et al (2000, p.165) referred to the work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918), "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America" as an early use of life history to present an account of the life of Wladek Wisniewski in the work published. One may even consider the ancient records on tombs, caves and pyramids to represent life history work as



Richardson (1990, p.17) noted in pointing out that life history have always been part of the recordings of humankind.

Based on my life experiences as described in chapter 1, I recognize my decision to pursue veterinary medicine was influenced from my past experiences from exposure to animal farming and ambitions of higher education. The experiences and my responses to those experiences have become part of my life history. My life history offers a way of exploring the relationship between my life and the social, cultural, economic, political and other influences that have been part of my experiences. The life history methodology provided an opportunity to locate experiences in my life within a context of my social surroundings. The idea that life history can enable me to locate my life in the context of others is part of my experience and is a common outcome of life history research (Shacklock and Thorp 2005, p.156). My interest in and choice of life history as a methodology may therefore be linked to the ability provided by the approach to explore the lives of female veterinary students, and their decision to choose veterinary medical education.

Life history as a research methodology is increasingly being recognized for its approach as it provides a rich source of data, not only to explore life experiences and it also enables the examination of relationships between causes and effect (Roberts 2002, p.4,5). During my research however, I found myself faced with the constant need to explain what a life history methodology meant to students at the point when I required them to sign the consent form as well as to several colleagues who enquired about my research. The need to explain life history may be due to the audience of my study population and colleagues having a background in enquiries where quantitative approaches are traditionally used. There also seem to be interchangeable and broad based use of the term life history to describe other forms of autobiographical research in the literature. Chase (2005, p.262) observed many researchers used the life history and life story terms interchangeably.

From my interpretation, I see life history as an exploration and an account of a person's life and the surrounding social context based on information that is interpreted and presented about the details of a life as recalled by the actual person. My understanding is derived from the life history approach described by Ojermark (2007, p.4) who had developed his ideas from the work of Hatch and Wisnieski's (1995) "Life History and Narrative", Denzin's (1989)

“Interpretive Biography” and Roberts (2002) “Biographical Research” to describe life history research as:

*“... An account of a life based on interviews and conversations. This life history is based on the collection of a written or transcribed or oral account requested by a researcher. The information is subsequently edited, interpreted and presented in one of a number of ways, often in conjunction with other sources. Life history maybe typical, focusing on only one segmented portion of a life, or complete, attempting to tell the full details of a life as it is recollected”* Ojermark (2007, p.4)

## **2. Application of Life History in Education**

From the time of being a young boy I can recall the old adage: “In order to know where you are now and where you are going, it is important to first understand where it is that you came from”. This old adage speaks directly to the importance of historical reflection and understanding. From my interpretation, life history is seen as an exploration that is used especially in scenarios where data cannot be sourced by using other research techniques, and where conceptual understanding is limited which is the case for female students’ choice of veterinary medicine. The broad and encompassing characteristic of life history is also identified by Lee (2001, p.297) citing Ken Plummer’s book, Documents of Life as “a broadly humanistic understanding of human experience”. The life history method calls for an understanding of the entire life experience as it relates to an individual. This methodology is a personally involved approach, in which the researcher and the individual(s) are collectively part of the research experience. This approach has the potential to be limit-less in its ability to experience a person’s life which is the strength of the life history approach that I identify with the most towards my choice of its use for this thesis. The particular aspect of the narrative life history approach I applied for this thesis was based on substantial accounts of this approach from the book entitled “*Exploring Learning, Identity and Power through Life History and Narrative Research*” by Bathmaker and Harnett (2010). The book demonstrated the use of narrative/life history approach as it explored the experiences of a wide range of persons including young people in reflecting on their learning and education at significant moments in their lives. I then identified with the life history methodology as I found

relevance to my enquiry which provided me with the confidence to pursue for the study methodology.

Ojermark (2007, p.2) described life history research applications to include areas such as family studies, migration, political change and education. Some specific applications to educational research include the impact of migration on the educational pursuits of immigrant families, the philosophy of political action as it relates to the educational experiences for vulnerable groups in society and even the relationships between cultural practices and education and career choices according to Ojermark (2007, p.2). Sikes (2006, p. x) noted that auto/biographical research, which can be included in the life history methodology, became prominent in a seminar series hosted by British Educational Research Association (BERA), which highlighted the use of the approach among educational researchers. Sikes also mentioned that teaching and learning involves people with histories and experiences who hold beliefs and values, as well as identities, all of which interact and are relevant.

Life history research in education has also contributed significantly to the understanding of overall educational experiences. Goodson (2003, p.4) emphasized how the life history approach can make a contribution to the development of teachers' professional knowledge and practice. This can be achieved by connecting the social structures, processes and relationships which exist as part of their educational environment with their overall experience in life. Generally speaking, Goodson holds the position that research involving life history of educators makes an important contribution to how they develop professionally, as well as, to affect the nature of their experiences in schools. In the same token, connecting female students' life experiences to the wider social structures, processes and relationships can allow life history to determine how they chose veterinary medicine for their professional development. The life history methodology is therefore an applicable approach in educational research and relevant to my enquiry. The approach allowed me to explore experiences in the lives of female veterinary students as they progressed towards their choice of veterinary medicine.

Conducting a literature review on the life history approach, I noted some issues which presented technical challenges to the approach. The life history approach, by virtue of its

small sample size as well as personalized (non-randomized) techniques to selecting participants, has been questioned regarding the validity of its data. This challenge is related to positivist approach to research. However, in my review, I noted that narrations from life history study are, in fact, a reflection of the social realities that exist through the lives of persons within the specific social context. Additionally, some techniques for data collection using life history includes repeated interviewing, document review, constructed timelines and group interviewing, to validate the data collected, as noted by Sikes (2006, p.x) earlier.

The query on the validity of the approach does not arise as Bertaux (1995, p.6) reported that every life history contains a “large proportion of factual data that can be verified”. Bertaux further argues that life histories collected from the same social milieu can serve as documentary sources for understanding a certain social reality, and together, yield a robust body of evidence. Additionally, the traditional notions and criteria of validity based on randomization and quantitative criteria are inappropriate to be applied to life history research. Life history approach is its own method of enquiry to inform research interests which deem it as appropriate. I accept Bertaux’s argument, and feel comfortable with the life history approach as an appropriate research method.

The literature also includes ethical queries that relate to the life history approach. One of the concerns relates to the inaccurate representation of a person’s life. Sikes (2010, p.1) cites examples of life history work, including Wilfred Foote Whyte’s (1943) Street Corner Society Study and Carolyn Ellis (1986) Fisher Folk research, where people did not like how they were re-presented. Sikes (2010, p.1) further reported that persons felt ‘hurt and betrayal’ from the published accounts of their lives. There may be a case where the researchers did not intend to misrepresent a person’s life history but the researcher’s interpretation was what presented a challenge with the person in question. However, intentional misrepresentation of a person’s life or, for that matter, reporting inaccurate data from any research methodology is a reflection of the responsibility, or lack therefore, on the part of a researcher and not a consequence of the research method used. Richardson (1990, p.131) notes the intentional behavior on the part of a researcher to misrepresent the lives of people as a moral question. While the above mentioned examples and discussion points relate to ethical challenges in the conduct of life history research, ethical considerations are a critical part of any research approach that researchers must address. While the entire

research process includes ethical considerations for the research, I would suggest that the main ethical query in life history work is the point of data analysis which involves the representation of people's lives.

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Grounded Theory**

On completing the interviews with students and particularly after preparing the transcripts and reports (Chapters four to nine) to represent and reflect the discussions, I was faced with a significant quantity of data to explore towards the enquiry. A search in area of qualitative interpretation towards life history and personal experiences led me to grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 50). After examining the nature, application and outcomes of grounded theory, I related its application to my enquiry, Additionally, I was exposed to the work of Urquhart and Fernandes (2013, p. 226) that grounded theory is synonymous with the researcher as a blank slate. Arguably, I entered the research with a priori views and opinions on the reasons female students chose veterinary medicine based on my literature review reported in Chapter 2, I engaged the life history interviewing with as much of an open mind as possible. Additionally, the life history methodology I used was also conducted in the context that the students' lives were novel and the interview data was new to the enquiry as provided by the students. The concept of a blank slate as noted by Urquhart and Fernandez for grounded theory can be applied equally to the use of life history for this study and provided me with confidence towards its use for the data analysis.

The theoretical framework that served as the base for the analysis of this thesis is grounded theory. For my research, the outcome is the understanding about how female veterinary students, through their life experiences, chose to pursue veterinary medicine for their education and career development. As part of the effort, I sought to determine what life events and social realities were identified as significant influences in these students' choice of veterinary medicine. For this reason, I engaged grounded theory in the exploration of student's lives followed by a critical analysis to conclude a theoretical position. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.13) as the developers of grounded theory suggest that an iterative, purposive and systematic analysis of data is required to explain social processes and interactions. The work of Glaser and Strauss initially involved research with dying patients in hospitals and generated a process of a constant comparative method which is the nature of

grounded theory. Grounded theory has its genesis in exploring the lives of people towards developing insights and understanding through theoretical development (Fletcher-Watson, 2013, p. 134). This approach of grounded theory led me to consider its relevance for the analysis towards responding research enquiry. The life history accounts I constructed were derived from narrative generated from inductive and deductive thinking as advocated for by Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 13). The analysis of the life history accounts also required for the inductive and deductive process of identifying codes, concepts, categories from which a theory could be generated for the analysis. My use of grounded theory in this thesis was to provide the specific understanding of how the life experiences of the students interviewed contained concepts which contributed to life stages theory in the choice of veterinary medicine.

Corbin (2005, p.50) who defines grounded theory as “*a theory generating research methodology*” recognized the outcome of the analysis using the grounded theory as “an integrated formulation that gives understanding about how persons or organizations or communities experience and respond to events that occur” Corbin (2005, p.49.) Charmaz (2000, p.49) further suggests that the generation of theory is not only a reconstruction of events, but also involves a co-construction between the researcher and the participant. The theory is therefore constructed from the data gathered by the interactions between the researcher and the participant. Life history methodology presents an interaction between the researcher (myself) and participants (female veterinary students). Charmaz notion of the application of grounded theory as an interaction complements the methodology of life history and towards its analysis which was my specific use. Grounded theory is further relevant to life history methodology as the theoretical formulations of the analysis is conducted through interactions and interpretations from discussions with people which the life history approach allows for.

In the application of grounded theory towards data analysis, Corbin (2005, p.50) propose concept identification as the first step which is identified at the first interview. At the first exposure to a research participant, life experiences and events shared may inform future enquiries on the part of the researcher. A critical characteristic of the grounded theory described by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.50) is the need for the researcher to interact with the data and identify as many dimensions of the data collected. A further development of

grounded theory is data reduction (Corbin 2005, p.50). Corbin explained that the researcher should represent the data by a “manageable number of relevant categories” or data reduction. The data reduction involves reducing the identified concepts and categories which is described as “selective coding”. The main purpose of selective coding is to represent the various concepts with a common construct that reflects the many possible descriptions and explanations from the collected data. Category saturation is an additional feature of grounded theory that I applied in this study where I was able to identify common concepts from the various dimensions and relationships between interviews with students. I applied this approach of the grounded theory to the data management for this study and presented an explanation of the general themes and concepts that arose from the research process in chapter 11, discussing this thesis.

Grounded theory which was applied to this study involved the systematic data collection and analysis towards the research enquiry. Grounded theory as a methodology does include strengths and weakness for the research such as:

Strengths:

- The increase in female veterinarians is considered a new phenomenon. Grounded theory is recommended for new areas of research as it does not assume any preconceived theoretical framework. This unassuming characteristic allowed for the data collected to be analysed and interpreted towards generating a theoretical framework specific to the study.
- The use of grounded theory through the application of detailed data collection, analysis and interpretation generated an understanding of the research enquiry that represents a body of knowledge.
- The use of grounded theory required me, as a researcher, to be open minded in treating with the data collected and view the data through different perspectives. This analytic approach allowed me to identify the different knowledge areas towards the research question.

Weaknesses:

- The data collected included large volumes of data which required detailed review, reporting, analysis and interpretation. This process as part of grounded theory was time consuming and as such may not be applicable to some research enquires where time is a factor.
- The knowledge identified and understanding reached towards the research enquiry using the grounded theory is only applicable to the lives of the students and cannot be applied generally.
- As the researcher, I held pre-existing ideas and assumptions at the start of the study. These ideas came from my observations and readings on the research topic. My development of questions to guide the interviews and reference to literature to apply towards this study may have served to influence the interviews, data analysis and the study conclusions.
- The challenges associated with the use of grounded theory for this research would have been helped by a researcher with significant knowledge and experience. My developing knowledge and limited experience of grounded theory may have been a weakness towards my use of grounded theory.

In recognition of the strengths and weaknesses associated with the use of grounded theory, I sought to exploit the strengths identified as follows:

- Reviewed available literature on grounded theory prior to implementing the research to gain knowledge on the methodology.
- Spent significant time scheduling and conducting interviews to maximize the time allocated for interviews.
- Covered prepared questions for the interviews and probed each student in detail on their respective life history.

Identified weaknesses were also ameliorated as follows:

- Dedicated significant time to manage the large volume of data collected through categorization and reduction into manageable themes for analysis.
- Understood the nature of the study and sort additional review and feedback on the relevance of the application of ground towards the research enquiry.



- Recognized the knowledge developed in this thesis was based on the life experiences of interviewed students. However, identified knowledge and understanding obtained was within the context of diverse life experiences of students and can be considered for other female students.
- Remained conscious of my preconceptions when I approached data collection, analysis and reporting and worked to prevent any influences these may have in the research process.
- My developing knowledge and limited experience was partnered with a knowledgeable and experienced supervisor. The supervisor provided instructive guidance and ensured that each step of the thesis was fully reviewed, critiqued, justified and reported in this thesis.

#### **4. Discussion of the Methodology used to conduct this Research**

Sikes, Troyna and Goodson (1996, p.43) describe the personal characteristics of life history methodology as an “intensely idiosyncratic personal dynamics” based on the individualistic and personal experiences that are involved in the research process. The result of this diverse nature and characteristics of life history research is that there is no one methodology that can be described. I will present in this section of the life history methodology, the following common methodological considerations in relation to life history:

- a. Choice of Life History
- b. Research Population
- c. Data Collection
- d. Data Analysis
- e. Data Presentation

##### **a. Choice of Life History**

There are two factors which influence the choice of life history methodology for this study. The first factor was my exposure to life history methodology as a research methodology in the Ed.D. programme, and a desire to experience this methodology for my research interest. The second factor was identifying life history as the most appropriate technique to explore the life experiences of students and achieve the goals and objectives for my research query

as noted by Ojermark (2007, p.2). Sikes (2006, p.x) also supports my second factor that my choice of life history is one which is capable of producing relevant results for this enquiry.

### **b. Research Population**

The research population present at S.G.U. represents the total number of female students enrolled in the veterinary medical programme. The number of female veterinary students according to the Office of Admissions at S.G.U. as of December, 2013 was 600, which represent 80% of the total student population in the academic terms of Veterinary Medicine delivered in Grenada.

Consistent in the literature, after reviewing many examples of life history research, the research sample or population tends to be small in number. There are studies in which one individual constituted the entire research population, other examples where a single digit number of persons were the maximum population from which data was collected. Sikes (2006, p.x) who drew reference to both Harry F. Wolcott's 1973 classic, "The Man in the Principal's Office" and studies in the 1920s and 1930s by members of the Chicago School, where a life history was about one person, which gave insight into the individual's experiences of their life. This example demonstrated that life history research can be applied in a study of one person from the perspective of sample size perspective. The point that life history work is not to prepare "nomothetic generalizations", as in the case of large samples in quantitative work, is made by Sikes (2006, p.x). The case for a small research population in a life history study is also based on the nature of the approach which requires a significant amount of time, effort and resources to conduct.

Once the number of individuals for a life history study is agreed upon, the next task to identify the research population is the sample framework to be employed. From reviewing Sikes (2006, p.x), I have identified the following examples of sampling strategies that are used in life history research.

- Convenience: the situation in which the researcher has access to potential participants and persons whom the researcher can easily identify to participate in the study.

- Purposive: this technique includes specific characteristics, attributes and/or experiences of individuals, who need to satisfy defined criteria to be included in the study.
- Opportunistic: this strategy operates by chance, in which the researcher meets an individual who is willing to participate in the study.
- Snowball: in this strategy, the researcher is referred to potential participants by other participants.

I considered the sampling strategies noted by Sikes above as being useful and applied convenience and purposive strategies towards identifying students to participate in life history interviews for my enquiry.

### **c. Data Collection**

The most commonly used strategy for data collection with the life history approach is the interview, a conversation which takes place between the researcher and the participant(s). The interview dynamics for the life history approach does not conform to any particular approach and is considered to be unstructured. This unstructured approach was used in the Chicago life histories that were collected as noted in Fontana and Frey (2000).

The interview in life history examines issues in an individual's life beyond the conceptual framework of the interview process. The interview and the resulting data should portray the participant to the extent that self-reflection and emotions are evolved to the point of expressing emotions associated with the life experiences that are discussed. The other aspect of the life history interview is the potential for the interviewer to receive confidential and even challenging information which can have ethical and possibly legal issues. Finally, one of the critical requirements for the life history interview is good inter-personal relationships between the interviewer and interviewee in the interview process. Sikes (2006, p.x) suggests that a good inter-personal relationship includes a degree of reciprocity, in which the interviewer shares his/her own experiences to the interviewee. The resulting exchange can serve to refine the process, and allow for increased sharing of information by minimizing the roles of the interviewer and interviewee.

#### **d. Data Analysis**

Life history, while being one approach, includes considerable diversity in the process of design, sampling and data collection. The diversity also relates to the considerable variation in personal lives that exist. This diversity would also apply to data analysis. The actual analysis which is done by the researcher includes an interpretation and representation of the conversations from the interview and data collection phase. Miller (2000, p.14-17) outlines three techniques in the analysis of life histories:

- Narrative: this is the reconstruction of life history interviews, and the analysis involves themes that emerge from the narrative.
- Inductive: this approach takes the form of arranging data collected into concepts which serve as themes from which theory is constructed.
- Neo-positivist: this approach aims to use information obtained from data collection to build on previous work or existing literature, in an effort to provide a greater understanding of an existing phenomenon.

For my data analysis, I applied both narrative and inductive techniques to report and analyze the interviews conducted with students.

#### **e. Data Presentation**

Ojermark (2007, p.43-44) identified several styles for presenting life history work which include narrative writing, using themes, patterns and schemes developed from the analysis. The narrative style includes detailed accounts of interviews which focus on the re-creation of the life experiences of the persons interviewed. Thematic classifications that emerged from the analyses were used to arrange the detailed accounts of participants' lives coupled with the use of anecdotal life sketches provides a greater understanding and evoke emotion to the theme(s) identified by the researcher (Ojermark 2007, p.43).

### **5. A Synopsis of My Experiences during the Research Process**

My previous research experience has been within the quantitative research domain. Having conducted qualitative research, I am reassured that research, regardless of its format, is never a precise process. My approach to this enquiry has been a dynamic and continually evolving process right up to the point of writing this thesis.

In this section, I will present my experience and application of the life history approach to my enquiry. Cohen et. al. (2000, p.166) described the life history approach as including five major processes: preparation, data collection, data storage, data analysis and data presentation. I have used these five processes for my study in addition to referring to the work of Goodson (2005) on “Preparation for Life History Interview” which assisted me in my competency development.

Preparation: Preparation is noted as the researcher’s selection of an appropriate problem and planning and designing research techniques (Cohen et. al. 2000, p.166). This process is similar to the “choice of life history research” noted earlier in the description of life history methodology. While my study is not based on a “problem” as identified in the preparation phase, I selected an observation from my past experiences and immediate professional environment of veterinary medicine for which I sought an explanation. Cohen et. al. (2000, p.166) also noted that in the preparation phase, the researcher should ask the following questions:

- a. Who is the object of the study?

In my research, I identified female veterinary students at St. George’s University to serve as my study population.

- b. What makes a good referee?

Cohen et. al. (2000, p.166) remarked that the elements in selecting good referees are accessibility of place and availability of time. My referees met both of these criteria. As a faculty member at S.G.U., I had access to the veterinary student population as well as faculty members with whom I collaborated to obtain support for the research. In addition, I maintained a relationship with the student participants and was able to recall students for a follow up interview upon updating my interview questions during the data collection period. Also, I scheduled interviews during the months of January through April with particular effort spent on avoiding any academic events such as examinations that may have served as barriers to student participation.

- c. What needs clarifying in the early stages of the research?

The informed consent process served as the point for clarification particularly in my role as a student researcher for the study. The students' rights in their participation and efforts made to assure confidentiality in the recording and reporting of interviews were important points for clarification at the beginning of the study.

Preparation for the study included the submission to, review and approvals from ethical review boards. The study's review process included applications to the University of Sheffield, School of Education, Research Ethics Application and St. George's University, Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon receipt of successful reviews in November of 2012 (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2), I proceeded with the data collection procedures.

Goodson (2005, p.2) also identified research participants as another area that is important to life history research. Goodson noted that the participants in research must represent a spectrum of interviewees and warned against choosing persons who appeal to the interests of the researcher. Participant selection was indeed a significant process for the study. My approach was to identify potential students from each of the six academic terms at S.G.U. I identified the respective student class representatives to share with me the name of three students from their class to participate in a study on females and their choice of veterinary medical education. Upon collecting eighteen names as referrals from the various student class representatives, I consulted with faculty advisors that were assigned to each class. Faculty advisors were then asked to identify one of the three students from each class who I then approached to participate in the study. After referrals from the respective faculty advisors, I had a list of six students from each of the student cohort in the six academic terms conducted in the Grenada campus. I approached each of the identified six students through an email invitation to meet with me in my office to discuss a possible participation in a research study. When I met with each student, I explained the process by which they were selected, provided information on myself and my role in the study and the information sheets and informed consent forms (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 4). I discussed the study in detail with each student, highlighting the expected roles and responsibilities for participants and responded to questions and concerns that the students had. Each student agreed to participate in the study. There was a time gap between students' agreement to participate in the study and the actual interview itself so I reminded the students about the

informed consent prior to each interview to re-confirm their informed participation. Each of the six students was different in their personal and professional experience while sharing the commonality of pursuing veterinary medical education.

**Data Collection:** The technique I employed was a semi-formal, semi-structured interview strategy. This process involved a mixture of questions and discussions on responses from the students. I prepared a list of questions (See Appendix 5) which I used to guide the discussions at each interview. The questions assisted in initiating the discussions which continued in a more relaxed, informal and unstructured manner. Each student sat with me in my office on S.G.U.'s campus during scheduled and confirmed times with each interview varying in length from one and a half hours to three hours. Two of the students also returned for an additional 30 minutes on average follow up interview.

**Data Storage:** The interviews produced a large amount of data which was recorded, transcribed, edited and developed for reporting in this thesis. I used an electronic voice recording device to capture the entire interview, and made notes during the interviews as well. The recordings were initially transcribed which was then reported through interpretation and organization into categories with my commentary and interpretation as documented in chapters four to nine.

**Data Presentation:** My presentation of the study data in the form of life history reports for each of the students interviewed took the format of arranging the life experiences of each student in chronological order. This was done to allow the reader to follow the life experiences of the students in a particular sequence. The life history reports presented significant events and experiences as recalled by the participants, which included the following themes: life history chronology, age of choice of veterinary medicine, impressions of veterinarians, female veterinarians as role models, female students' academic performances, barriers and opportunities and extraneous experiences. In reporting the life histories, I used my views to present perspectives of the students' life experiences based on my exchanges and interpretations during the interview process. I also attempted to allow the students to be reflective and reflexive in their discussion of issues that related directly to their life experiences. Finally, as much as possible, I used the students own words in the reporting of their respective life histories.

Data Analysis: Cohen et al. (2000, p.167) proposed that the three main components of quality for data obtained using the life history approach are representativeness, reliability and validity. My thesis did not seek to include all three components as I recognized that my effort towards the analysis of the data was to reflect representativeness among the students I interviewed. The analytic approach was to first understand the nature of the students who participated in the study. From the life history, I prepared a description of the students' characteristics in terms of their demographic data which was compared and summarized (see Appendix 6). The students' demographic information allowed for me to assign a fictional identity to each student through the use non-personal identifying names. Each of the interviews conducted was then transcribed from recordings to construct transcript notes which represented the raw data for each student. I reviewed the transcribed notes to identify an approach in which to present the students data. The method of constructing the life history interviews into chapters four through nine for this thesis followed arranging the transcribed notes together with my interpretations into the following subheadings:

- Life history chronology
- Age of choice of veterinary medicine
- Impressions of veterinarians
- Female veterinarians as role models
- Female students' academic performance
- Barriers and opportunities
- Knowledge and experiences of veterinary medicine
- Interacting themes between and among the various themes noted above as well as the relationship of life history, veterinary and S.G.U.

Goodson (2005, p.4) commented on the use of life history approach to take into consideration a number of issues which he presented as "bi-polar oppositions" in an attempt to stress the differences. These procedural issues include:

- Interviewer questions versus silence
- Structure versus emergence
- Prescription versus freedom



- Interview versus conversation
- Research versus therapy
- Coverage versus depth
- Flow versus focus

I found these seven constructs by Goodson to be relevant to me in executing the interview process and in the subsequent management and analysis of the data collected. The interview questions I presented were followed by silence on my part to allow each student to respond. However, at times, I found myself breaking my silence to provide a focus for the discussion around an interview question, or to probe a student response further on developing a greater understanding of the life experiences that were shared. The interview process also changed from a semi-structured question-answer approach to an unstructured conversation which suggested the emergence of variations to the structure of an interview. With regards to prescription versus freedom, I had to allow for a lot of flexibility in my discussions with the students. The “research versus therapy” perspectives I directly observed and experienced during the data collection process. I found the study to be instructive to my research enquiry as well as therapeutic in terms of the emotional discussions and realizations that the students came to as part of the interview process. I also identified personal reflections and recollections of my past experiences and how they related to my choice of veterinary medicine to be therapeutic for my benefit. The issue of coverage and depth was explored within the limitations of the scope for the research. I felt that together with each student, we adequately explored their respective life experiences that were relevant to their choice of veterinary medical education. There were a few instances when the depth of the discussions progressed to even uncomfortable situations and talking points for me. The flow and the focus of the research I considered to be seamless as I was able to coordinate the identification, informed consent and interviewing of students in a timely and complete manner. Each student responded positively to the focus of the research in their representation of their respective life experiences. These procedural issues with the life history approach, noted by Goodson, seem in my study experience to equally and separately apply to the research.

## 6. Data Recording and Analysis

During the informed consent phase and again prior to each interview, I requested authorization from each student to use a digital audio recorder to record the interview. I then transcribed the interviews which were tedious and time consuming exercises but one I considered valuable. An example of transcribed interview notes are included in Appendix 7 .One advantage of transcribing the recording, I found, was becoming more familiar with the data and I developed a greater understanding of the student's life experiences. The reporting of each student's life experience, however, was not a complete record of the interviews but rather the relevant discussions and my interpretations with reference to the study questions. The life histories covered the chronology of life events of the six students from their earliest memory through the various landmarks of personal experiences, education, financial circumstances and invariably the elements of the social, cultural and economic dimensions that formed the influences of the participants' lives. The life histories demonstrated that the choice to become a veterinarian as a female was a multidimensional one of personal, inter-personal, academic, financial and educational factors which is beyond the traditional care and relief of animal suffering concepts that is commonly associated with females in veterinary medicine. Finally, I must note that the life histories are all of varied lengths and contain details that are similar as well as dissimilar. Each life history also reflected the personality of each student and the diversity of their life experiences.

The analysis of the life history data occurred in stages originating from the interviews themselves where I took notes on specific points of interest shared by the students as well as my impressions on what was important in answering the study's research question. The analysis occurred in stages and included the following:

Interviews: At the point of conducting the respective interviews, I identified particular trends from students' responses to questions. Recollection of experience with pet animals was one of the trends I noted for students as they referred to their early childhood experiences. Discussions revolving around family members and schooling was also consistently presented by students. A time delay from completing undergraduate education to enrolment into veterinary school was also noted and some of the academic, financial and personal reasons for the delay emerged. The role of S.G.U. in terms of the academic

opportunity it provided for the students to pursue veterinary medicine became apparent to me as well as the overall positive views and opinions of the students towards veterinary medicine and veterinarians. The issue of extraneous experiences was noted from one particular interview and was also a point of enquiry I used for the other students. In general, the interviews provided me with themes that I pursued further in my interview transcription.

**Interview Transcription:** Upon completing the interviews, I transcribed the interview recordings and notes as soon as possible. For the transcription process, I followed the chronology of the interview discussions with the students. The transcription assumed the structure of a time chronology of the students' life history as they related experiences that were relevant to their interest and choice of veterinary medicine. Transcription of the interview notes allowed for continued analysis from the interviews as the influence of life experiences and in particular the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the students were apparent. The transcribed interview notes were then allowed to sit as records while I completed all interviews before proceeding to the data analysis.

**Interview Reporting:** The development of the thesis document allowed for me to construct the reporting of the interviews for each student's into respective chapters. The reporting of the each student's life experience required for my reference to the transcribed interview recordings and notes. I then sought to organize the data in a manner to represent the students' life experiences and be understandable to the reader. I chose to first summarize the students' life history in a life history chronology to provide context into the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the students' lives. From the general themes that I identified based on the interviews and the transcribed interview notes, all of the students' data was represented into the themes of life history chronology, age of choice of veterinary medicine, impressions of veterinarians, female veterinarians as role models, female students' academic performances, veterinary knowledge and experience, barriers and opportunities and extraneous experiences. This organization of the students' data represented in chapters four to nine and into the noted subheadings served to further align the data into categories of themes that applied to all students and served as the continuing analysis of the study data.

Analysis and Interpretation: Further analysis of the data from chapters four through nine is reflected in chapter ten which explores the data categories and how they interacted with each other towards responding to the study's research question. To assist in the data analysis, I referred to the grounded theory. According to Corbin (2005, p.50), concept identification, establishing dimensions of data, reduction of data (selective coding) and explanations are steps used in grounded theory. My application of the grounded theory included:

- a. Concept Identification: The emerged themes identified as age of choice of veterinary medicine, impressions of veterinarians, female veterinarians as role models, female students academic record, barriers and opportunities, previous knowledge and experience with veterinary medicine and extraneous experiences were all considered as central concepts from the interviews with students.
- b. Dimensions of data: The identified concepts were further assessed based on the responses presented by students. The concept of age of choice was interpreted in the dimension of early interest in veterinary medicine noted by students. The concepts of impressions of veterinarians including female veterinarians as well as knowledge and experience with veterinary medicine were interpreted in the dimension of positive perceptions of veterinarians and veterinary medicine. The concept of female students' academic record was interpreted in the dimension of barriers which also included personal and financial barriers. SGU related academic opportunities were also noted as a dimension of the students' experiences as it related to the pre-veterinary programme and financial aid opportunities. The concept of students' extraneous experiences in the context of personal factors that served to influence students' choice to pursue opportunities outside of their family and social environment to seek mobility was not identified as a general concept and no dimensions was interpreted for extraneous experiences.
- c. Reduction of data categories (selective coding): The dimension of early interest in veterinary medicine was consistently identified together with the dimension of positive impressions and experiences with veterinarians and veterinary medicine. I reduced these dimensions to into needs and experiences respectively. Needs was identified in terms of students' personal, financial and academic reasons to pursue

veterinary medicine. Experiences was derived from positive interactions and resulting perceptions of veterinarians. The interest in veterinary medicine by the students is considered as the product of the interactions of the needs and experience that creates the interest to pursue veterinary medicine. The development of interest is considered to advance to the stage of decision and particularly as a transition state from interest to enrolment. The concepts of barriers and opportunities are noted to participate in the transition that occurs in decision making. The barriers and opportunities which are noted as personal, financial, and academic interacted with the students' interests and results in the decision and enrolment into veterinary medicine. This reduction of data categories into needs, experiences, interests, decision and enrolment reflect the stages of students' life experiences which was identified from the data collected. The reduced data categories also occur within the social, economic and cultural realities of the students lives.

- d. Explanations: The chronological sequence of students' life experiences occurred through different stages in life and reflected the reduced data categories of need, experiences, interests, decision and enrolment. The explanation for each of the reduced data categories was done by providing an understanding of the different stages in the students' lives. The interactions of personal, financial, and academic need with veterinary medical related experiences produced interest. The transition of interest to decision and enrolment towards veterinary medicine is explained by the influences of barriers and opportunities to overcome the barriers. The proposed Life Stages Theory presented in chapter 11 on discussion explains the interactions of the reduced data categories towards understanding the influences of the students and their choice of veterinary medicine.

## **7. Description of Scenes**

Goodson (2005, p.3) noted the importance of describing the scene of the interviews. Monchery (2010, p.84) citing Sikes (2010, p.23) pointed out that recordings can only capture what was said and only present a limited representation of an interview encounter. A description of the interview scene is therefore important to build the whole picture of the

life history interview process in the study. I will present below a description of the scene that formed part of the life history interview location.

I met with students in my office usually on Saturdays, although I had some interviews during the weekdays as well. For the most part, veterinary students are occupied from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm from Monday to Friday, which was why the students requested to hold the interviews on Saturdays, since it was convenient for them. As a male faculty, meeting with female students in my office over the weekends, I always requested for and had the presence of a female faculty colleague in the office area during all interviews held at the weekends. My colleague and I met each student at the main entrance door and the student and I entered my office space, while my female faculty colleague indicates that she would be in her office throughout the day. The interviews were also scheduled separately, without any overlap time in order to prevent other students from knowing who was participating in the study. The office space used was an enclosed room, measuring approximately nine feet long and twelve feet wide in dimensions with a single door access which was closed for the interviews. The office space was also ventilated through a central air conditioning system which all together created an isolated environment for a confidential interview with each student. In my office, each student and I sat at opposite sides of my desk. For each interview, I had available water, soft drinks, juice and sweet and savoury pastries for the students and myself to consume. During each interview, there was no interruption for those held on weekends with the rare break to use the rest room. For the interviews held during the weekdays, the telephone and knock on the office door served as an interruption. I placed the audio recorder on the desk equi-distant between myself and the student as I conducted each interview through asking questions, restating students' positions on recalled information and contributing to the discussions towards developing an understanding of the respective life histories.

The following six chapters represent my report on the life history accounts from interviews with the students. The chapters are arranged and entitled as follow:

- Chapter 4 Interviewee 1: "There is something about Mary"
- Chapter 5 Interviewee 2: "Jane's Clinic World"
- Chapter 6 Interviewee 3: "Lone Lucy"

- Chapter 7 Interviewee 4: “Sanju’s Tale of Two Medicines”
- Chapter 8 Interviewee 5: “Miracle of Marie Street”
- Chapter 9 Interviewee 6: “The Life and Times of Anne”

## Chapter 4 Interview 1: “There is something about Mary”

### Life History Chronology

*“... When I think back in my life, my first recall from my history was the time of my pet dog Bruno. Bruno was a gorgeous brown male Labrador who I spent all my days with. Bruno at night would also sleep on the floor of my bed. Each day, I would go for a walk with my nanny and Bruno to the park where Bruno and I would play with other dogs” (Mary, 1)*

The above excerpt from the interview with Mary represented her first life history recollection which was fondly associated with her pet dog. The period in Mary’s life was around the age of three to four years old.

Mary is from the west coast of the United States, who grew up under the care of a live-in nanny. Mary’s father is a physician who worked at a nearby hospital as an administrator and her mother is an accountant with a company that consults with financial institutions. Mary grew up in an affluent family of upper income level and enjoyed various luxuries in life, including a comfortable home, luxury vehicles and annual vacations to distant countries. Mary spent the majority of her time with her nanny and pet Bruno as her parents worked all day and on weekends as well. At the early age of three to five years, which was prior to schooling, Mary reported a very structured regime of daily activities. Mary received tutoring at home during the days and at evenings during the week had swimming, art, piano, dancing and singing lessons in her home. Mary shared that all of the lessons were private sessions with teachers which she enjoyed very much. Mary also recalled her daily routine in association with her pet dog when she stated:

*“... Bruno was always with me whether I was learning to read and write or swimming and painting and he being there was the best part of being at home” (Mary, 2)*

Mary did not recall having many out of home activities in her early childhood apart from noting the daily walk to the park and specifically mentioned visiting the veterinarian and pet shop with her pet, Bruno and her nanny. The visits to the veterinarian and pet shop served



as memorable experiences for Mary as they were identified from her early childhood memories which were linked to her pet dog. Mary in remembering some of her early experiences shared:

*“... Bruno’s birthday coincided with Christmas as Bruno was a Christmas gift for me when I was little. Together with my nanny, we would take him to the veterinarian which was a nice place to visit. There were always beautiful animals to see and it was like going to the zoo. The vet also always took great care of Bruno and it was nice to see how Bruno interacted with the other dogs. Whenever we visited the vet’s office, we would also visit the pet shop which was in the same shopping mall as the vet’s office. The pet shop also had animals to see and many treats and toys which we would buy for Bruno. Even during the year, we would take Bruno to the pet shop to get his coat groomed and also to purchase a bed as he always ripped his bed” (Mary, 3)*

As Mary got older, towards the age range of six to ten years, she reported attending a private school. The private school was located close to where she lived and was her first experience interacting with other students as she was previously home schooled. On the first social interaction for Mary outside of her home environment, Mary commented:

*“... At school, I found myself missing home and always being around Bruno. The other students also seemed to know each other and I felt left out in the class” (Mary, 4)*

Prior to attending the private school, Mary noted that her parents were both busy at work and could not remember seeing them during the week as they would leave home before she woke up and return when she was already asleep. Mary noted however that she recalled seeing her parents on weekends for some time. Also, being in the new school increased the opportunity for Mary to see her parents as they would attend school events with other parents. Mary remarked on her fond memories of school as:

*“... The best part of being in school was the times when my parents would visit in the evenings to see me swim as I was on the school’s swim team.*

*Having learned to swim at home, swimming was a sport that I enjoyed and was good at. I received several medals over the years in school which my parents were very proud of. They would always speak about my swimming to their friends and displayed my awards at home” (Mary, 5)*

School life was a challenging one for Mary as her positive recollection during that period of her life was associated with her swimming. In terms of other school activities, Mary did not recollect much except to highlight that the classes and classmates did not form part of her memory.

During Mary’s early school life, she noted that her parents purchased another pet dog for her during a Christmas holiday. Mary recalled:

*“... It was for my eight birthday [which coincided with the Christmas season] that I received a gift of a daschund puppy from my parents. I named the puppy Maddy as she was a female and very tiny as well ... I remembered her as I saw her in the pet shop while waiting for Bruno to be groomed. When I held Maddy in the pet shop, she felt soft to touch and I told my nanny that I wanted her as my pet” (Mary, 6)*

The new daschund puppy was a gift which Mary recalled with affection and one that she took care of as she was at an age where she began to assume responsibility. Mary attended to both Bruno and Maddy by feeding them and ensuring that they walked and took them outside to pass their stool. With Bruno and Maddy together, Mary would visit the veterinarian with her two dogs as well as have them groomed at the pet shop. Mary also shared

*“... I was fascinated with the various types of dogs and learned more about breeds from books we bought at the pet shop. We also bought clothing for Maddy in particular as she was a girl whereas Bruno would always rip apart anything thing we put on him” (Mary, 7)*

Mary further described that before her ninth birthday, she began to share with her nanny that she wanted another pet dog when they visited the pet shop. Mary commented:

*“... There was a black short hair male daschund which I saw in the pet shop and I wanted him as I thought that he and Maddy would make a great pair. I played with the puppy who I named Trevor and did not want anyone to buy him. I told the people in the store that my parents would buy Trevor for me for my birthday and I told my nanny to let my parents know about Trevor” (Mary, 8)*

Mary recognized the link between wanting a dog and her parents buying that dog for her birthday so she insisted to her nanny on getting the dog for sale in the pet shop who she identified with. Mary received the pet dog she selected from the pet shop for her ninth birthday as her parents bought Trevor [the dog she wanted and gave a name to in the pet shop]. Mary remembered the birthday and stated:

*“... I woke up for my birthday and there was no gift for me. I also did not see my parents around the house and when I enquired from my nanny, she noted that they went out. I sat near the window and looked out for when my parents returned. It seemed like I was waiting forever as there were no cars passing by but eventually I saw my parents’ van approached the front yard and parked in the garage. I waited for them to come into the house and there I saw my father holding a carryon cage with Trevor inside. I was very happy as now I had Bruno, Maddy and Trevor ... I also recalled my mother telling me that there was no more room for any further dogs and that I should not ask for any other pets in the future ... I was so happy about Trevor and I agreed with them, then we all took Trevor to the pet store to get him a bed” (Mary, 9)*

The three pet dogs served as the main part of Mary’s life history growing up. Unfortunately, around the age of ten years for Mary, she together with her nanny and her three pet dogs were on their way to the park when Bruno [the first pet dog] was hit by a vehicle. Mary remembered the experience clearly as she shared:

*“... We were approaching a road intersection when Bruno who was on a leash and being held by my nanny overpowered her and entered onto the street where he was hit by a passing car. Bruno made a sound of pain and*

*lay on his side on the road. His breathing was heavy and his abdomen was bruised and began to swell. The driver of the car stopped and I remembered constantly crying while holding onto Maddy and Trevor tightly. The driver of the car held Bruno in his arms and placed him in his car and together with my nanny and Maddy and Trevor, we all went to a veterinary hospital. The veterinary hospital was not our veterinary office where we took my pets and I did not know any of the vets working there ... The vet who examined Bruno told us that he sustained internal injuries, was bleeding internally and there was a need for Bruno to have surgery ... [Mary became emotional in the interview] ... after surgery, the vet who saw Bruno told us that he died ... [Mary was visibly distraught while sharing this memory and I took a break from the interview]" (Mary, 10)*

After several minutes, Mary agreed to continue the interview and we began to discuss her school experiences when she was growing up.

Mary shared that she remained in the private school which she first attended since the age of six and moved into a higher class with each passing year. The school experience of interest to Mary was during a career day when parents of students spoke about their careers. Mary noted that her two parents attended and spoke about their careers as a doctor and a financial advisor. At the end of the career day, Mary remembered her teacher asking each student what career they would like to pursue. At that time, Mary with reference to her anger and sadness over the death of her pet Bruno and stated:

*"... I was angry with the veterinarian at the hospital as they did not save Bruno after he was hit by the car. I was angry that we did not take Bruno to our regular veterinarian who knew Bruno ... I was also sad to lose Bruno as he was my first dog and I grew up with him ... and during this ordeal, I thought to myself that I wanted to be a veterinarian as I would have saved Bruno ... I shared with my teacher and my class that I wanted to be a veterinarian when I grow up to save animals from suffering and dying"*  
(Mary, 11)

The tragic loss of Mary's pet Bruno served as an influence that propelled her to make the decision to become a veterinarian. The decision Mary made to become a veterinarian was shared when she was 11 years old among her class at school. The decision also, while associated with anger and sadness, represented Mary's first choice of veterinary medicine.

Throughout middle and high schools, Mary remained enrolled in private schools. While the specific school experiences were not remarkable in terms of Mary's specific memory, Mary considered herself to be an average student in terms of her academic performance. Mary remarked:

*"... I certainly was not the top student or anywhere near the top performers in my class. If anything, I would pass my classes and that was sufficient for me. All through middle and high school, I looked forward to attending college as I wanted to explore further how to become a veterinarian. Whenever we took Maddy and Trevor to the veterinary clinic, I would speak to the attending veterinarians about my interest to become a veterinarian and asked about what were their schooling pathways they each took ... I learned about the need to maintain good grades and pursue undergraduate education in a field that is relevant to veterinary medicine"*  
(Mary, 12)

Mary based on her expressed interest to pursue veterinary medicine was provided with an opportunity to assist in the veterinary clinic where she had taken her pets since she was a child. Mary accepted the opportunity and committed to spending a lot of time in the clinic. Mary recalled:

*"... At least every Saturday, I would go to the clinic to assist the veterinarians. At first, I would be involved in feeding the animals who were in-patients as well as cleaning their cages and taking them for walks. After some time, I would be involved in observing veterinarians attend to animals in the clinic examination room. All of these opportunities I fully enjoyed as it showed me how veterinarians did their work and confirmed for me that I wanted to become a veterinarian as well. I also worked in the clinic during summer vacations and school breaks and would even visit the*

*clinic during school in the week days to follow up on patients whose care and rehabilitation I participated in. My nanny would drive me around to drop me off and pick me up from the clinic whenever I needed” (Mary, 13)*

The time came for Mary to begin applying to undergraduate programmes in universities when she was nearing the end of high school. With the decision made by Mary to pursue veterinary medicine, she applied to universities with veterinary schools which were also advised by the veterinarians she knew at the clinic where she worked part-time. Mary received a mix of acceptances and rejections for her applications for admission and finally accepted an admission offer that would allow her to pursue a pre-veterinary programme. As an 18 year old, Mary left home together with her pet daschund dogs Maddy and Trevor and relocated to a university campus out of state. Mary reported on her entry into college as:

*“... It was a very nervous time and at the same time exciting period for me. I only knew my home and the immediate community that we lived in, including the private school system where I had my education. I was now away from my nanny who I grew up with and who cared and looked after me for all my life up to this point. However, it was also very exciting as I was beginning my specific training towards becoming a veterinarian ... plus I had Maddy and Trevor with me so I had company” (Mary, 14)*

Mary rented an off-campus apartment to accommodate her pets living with her. The cost for Mary’s education for her pre-veterinary programme was covered by her parents.

The years as a pre-veterinary student were difficult for Mary as she deviated from the curriculum mapping for a pre-veterinary programme and at the end completed an undergraduate degree in biology. Mary shared:

*“... I got caught up in all the bad things about college and with no one there to check on me, I partied, did not take my classes seriously and even dropped out of courses and took other courses to follow friends in other programmes. I struggled academically and was not focused towards my goal of gaining admission into a veterinary school ... It was during a meeting with my academic advisor that I learned about my lack of*

*satisfactory progress in the pre-veterinary programme and had to switch to a biology programme to complete my degree” (Mary, 15)*

The undergraduate experience for Mary was not successful as she did not gain admission into a veterinary school after submitting several applications. Mary, in total, sent out more than 20 applications and which were all denied. Mary described her experience at that time as follows:

*“... When I returned home from college, I knew that my nanny who I grew up with was no longer employed but it was different for many other reasons. Maddy and Trevor returned home with me but they were also getting older and had much less activity. My parents still worked long hours. I returned to the vet clinic where I worked as a high school student and was able to get a job as a veterinary technician. For this, I had to undergo training which I did and once again enjoyed working in the vet clinic and with veterinarians” (Mary, 16)*

During the course of Mary’s undergraduate training, she was no longer in her sheltered environment of home and made choices that compromised her academic performance which negatively impacted her ambitions to begin veterinary school. After returning home and reuniting with the veterinary clinic, Mary refocused her passion for veterinary medicine. However, having not met the requirements for admission into a veterinary school, Mary decided to pursue her career as a veterinary technician. Two years into working as a veterinary technician, Mary encountered a new veterinarian who joined the clinic. The new veterinarian pursued veterinary medicine at S.G.U. in Grenada. The new veterinarian and Mary began to develop a professional relationship as Mary admired the new veterinarian and over time, they also developed a personal relationship. Mary who was still living at her parent’s home continued to work at the veterinary clinic for a couple more years and eventually moved out of her parent’s house and began to live together with the new veterinarian with whom she also worked. During the relationship, Mary and the veterinarian discussed Mary’s interest in veterinary medicine and the idea to apply to S.G.U. in Grenada came up. Mary shared with me:

*“... When I first saw him as a new veterinarian in the clinic, I was jealous as he was what I wanted to become ... then we worked together and I learnt a lot from him about being a veterinarian ... we were of similar age range, we identified with each other and over time, fell in love ... it was also refreshing to learn about his veterinary training as I did not know anything about Grenada or even the existence of a veterinary school there ... we even took a trip to Grenada as a vacation together and he showed me the beautiful island and campus and I immediately wanted to apply ... I applied to S.G.U. and was given a path of the one year pre-veterinary programme that once I was successful in would gain admission into the veterinary school. That was in 2011 and before I left to travel here, my boyfriend [the new veterinarian at the clinic who graduated from S.G.U.] and I got engaged as we plan to get married after I complete vet school” (Mary, 17)*

In August 2011, Mary joined the one year pre-veterinary medical programme and was successful in earning a place in the veterinary school. The life experience of starting veterinary medical education was made more meaningful with meeting and relationship that developed with her fiancé. The fiancé was critical in sustaining Mary’s veterinary interest while at the vet clinic and more importantly for Mary, providing knowledge of an alternative pathway and an opportunity for veterinary medical education at S.G.U.

The life experiences described by Mary based on relevance towards her choice of veterinary medicine identified an early exposure to animals through her pets and a clear intention to pursue veterinary medicine from the tragic car accident and death experience of her pet, Bruno. The social realities of career driven parents and care giving provided by her nanny as a domestic employee highlighted the influence of the nanny which was exemplified in the gifts of pet dogs for Mary on her birthdays. The affluence of living in a high income family removed financial limitations towards pursuing higher education and ambitions for veterinary medicine. The tragic experience for Mary when she lost her pet in the veterinary hospital provided confirmation for Mary to identify veterinary medicine as her career choice. The experience of working in the veterinary clinic as a middle to high school student maintained Mary’s interest in veterinary medicine. The relationship with the S.G.U. graduate and fiancé occurred at a critical time during which Mary, from her unsuccessful attempts to



secure admission into a veterinary school, was provided with an opportunity to re-consider veterinary medicine as a reachable career path. The knowledge of S.G.U. re-ignited Mary's original interest and decision to pursue veterinary medicine. Mary is now a successful student in the veterinary programme at S.G.U. with an expected graduation date of 2016. Upon graduation, Mary intends to pursue companion animal medicine practice at the veterinary clinic where she previously worked together with her fiancé and build her own veterinary clinic as well.

### **Age of choice of Veterinary Medicine**

*"... I note the period in middle school around 11 to 12 years old when I was asked about my career option and I reported veterinary medicine at school. This period of time was at a career guidance session in school where all parents including my parents spoke about their respective careers. I guess no parents were veterinarians as there was no presentation on veterinary medicine but that was what I shared as my career choice. I never thought of any career that I can recall before choosing veterinary medicine. After not gaining acceptance to a veterinary school upon completing my undergraduate degree programme, I decided to consider alternate options but I still only considered working as a veterinary technician so that I can remain in a field that worked with caring for animals in a vet clinic" (Mary, 18)*

Mary reported an early interest as a young child with taking her pet dog to the veterinarian but officially articulated her choice to pursue veterinary medicine at the career day in school when she was in the 11 to 12 years old age range.

### **Impressions of Veterinarians**

*"... I remembered the first time I walked into the veterinary clinic with Bruno. He was nervous and I think I was as nervous as him. However, the veterinarians took such great care of him and allowed me to be there for all of the examinations they conducted on him. It actually became fun for me to visit the veterinarian with Bruno. Of course, there was the time with*

*Bruno when he died but I was angry at that time. Looking back, I recognize the type of injuries he would have sustained led to his death ... What is interesting was that when the various parents were speaking about their careers during the career day when I was in school, there was no veterinarians present. My contribution when I indicated that I wanted to become a veterinarian was completed based on my experiences with caring for my pets and attending the neighbourhood veterinary clinic”*  
(Mary, 19)

Mary's view of veterinarians growing up was one where she always admired and enjoyed them. The admiration for veterinarians and veterinary medicine occurred within a limited social exposure in her parent's home which confined Mary to her pets and by extension their care by veterinarians. The point at which her first pet Bruno died due to a tragic injury was a critical stage of Mary's developing interest in veterinary medicine. The actual occurrence of the injury led to anger and reservations towards veterinarians due to the emotional connection to her pet dog. However, at the same time, Mary through the tragedy of her pet decided to pursue veterinary medicine. While the tragedy may have served to influence the actual decision that Mary made at the referred career day, the tragedy occurred at a point where Mary was already engaged in the care of animals and the admiration of veterinarians. I am also of the view that the interest Mary showed by working over weekends, after school and vacation periods in the clinic was an opportunity to sustain her interest in the veterinary technician role firstly and veterinary medicine as well. Mary's decision at an early age and her choice to gain experience in veterinary medicine suggested that there was an initial and sustained appreciation of veterinarians and a desire to become a veterinarian. Mary commented on her views of veterinarians as:

*“... My view of veterinarians today, well, I am engaged to one and I intend to marry him after I graduate. I remembered after completing my undergraduate programme and realizing that becoming a veterinarian was more than just choosing to become one but also qualifying to become one. I view veterinary medicine as a privilege and a fortune to work and care for animals. However, even as a veterinary technician for a couple of years while working and caring for animals, I still did not feel the complete*

*capabilities that veterinarians have. A veterinarian has the science and medicine to back the care and love for animals which is very powerful which was why I wanted to become a veterinarian. There is this awesome privilege to be a veterinarian specifically and to share that skills set with animals. I am not a veterinarian yet but I have seen it time and time again from veterinarians” (Mary, 20)*

Mary’s view of veterinarians today is an evolved one from her early admiration and enjoyment of observing veterinarians. Through the experiences of working with veterinarians, the specific professional characteristics of veterinarians were identified by Mary and formed her current views and opinions. With Mary on a pathway to become a veterinarian, there is that specific skill-based professional quality of veterinarians that Mary aspires towards. The view of veterinary medicine as a privilege is also prominent in Mary’s perspective. I believe that while Mary came from a high income family and was able to secure private education for her school and college experiences, she recognized that to gain admission into a veterinary school was difficult and almost out of reach for her. Now that Mary is in veterinary school, she sees her position as one that is privileged on several levels.

A main factor that I consider as influential to Mary’s current views of veterinarians and veterinary medicine is the role of her fiancé. The fiancé came into Mary’s life as someone she aspired to professionally become. I sensed that while Mary was rejected from every veterinary school application that she sent out, she resigned herself to being a veterinary technician. The experience and support of her fiancé allowed Mary to return her interest to her career of choice to become a veterinarian. The personal affections that developed during the experience I propose were also because her fiancé was a veterinarian. The view of veterinarians as a special set of competent professionals that are privileged to have such a career is a significant development of Mary’s position. The personal relationship outcome of the experiences and emotions of being engaged to a veterinarian is also a demonstrated affection that Mary holds towards veterinarians.

### **Female Veterinarians as Role Models**

*“... As a child and throughout my years of attending the vet clinic in my neighbourhood with my pet dogs, I engaged with several veterinarians*

*both males and females. I have always admired veterinarians that were both males and females. Obviously, my relationship with my fiancé as a male is more personal and affectionate but I also admired and still admire him as a veterinarian. Interestingly, and I only thought about this right now since you asked but the veterinarians that were involved with Bruno when he was hit by the car at the vet hospital were all females and they were the vets that I was angry at” (Mary, 21)*

I identified admiration by Mary towards veterinary medicine as a child and indeed growing up was related to the profession of being a veterinarian and not veterinarians of any particular gender. Also, there seem to be no specific adverse view or opinions of female veterinarians as a result of the tragedy with Mary’s pet dog. Mary noted:

*“... Today, the majority of my professors here at S.G.U. are females and I have the utmost respect and admiration for female veterinarians. I for one know how difficult it is to gain entry into a veterinary school and become a veterinarian so I respect them completely. But, to say that there are any female veterinarians that I admire, I cannot say that specifically” (Mary, 22)*

The issues of female veterinarians that serve as role models for aspiring female veterinarians I do not think apply to Mary. Mary’s experiences does not relate to any memories that specifically involved female veterinarians but rather applied to veterinarians in general.

On the topic of increasing number of females in veterinary medicine, Mary commented:

*“... My view is that more females are getting more involved in veterinary medicine because more people are engaging veterinarians for the care of their animals. Previously, persons may have attempted home based remedies or not pursue veterinary services but with more people interested in veterinary care for their animals, more females are also interested in becoming veterinarians. There are also more ads with women*

*veterinarians and from S.G.U., more female faculty which can be an influence for female students but it was not my experience” (Mary, 23)*

Mary identified an increased involvement of veterinarians for animal care in general as well as an increase demand towards seeking veterinary services which may be an influence for females to consider veterinary medicine as a career choice. Mary’s view was also her own experience as she sought even as a young girl veterinary care for her pets.

### **Female Students Academic Record**

*“... I was never really a good student before coming to S.G.U. I always did what I needed to do to pass and nothing more. Throughout my school years, the female students were ahead in the class but I was not one of them ... but, to say that I outperformed male students, I cannot” (Mary, 24)*

Mary reported not having any particular comparatively higher performance when compared to male students during her schooling life. However, Mary noted other female students to be more academically successful than male students during the period of her schooling. With regards to Mary’s views on the performance of female students, she stated:

*“... I would definitely say that in my experiences, female students outperformed male students. Even here at S.G.U., while there are more females in the class, the male students are performing at a lower standard than the female students ... I even outperformed my male counterparts from the pre-veterinary programme prior to gaining admission into the veterinary programme. I have also continued my high level of academic success as a veterinary student thus far” (Mary, 25)*

Mary seems to excel when the pathway to the veterinary school through a one year pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. was provided. It seems that while Mary was in middle and high schools and during her undergraduate training, having made the decision early in life to pursue veterinary medicine, there was an assumption on her part that she would gain admission into a veterinary school. Mary, during her school life, was always able through her parent’s financial support to pay for private schooling. This financial capacity of Mary’s parents may have created complacency on her part with an assumption of automatic entry

into a veterinary school as an entitlement as her parents would have provided funding. This complacency may have contributed to Mary's average academic performance which fell below the minimum requirements for entry into a veterinary school. However, after being offered an opportunity at S.G.U. to pursue veterinary medicine through a pre-veterinary programme, Mary excelled in her academic performance. Mary associated her changing performance to her maturation after learning about the consequences of her poor performance by not gaining placement in a veterinary school and making the best use of the opportunity that she was provided. Mary stated:

*"... As a mature student compared to my other classmates, I spent more time seeking admission into a veterinary programme. After completing my undergraduate degree, I sought admission into any veterinary school but all my attempts were unsuccessful ... I can recall a period where I gave up seeking admission into a veterinary school ... however, the opportunity that S.G.U. provided was one that I took up and made maximum use of it ... the admissions experience was generally a pleasant one as I was given the task to complete 32 credits of coursework over two academic terms with a minimum cumulative GPA requirement of 3.5. This specific guideline I worked with which I met at the end of the one year pre-veterinary programme and was given an automatic admission into the vet school here at S.G.U."* (Mary, 26)

Mary experienced two phases of applications into veterinary school. The first phase was at the end of her undergraduate training which was during the period of her minimum academic performance and therefore struggled to gain an acceptance. The advent of Mary's relationship with her fiancé and the knowledge and opportunity provided by S.G.U. was the second phase. This second phase was associated with Mary being more mature in her life experiences. The failures of Mary's past applications, being disconnected from her immediate parental influence by living with her fiancé and given a chance to pursue her childhood ambitions was rejuvenated through the opportunity at S.G.U. The admissions process was therefore a difficult one for Mary and required time, effort and opportunity to be able to gain admission into S.G.U.'s veterinary school.

## Barriers and Opportunities for Female Veterinary Students

*“... The only barrier that I had was gaining admission into a veterinary school. After several attempts and applications, I was unsuccessful in gaining admission ... And, the admission barrier was overcome through the pathway provided by S.G.U.” (Mary, 27)*

Mary recognized her inability to gain acceptance in a veterinary school as her barrier. Mary commented:

*“... The choice of veterinary medicine for me as we discussed was a very early one. I would agree that my experiences with Bruno was a deciding factor where I thought if I was a veterinarian, I would have made a difference and Bruno would have survived. Working with the veterinary clinic was just another opportunity for me to begin to become a veterinarian even before I had a chance to” (Mary, 28)*

The experiences of the vehicular accident for Mary's pet Bruno as well as the experiences at the veterinary clinic were influences she noted as relevant to her choice of veterinary medicine. Mary also commented on her experiences and relationship with her fiancé as the main factor for her presence in S.G.U.'s veterinary school. Mary noted:

*“... As a female, I would have to admit that my fiancé was and is the main reason that I am here today. If he was not in my life, I would not have known about the existence of S.G.U. and to even apply and enrol into a veterinary school. Also, I would say that the opportunity to work at the veterinary clinic during my middle and high school years was related to my ability to care and comfort animals in the clinic. I cannot say the same for males as even male veterinarians who are great at surgery and veterinary practice; it usually is a female who does the grooming and caring of the patients that come into the clinic” (Mary, 29)*

Mary identified being female as a factor that allowed her to gain experience at the veterinary clinic. This experience to work in the clinic was an opportunity as it sustained Mary's interest to pursue veterinary medicine. Mary reported that her admission into

S.G.U.'s veterinary school was directly related to her personal relationship with a male veterinarian who is her fiancé.

## **Knowledge and Experience of Veterinary Medicine**

*"... When I made my decision to become a veterinarian, the only knowledge I had about veterinary practice was the care of my pets at the vet clinic. During those times, I saw the care of veterinarians and the comfort of my pets at the vet clinic which attracted me to the profession" (Mary, 30)*

This initial perception of care for animals was the characteristic of veterinary practice that Mary connected with and associated her early interest in veterinary medicine. Also, Mary shared:

*"... The time I spent working at the vet clinic highlighted for me the work that veterinarians do. I was able to observe how veterinarians heal animals and the work which involved managing animals with their medications, nutrition, housing etc. I got an opportunity to also see how people admire veterinarians for the work they do and it all reaffirmed for me that I wanted to be a veterinarian" (Mary, 31)*

Working in the vet clinic while at school provided a direct understanding for Mary of veterinary practice. While this period was after Mary's decision to become a veterinarian, it provided an opportunity for Mary to maintain her decision with a full understanding of veterinary practice. The exposure of Mary to veterinarians for the care of her pet animals as a child suggested being the first influence towards her thought process to consider veterinary medicine as a career option. The main characteristic that emerged from Mary's early exposure to veterinary practice was the care and healing provided by veterinary medicine. It should be noted that during Mary's life history chronology, she noted the pet shop as a concurrent experience in grooming her pets and purchasing accessories for them.

## **Extraneous Experiences**

The question of extraneous experiences in Mary's life history towards her choice of veterinary medicine was a follow up discussion. The issue of extraneous experiences



emerged as an element of another student interview [Lone Lucy, Ch. 6] and I queried this potential factor with all students that I interviewed. The extraneous experiences that emerged were related to a need to escape family and community challenges which encouraged mobility on the part of the student and the choice of veterinary medicine in a distant country. From my discussions with Mary, there was no interest for her to escape any social circumstances or any desire to seek opportunities through relocation except to pursue veterinary medicine. Mary shared her desire on several occasions to return to marry her fiancé and work as a veterinarian where she grew up. Mary did refer to her parents' respective careers and their absence at home as stressful growing up. Moreover, Mary felt the lack of direction from her parents led to her inability to manage her independence as an undergraduate student which led to her negative behaviours and poor academic performances. Mary remarked:

*"... I had always disliked my parent's careers in medicine and finance and I knew that I never wanted to become a doctor or a business person ... I would observe how the senior veterinarian at the clinic treated me like a daughter and I felt very comfortable around him. I also saw the wonderful family life he had as I knew the family and I wanted that for myself as well. Maybe that is why I was so attracted to my fiancé as well"* (Mary, 32)

This follow-up interview proved instructive as I was able to obtain additional emotions and understanding that linked Mary to veterinarians as well as to her aspiration to become a veterinarian. Mary's parents, due to their busy work schedule, required that Mary be attended to by an employed nanny of whom Mary spoke fondly. However, Mary felt a parental connection to the senior veterinarian in the clinic where she worked and was able to observe a family life from a veterinarian perspective which she wanted for herself. Mary connected veterinarians as family-oriented professionals, which she wanted to experience for herself and considered being a veterinarian to provide the opportunity to do so. Mary's choice to become a veterinarian is a possible attempt to obtain the family experience that she observed from veterinarians and wanted for herself. While the paternal connection to the senior veterinarian and the family life association with the veterinary profession occurred after Mary made her choice to become a veterinarian at her school's career day, it possibly informed her relationship with her fiancé and maintained Mary's interest towards

remaining in a veterinary environment even when admission into veterinary school was denied.

Mary's choice of veterinary medicine was not to obtain an opportunity to become mobile and disconnect from her social circumstances which brought up this query of extraneous experiences for the study. Mary's had a firm commitment to joining her fiancé in veterinary practice in her home area.

## Chapter 5 Interview 2: “Jane’s Clinic World”

### Life History Chronology

*“... The only profession that I ever wanted to pursue was veterinary medicine. My entire life since I was a child was spent in a veterinary environment. I grew up with my parents who are both veterinarians and owned a veterinary clinic. I always spent my time in the veterinary clinic with my parents and luckily the clinic was located close to home so even as I got older, I could have walked to the clinic” (Jane, 1)*

Jane’s earlier life experiences were associated with both parents being veterinarians and running a family veterinary clinic. This exposure for Jane was very significant in her early ambitions towards becoming a veterinarian. Jane’s early life experiences also included her siblings and schooling. Jane recalled these memories by stating:

*“... As a child, my two brothers and I would spend after school hours and weekends with our parents at the clinic. We did everything there ... we ate, slept, did homework and only went home just in time to prepare for bed. I was always fascinated by the animals that came into the clinic and would always try to complete all my schoolwork so I could assist my parents as they attended to animals that came in. There were also two staff members and other veterinarians that passed through the clinic on a short term basis. I did very well with all of the staff at the clinic” (Jane, 2)*

Jane demonstrated a preference to veterinary medicine by her interest in observing the work that occurred in the clinic. The inquisitive nature of Jane during the period of her early years of the age range five to seven showed that the exposure to the veterinary clinic influenced Jane’s interest at an early age.

Jane responded to my query on her siblings’ involvement in the family’s veterinary clinic by reporting:

*“... My brothers were not particularly interested in being there at the clinic. My eldest brother would always be on his computer in the staff room*

*mainly playing games. My other brother [also older than Jane] would always have a friend's house to go to then we would pick him up on the way home. I even recalled my brothers going for week long stays with our cousins during school holidays as they felt bored being in the clinic. As we all got older, my brothers would stay at home while I would attend to the clinic with my parents" (Jane, 3)*

There was a clear division between Jane and her two brothers; Jane was the only one among the three children that expressed an interest in the family owned and managed veterinary clinic. Jane's two brothers actively sought to be away from the clinic while Jane herself wanted to be involved in the work at the clinic. In terms of Jane parent's involvement in her life at the period of time, she noted:

*"... At the clinic, my father was the main veterinarian and he would also call me in when there was a patient that came in as he knew that I was interested in veterinary medicine and he also knew that I would get upset if he did not inform me when a patient came in. My mother also worked in the clinic, however, she was in grad school so spent a lot of time going to classes in the evenings. My father was the person who showed me everything in the clinic. We did not perform any major surgical procedures at the clinic as those cases were always referred out to a nearby hospital. The clinic also served as a boarding facility for animals left over a period of time and we also responded to house calls from persons requesting veterinary services at their home. One of the other veterinarians who worked in the clinic attended to house calls and I would accompany the vet while my father remained at the clinic" (Jane, 4)*

Jane had a closer connection with her father as he was the main practicing veterinarian in the clinic as opposed to her mother who was pursuing graduate training at a university near to where they lived and where the clinic was located. Jane appreciated the fact that her father encouraged and supported her veterinary ambitions and she felt a special connection with him as she spoke about him fondly. The veterinarians that worked in the family clinic

were also part of Jane's life experiences. In her recollection of the veterinarians, she highlighted that:

*"... They were young veterinarians who were recent graduates and only spent a short time with us before they got a job elsewhere. The veterinarians that came to work with us were mainly females and I looked up to them as I wanted to be a veterinarian just like them ... On reflection, now that you asked me about it that, the majority of veterinarians that I knew through the clinic were females and now being here at S.G.U., almost the entire school are females, so I can see why you are researching this area" (Jane, 5)*

Jane's experience growing up in her family's veterinary clinic also included interactions with mainly young female veterinarians, which formed part of the aspirations for Jane towards her continuing interest in veterinary medicine. Jane recalled modelling herself after the female veterinarians that periodically worked in the clinic when she stated:

*"... I would adopt the very same positions in which the veterinarians [female] would place their clinical tools on their lab coats or on their person" (Jane, 6)*

The influence of the female veterinarians was therefore a significant one for Jane growing up. As Jane continued to grow, she got more involved in school and described her school experiences as follows:

*"... I got more involved with schooling as I got older. I attended the same schools that my brothers did. I particularly enjoyed school as attending classes, meeting my classmates was a lot of fun and I also did well in exams which made me very popular. All through my schooling, up until high school, I spent my days in school and during the evenings and on weekends, I worked with my father in the clinic. When I was in high school, my brothers both left home to pursue their college degrees, and my mother began teaching at a nearby college. On weekends, my mother would assist in the clinic but it was mainly my father who ran the clinic ... with my father*

*working as the main veterinarian in the clinic, it was difficult for him to manage and there was even a point in time when we had not employed any veterinarians like we used to and also had to release one of the staff members. There was a time also when my father and mother began speaking about selling the clinic as the business was slow. My mother started working in a fulltime job and my father was thinking of looking for a job. I remembered that I became immediately sad and told my parents that I wanted to keep the clinic going as I was going to become a veterinarian and wanted to work in our family owned clinic” (Jane, 7)*

The socio-economic changes that occurred in Jane’s life connected to her family owned veterinary clinic served as a period in Jane’s life where she clearly articulated her intentions to train as a veterinarian and work in the family’s clinic. The challenges included her mother working at a nearby college and her father wanting to explore alternate employment opportunities. This point was the first official declaration of Jane’s decision to become a veterinarian, although since Jane was a child and growing up, she wanted to become a veterinarian and this knowledge was also known by her father and other family members. Jane described the decision by her father to place a hold on selling the clinic as an important one for her. Jane shared:

*“... I protested that the clinic was our life and livelihood and where I wanted to return to after I became a veterinarian. My father agreed to hold on to the clinic and my mother would assist on weekends” (Jane, 8)*

Jane completed high school and proceeded to college as she decided to pursue the pathway to become a veterinarian. Jane recalled:

*“... I applied to the same college where my mother taught to pursue my college degree and from the onset, I planned my courses and the programme in preparation for veterinary school. I pursued courses that would lead to a degree in zoology ... one of the best things about doing my degree there was its proximity to the clinic as I was able to continue to work with my father in the clinic. Whenever I did not have classes, I will be*

*in the clinic and I did all of the administrative and technician support services” (Jane, 9)*

Jane, from the time just prior to learning about the economic struggles of the clinic, became driven to assist in any way that she could have to keep the clinic functioning even in light of the clinic’s economic downturn. As a college student, she was able to assume greater roles and responsibilities to assist her father. Jane even scolded her brothers for not assisting at the clinic when time allowed; she stated:

*“... When my eldest brother graduated from college with his degree in Information Technology, he returned home for a while before he got a job. During the time he was at home, I got angry as he would not come in to assist us in the clinic. Even my other brother when we was on a break would spend his time at home with friends ... my father and I managed to keep the operation costs down and at times even had some profit from the clinic in different months of the year” (Jane, 10)*

Jane’s brothers lacked any interest in veterinary medicine although they shared the same experiences of growing up in a veterinary environment. Jane, when asked about her brother’s lack of interest in the veterinary clinic, commented:

*“... I don’t know exactly why my brothers were not interested in the clinic; they just seemed to prefer to do their own things. I was the only one who wanted to be in the clinic with my dad and the other veterinarians ... We never had any pets at home and growing up, the only exposure I had to pets was a little Boston terrier who was abandoned in the clinic by its owners and we kept him as our pet in the clinic until he died while I was in college ... my main reason for wanting to be in the clinic and be a vet was to continue to work in the clinic which I grew up in” (Jane, 11)*

Jane’s connection to the clinic and her commitment to becoming a veterinarian suggest that Jane maintained sentimental value and personal belonging to the clinic. Jane’s position was not shared by her brothers as they had different ideas of what careers they wanted to pursue. I note the sacrifice and efforts on the part of Jane’s father to maintain the activity of

the clinic for Jane as he recognized her desire to maintain the continuity of the clinic which was connected to her choice to pursue veterinary medicine. Jane, in describing the time while at college and working with her father during the period of slow business, shared:

*“... I could not have wanted to become a veterinarian fast enough. All I thought about when I was pursuing my degree was how to get the best scores that will enable me to proceed into vet school as soon as I graduate. College seemed like a long time for me as it took a full four years to complete. In the meantime, my mother proceeded to obtain her doctoral degree and took up a new position in a school of veterinary medicine as a professor. This development meant that our family was earning more but also that my mother being in a vet school placed extra effort for me to get accepted into a veterinary programme” (Jane, 12)*

Jane’s interest to pursue veterinary medicine was influenced by her desire to maintain the family clinic. This influence was sustained over time by her father as he involved Jane in all aspects of the clinic’s work and worked hard to maintain the operations of the clinic even when the financial circumstances were difficult. There was an influence in the form of pressure from Jane’s mother being a professor in a veterinary school; she felt greater expectations for her to pursue veterinary medicine. Somehow, over the years, there was a silent conflict that was occurring between Jane and her mother. Jane felt that her mother did not participate in the clinic as she should have done. When asked about she felt about her mother and her role in the clinic, Jane commented:

*“... I was not surprised that my mother began to teach in a vet school as she was always studying and doing something else even when she was in the clinic” (Jane, 13)*

Jane felt betrayed by her mother’s lack of attention to the clinic while remaining affectionate about her father’s commitment to the clinic. As Jane came to the end of her college degree, there was another change that would occur in her life. Jane shared:

*“... Just as I was about to graduate from college, my father informed me that he was beginning to look for a job with the federal government*



*[United States] as there was openings for veterinarians to join the Department of Agriculture. My father however said that with the job being offered close by, the clinic can remain open on evenings and weekends ... to top off what was a bad situation that became worse, my applications to veterinary schools were not successful. With father in a new job, my mother teaching in a vet school and my two brothers working in different states, I felt that my world was crumbling before me ... everything that I depended on for me to become a veterinarian was changing. I was afraid that the clinic would close and there would be nothing to work for” (Jane, 14)*

The period of time around completing college was a significant challenge to Jane. Jane’s projected pathway from college to veterinary school was not foreseeable and the family’s clinic on which Jane depended was at risk of closing. This period of time coincided with the economic downturn in the US where jobs were being lost and consumers were not spending from the post 2008-2009 years. Both of Jane’s parents were revising their career paths and Jane’s brothers began to live separate lives. These changes, however, were not necessarily only due to the economic downturn in the US but a consequence of Jane’s firm and focused desire and her personal investment made towards becoming a veterinarian and operating the family clinic. Jane’s inability to gain admission immediately into a veterinary school was also disappointing for her.

After returning home from college, Jane continued to work full time in the family clinic although the clinic operations were confined to the evenings and on weekends. Jane stated that:

*“... I had to do something to keep the clinic going as I had the time now. My father gave me full access to do what I wish with the clinic and I began to diversify the clinic’s operations to include animal products such as pet supplies and pet food. I also opened a pet grooming service in an effort to increase business especially during the day when my father was not around to receive patients” (Jane, 15)*

Jane's persistent work on the clinic began to reap some rewards as the clinic began to experience increase business and turned to making a profit. Jane felt proud of her accomplishments and worked even harder to promote the clinic's success.

Jane continued to apply to veterinary schools in the meantime and recalled:

*"... It was a Friday evening after having finished college for about one year, I checked my email and there I saw a message from a veterinary school providing conditional acceptance for me based on a need to wait for the following academic year. This was great news as I finally got accepted into a vet school. I felt a relief as I was worried that I did not make the grades to get accepted"* (Jane, 16)

The acceptance received by Jane was important as while her drive to become a veterinarian remained throughout the period of her life, personal changes and initial rejections of her applications did have her feel that she was not good enough to get accepted into a veterinary school. Interestingly, Jane received two additional acceptances from veterinary schools from the Caribbean including S.G.U. Jane remarked:

*"... Apparently, when I applied to veterinary schools during the year after college, I applied to many schools including those abroad. These schools also had admission offices in the US so it felt like I was applying to US schools. S.G.U.'s acceptance letter interested me and when I looked at the website and saw the beautiful campus and their AVMA [American Veterinary Medical Association] accreditation, I realized that there was a lot of success coming out from the vet school. I spoke with my father about my acceptances and he wanted me to attend a US vet school. However, the vet school in the US that I got accepted into was the same one that my mother worked for and I felt that she may have done something to gain admission for me ... I had to choose. I did not fancy going to the same vet school where my mother worked so I decided to attend S.G.U. ... The people at S.G.U. were really nice as they called me and shared some benefits as they were also providing a partial scholarship for my tuition costs. I was also made aware of a scholars programme which I applied to and received*

*a positive response. I knew about my parents financial struggles over the past few years as they had lost half of their savings when the financial markets crashed and their need to have new better paying jobs so I thought that by accepting the scholarship S.G.U. offered, I would not be a burden to them” (Jane, 17)*

The opportunity for a scholarship provided by S.G.U. and the concurrent financial downturn of the family led Jane to choose to study veterinary medicine at S.G.U. Jane added:

*“... I am now a fifth term student here at S.G.U. and I am enjoying the entire experience. The professors here are great and the island [Grenada] is beautiful. I feel like I had to come here and in any event I will be returning to the US for my clinical fourth year after which I plan to take up the full practice at the clinic” (Jane, 18)*

The drive to become a veterinarian by Jane had its genesis from when Jane was a child, growing up with her father who was a practicing veterinarian. The sentimental connection to the family-owned clinic was also present as Jane made a commitment to continue the work of the clinic by also becoming a veterinarian.

### **Age of choice of Veterinary Medicine**

*“... I made the choice to become a veterinarian when I was a young girl. I think that at my first recall, I wanted to be a veterinarian. Growing up in the family’s vet clinic and with my parents being veterinarians, I wanted to be a veterinarian as well ... If I were to give you a year, I would say that as young as four to five years old was when I wanted to be a veterinarian” (Jane, 19)*

Jane’s life history was one where specific veterinary related experiences such as her parents being veterinarians and growing up in a family-owned clinic intersected to create a *habitus* for Jane. Jane aspired to follow the footsteps of her parents and was influenced by her immediate veterinary environment. The early choice to be a veterinarian I consider to be linked to the habits or *habitus* of her family. However, Jane’s emotional development over time coincided with her admiration of her father and his struggles to maintain the family

owned clinic. Additionally, Jane's attachment to the clinic itself and her desire to maintain the sustainability of the clinic by becoming a veterinarian was an evolved decision on Jane's part that sustained her early decision to become a veterinarian. The influence of Jane's mother was towards academic pursuit and veterinary medicine also represented that for her.

The idea for a young female to become a veterinarian in the case of Jane, was almost an automatic choice initially. The social realities that surround Jane were apparent and clear towards a choice of veterinary medicine. However, there were always other landmarks in life such as the economic threat of the family clinic prior to applying and enrolling into college. The threat to the clinic fuelled Jane's childhood ambitions and personal commitment to herself and her family to pursue veterinary medicine. Based on Jane's life history, the choice of veterinary medicine was made early and was supported and sustained through various life experiences that served as both opportunities and challenges to Jane's choice. This reality also suggests that Jane's choice of veterinary medicine was dependent on roles and influences of different people throughout Jane's life history.

### **Impressions of Veterinarians**

*"... Veterinarians were my heroes growing up and still are today. I can recall being in the back room of the clinic as a child and coming up to see what my father was doing as a patient came into the clinic...My father and mother were my first impression of veterinarians. My mother while being a vet only worked at the clinic when my father was not available. My father on the other hand ran the clinic and covered the majority of cases with veterinarians that were hired over the years ... As a child, I enjoyed the life that we had as we were comfortable in our home and the life we lived. I thought that the veterinary practice gave my family a lot where all my brothers and I attended college without having to take loans. Veterinary medicine provided a lot for my family and only the financial situation in the US challenged the viability of the clinic in recent years" (Jane, 20)*

Jane's impression of veterinary medicine as a child was a positive one. Jane felt that with her parents being veterinarians there was financial security for her family. Jane's main

position as it related to veterinary medicine was its significant contributions to her family on which Jane based her main impressions. Jane further commented:

*“... The veterinarians that came through the clinic were always young and friendly people who I enjoyed having around. I guess being the daughter of the clinic owners helped a lot but they all spent time with me and showed me everything they did. When I shared my interest to be a veterinarian, they would spend the time to explain as much as they can to me in the procedures they performed ... The female veterinarians especially were the ones I looked up to as I saw myself being like them in some years to come. I admired the fact that they were qualified veterinarians but was still regular people who did regular things such as go to the malls, go out to eat and travelled a lot ... There was one particular [female] veterinarian who some people thought I resembled and I was taken for her little sister at times”*

(Jane, 21)

Jane's early impressions of veterinary medicine were also influenced by the young female veterinarians that worked in the clinic with her father. Jane's admiration of these young female veterinarians developed as a result of the manner in which Jane connected to the veterinarians on a personal level. Jane's family-oriented interest and impressions of veterinary medicine were built on by her exchanges with the young veterinarians that worked in the clinic. Jane also began to identify with veterinarians in terms of their social life and the role they played in society. Jane commented on her personal involvement with veterinarians when she stated:

*“... I accompanied my favourite of all the vets [female] who was like a friend to me into the mall close to the clinic where she went with her boyfriend ... and, that was how everyone saw me as a little sister to her”*

(Jane, 22)

Jane's view of veterinarians in the society was one where veterinarians were looked up to and respected. Jane, in her own way of respecting veterinarians, from her parents to those who worked in the clinic, also observed how people treated the veterinarians with gratitude when they looked after their pets. Jane recalled:

*“... It was always nice to hear the great things people said when we treated their animals. Even when we met them elsewhere, all they would talk about was how their pets recovered and were doing well ... this made me feel really good and I felt important to have such an impact on people. There were also times when schoolmates that I knew from school brought their pets to the clinic and I took pleasure in participating in their pet’s care management and ensured that I played a role as well ... The best exchanges we had was during house calls as pet owners were also grateful to see us come to their home and stabilize their pets from injuries and illnesses ... Even when some of the pets did not make it, the owners were still grateful for the work we did” (Jane, 23)*

Jane’s experiences working with the veterinarians in her family’s clinic created a positive view of veterinarians in their interactions with the public. Jane’s responses suggest that the public’s impressions of veterinarians were very important to her and in turn contributed to the positive impressions she held of veterinarians. In fact, Jane’s comments also suggest that in growing up and working closely with veterinarians, she felt in many ways like a veterinarian herself. Jane’s current view and impressions of veterinarians are built from her childhood impressions and informed by her recent experiences at S.G.U.

Jane’s impressions of veterinarians at S.G.U. were recalled as:

*“... Today, I feel that veterinarians are even more important than what I originally thought. Here at S.G.U., veterinarians are involved in so much more than clinical practice ... look at you [myself] for example teaching medical students and being involved in so many activities that are related to human health ... All of the faculty are involved in many things, in the labs, in pest management, in food production, in disease control in addition to clinical veterinary work. I feel that veterinarians are multi-talented people that play a part in several aspects of life beyond the care and management of animals. It is also interesting to know that some of the vet faculty here [S.G.U.] are international experts who have written the text*

*books that we study and publish [scientific] papers that we can read in journals” (Jane, 24)*

I believe that Jane’s impressions of veterinarians from her early childhood, throughout the years and since enrolling at S.G.U. has been a developing progression of admiration and respect which contribute to Jane’s positive impressions of veterinarians.

### **Female Veterinarians as Role Models**

*“... There are several female veterinarians that I have admired throughout my life. My mother now being a professor in a US vet school is someone that I admire. Being here [at S.G.U.] and seeing how the faculty serves as leaders in veterinary medicine, I am very proud to have my mother as a professor as well” (Jane, 25)*

It is interesting to note that Jane in reporting the chronology of her life history and through her reflections and impressions of veterinarians did not feature her mother in a prominent manner. Rather, Jane emphasized her father and some of the female veterinarians that worked in their clinic. I would suggest that only after attending S.G.U. and recognizing the professional status of veterinary faculty that Jane developed an appreciation for her mother as a veterinarian.

The female veterinarians that worked in the clinic were certainly role models for Jane as she mentioned the veterinarians in a positive and admirable context. The female veterinarian who Jane considered like a big sister to her would have served as a main female role model that influenced Jane’s choice of veterinary medicine. Jane had a personal relationship with the identified female veterinarian beyond the clinic which allowed her to experience the social life of a female veterinarian.

Jane also shared the role of her father as a role model by stating:

*“... What I enjoyed the most about my father was how he looked after our family through managing the clinic. I always wanted to be like him and manage the clinic which was why I wanted to become a veterinarian” (Jane, 26)*

Jane made a direct association between a veterinarian in the person of her father and the ability of a veterinarian to earn a living and support a family. This is the quality and characteristics of a veterinarian that Jane identified with the most. Jane also referred to the lifestyle and social experiences of veterinarians when she commented on the relationship with the female veterinarian who was considered as a big sister to her. I gathered that outside of the clinic, school and the family itself, Jane did not have much social experiences even while at college. The opportunity to experience the social life of a veterinarian and particularly that of a female veterinarian would have been another quality that attracted Jane. The public's view of veterinarians through Jane's exchanges showed how positively people viewed veterinarians which combined to establish veterinarians, both her father and mother and other veterinarians as role models.

### **Female Students Academic Record**

*"... I was always a focused student throughout my schooling. I excelled in all my classes and was always in the top list of the class even during my college years" (Jane, 27)*

Jane was successful academically and this may have been due to the early dedication and commitment to become a veterinarian. Jane reported during her school years, she and her brothers would be in the veterinary clinic after school hours and on weekends. Jane noted that she would prepare all school work and do all of her studies at the clinic while only taking a break to see the incoming animals. On the query of male versus female student academic performance, Jane commented:

*"... I also knew of male students who were good students. I don't think that I performed better than they did but we all did well in exams ... I would say that among all students, the females generally do better than males and certainly that is the case here at S.G.U." (Jane, 28)*

Jane identified that while there were male students who also performed very well in her classes, the majority of the top performing students were females. With regards to Jane's academic performance and her admission into veterinary school, she shared:



*“... I was so anxious to get into vet school as soon as I completed college that I did not realize I missed the application cycle [during the final year of her undergraduate training] to immediately enrol in a vet school. Then, when I completed my degree, there was a waiting list which took more time before I was finally accepted into three vet schools. This was all after I applied to every veterinary school that I could think off and searched on the internet. Then the S.G.U. opportunity came out of nowhere as the opportunity to have my tuition fees partially waived was great for me and my family. With S.G.U. also having a long list of US graduates practicing veterinary medicine back in the US, I took up the offer at S.G.U. I am very happy to be here as I love the island [Grenada] and the vet school is like a family where I feel comfortable studying veterinary medicine”*  
(Jane, 29)

There was a waiting period while Jane’s application to veterinary school was processed. Jane reported that her acceptance to the US based vet school where her mother worked was questionable for her in terms of the influence of her mother in her acceptance. However, the opportunity of a partial waiver of tuition at S.G.U. provided Jane with an incentive to enrol there. Furthermore, the ease of obtaining placement into separate veterinary schools demonstrated that Jane’s academic standards were recognized as sufficient for admission into three veterinary schools. When asked about the two year period between completing college and enrolling into S.G.U.’s veterinary school, Jane commented:

*“... It turned out for the best as I was able to commit full time to the clinic where we reduced the cost of operations and I diversified the clinic to co-function as a pet supplies store and a regional distribution point for a pet food company ... I would also imagine that if I did not wait for the two year period, I would not have received the opportunity of the scholarship from S.G.U.”* (Jane, 30)

The two year gap between college and S.G.U. seemed productive for Jane as she was able to support the family’s clinic and receive the opportunity at S.G.U. after applying to all the veterinary schools she searched. Jane’s productivity prior to enrolment at S.G.U.’s

veterinary school was due to her academic success as a student, her responsibilities and involvement in the family clinic and the opportunity of a tuition free scholarship.

## **Barriers and Opportunities for Female Veterinary Students**

*“... In my life, I was fortunate to have many opportunities to support me being here [in veterinary school at S.G.U.]. While I spoke about my father, the clinic and vets that worked there and indeed S.G.U. as my main reasons for being here, I am thinking the whole socio-economic circumstances as you [me] put it was the main factor that drove my interest to pursue vet medicine. Veterinary medicine was the only career that I knew and saw as a child. The clinic was the place where I grew up and everyone that I interacted with was in one way or another connected to the clinic” (Jane, 31)*

After probing Jane throughout the interview, she began to apply my thinking of exploring the socio-economic factors in her life history. Jane’s responses and reflections identified the social exposures of her family and the clinic as her early exposure and the economic challenges of the clinic as a drive for her to do something which included becoming a veterinarian. Jane always considered herself as part of the clinic and as a veterinarian in training throughout her years prior to enrolment into veterinary school. The opportunities for Jane to choose veterinary medicine were her immediate environment including her parents and workers within the clinic who all contributed to the veterinary focus of Jane’s life. Jane’s personal connection to the clinic and her desire to maintain the clinic as a family owned operation provided the influences for Jane’s education and career choices of veterinary medicine.

Jane further remarked on the topic of barriers and opportunities:

*“... The barrier that I could think of was the financial strain my veterinary education would place on my family. My father and mother would have had to enter into loan arrangements to fund the cost of my veterinary education. Every time I applied to veterinary schools, I also enquired about scholarship opportunities. The only other barrier I would say was the initial*

*difficulty in gaining a place at a vet school. However, the wait did not alter my desire and expectation to become a veterinarian” (Jane, 32)*

The scholarship opportunity offered at S.G.U. was a significant one as it addressed directly Jane’s concern about the funding for her education. While Jane still incurs costs associated with partial tuition, travel, accommodation and other costs of daily living, it is a cost that can be managed by her parents. Jane’s barriers of waiting for a placement in a veterinary school occurred in the time frame of applications submitted beyond deadlines for veterinary schools.

It should be noted for reference that the scholarship provided by S.G.U. is a veterinary student mentorship programme where a few students in each entering class would be awarded scholarships. The scholarship is based on entering students’ strong background and work in veterinary medicine which is supported by recommendations from veterinarians. Jane’s academic performance, previous veterinary related experiences and recommendations from veterinarians were factors that led to Jane’s receipt of the mentorship programme scholarship from S.G.U.

### **Knowledge and Experience of Veterinary Medicine**

*“... My knowledge of veterinary medicine certainly influenced my choice to pursue this as my career. Everything about what I knew as a child from the clinic and everything growing up I would say all contributed to my choice ... even after college and working in the clinic was very rewarding for me as I was able to make decisions which I think helped to keep the clinic viable for us [the family]” (Jane, 33)*

Jane, throughout the interview in her several references to her experiences at the clinic, reported on the operations of the clinic, the veterinary services provided and her interactions with other veterinarians and people with their animals. There was, however, minimal reference to the veterinary care aspect of the clinic itself. Even when animal care was discussed, it was in the context of positive feedback from the public and her enjoyment of working with veterinarians. Jane, in my interpretation, displayed knowledge of health care management at the clinic rather than specific veterinary practices and procedures that

are performed in a veterinary clinic. Jane was therefore influenced by the operational and socio-economic experiences of the veterinary clinic which formed a major part of her overall life history.

### **Extraneous Experiences**

Throughout the interview and follow up with Jane on extraneous experiences in her life history that informed her choice of veterinary medicine, Jane referred consistently to her desire to return to the veterinary clinic. The question regarding extraneous experiences that encouraged movement away from the family and social realities did not apply for Jane. Jane remarked specifically to this question:

*“... I have never entertained any ideas about leaving my home state or the US up until the opportunity at S.G.U. came up ... I even sought to attend college close to home so that I can be close to the clinic ... I look forward to returning to the US, completing my veterinary degree and working in the clinic” (Jane, 34)*

Jane’s life history refers to an early and focused determination to be a veterinarian and her socio-economic experiences sustained her early choice to pursue veterinary medicine.

## Chapter 6 Interview 3: “Lone Lucy”

This third student interview was different from the two previous interviews presented in Chapters four and five. This chapter will include a chronology of Lucy’s life experiences including the relevant socio-cultural and environmental contexts. However, Lucy’s life history and chronology of events did not relate to any history of wanting to become a veterinarian. Lucy’s choice of veterinary medicine occurred just prior to her application and enrolment in S.G.U.’s veterinary school. This life history report therefore does not relate specifically to a choice of veterinary medicine. I however applied similar interview questions as I did for previous student interviews in an attempt to determine experiences from Lucy’s life history that eventually led to her choice to pursue veterinary medicine.

### Life History Chronology

*“... I am 26 years old from Minnesota in the US where I lived all my life before coming to Grenada almost three years ago. My family is from just outside St. Paul in an area that is known for dairy farming. My entire family and the entire community is associated one way or another with the dairy farming practices” (Lucy, 1)*

Lucy’s life experience began with her socio-cultural and environmental exposure to dairy farming. Lucy’s early exposure to career ambitions based on her family and other members of the community was centred on working in a large dairy farm operation. Lucy recalled her first set of memories in her childhood days as:

*“... I would periodically visit the farm when my mother took me to meet people who she worked with. My mother worked at the farm, my father and all my relatives worked on the farm. Everyone that we knew and I would meet at our house or when we went shopping all worked on the farm” (Lucy, 2)*

Lucy’s visits to the farm as a child were not remarkable as she did not recall any exposure to animals or veterinarians, which I tried to identify from the interview. Lucy noted that the

farm was a place to visit as a child and only associated the farm with people that she knew who worked there. On my enquiry regarding early memories of animals, Lucy shared:

*"... We had a few animals at our house. My father and brothers mainly tended to some chickens which we used for our own consumption. We also had some dogs over the years but as they kept having pups ... We subsequently gave them away. I did not do anything related to the caring of any of the animals. My two brothers were the ones who looked after the animals at home as they played with the dogs and fed the chickens"*  
(Lucy, 3)

Lucy reported a lack of interest in her childhood days in terms of caring for animals and did not specifically relate any activities as a child with any involvement with animals.

With regards to Lucy's lifestyle as a child, she described:

*"... I enjoyed watching television and reading mainly. We all did our household chores regularly such as cleaning and assisting in the kitchen, but my spare time was occupied with watching television and reading books that we had at home and those that I borrowed from the district library ... I particularly enjoyed viewing the national geographic channel and would even read the national geographic magazines in the library. I would only visit the library once per month or at the most twice per month. When I did go, I would walk with my brothers library cards to borrow books in their names which gave me sufficient books to read before the next visit"*  
(Lucy, 4)

Lucy's interest in the national geographic television channel and publications together with her described passion for reading books suggested an early interest in learning.

When asked about the relationship with her family members, Lucy noted:

*"My father was always at work and whenever he came home, he was always asleep only to get up to return to the farm. My mother also worked long hours on the farm during the week but would generally be at home on weekends. My mother was the*

*one to share my interest in reading as she stacked newspapers from the week to read over the weekend. On weekends, I would also assist my mother in the kitchen as she would cook a lot of food which she would refrigerate for us to reheat and eat during the week. My two brothers were also busy doing things mainly outside the house but when they came into the house; they would occupy the television on cartoon channels which I did not care to see". (Lucy, 5)*

Lucy's relationship with her immediate family suggested that she was very independent in her approach and daily life as a child. The only interactive experience Lucy had applied to her mother and that was limited to the weekends. Lucy, I would suggest, was almost left to her own devices growing up within the confines of the closed and small family and community structure.

As it related to school, Lucy and her brothers attended a nearby school. Lucy described her school experience as:

*"... I was not fond of attending school initially. I enjoyed learning all that I needed to know at home. My brothers and I grew up learning everything from our mother and once we were able to read, we followed a phonic system of classes at home which used both books and the television to present classes... school for me was a distraction as I was learning well at home. Even at school, I immediately became the best student in the class. I was ahead of all students who were in school all along and I even assisted my brothers in their school work with writing essays and working math problems even though they were in a higher grade [class] than I was"*

(Lucy, 6)

Lucy excelled in her school and appeared to be ahead in her competency level compared to her classmates. Lucy's high level of academic achievement is a characteristic which was apparent from early days of school.

During breaks in the school term, Lucy and her brothers began to experience the work on the dairy farm. Lucy noted:

*“... During school breaks, my brothers and I worked on the dairy farm where my parents and relatives worked. For me, working on the farm was a good way to earn some extra cash. Through school, my parents would provide me with a weekly allowance which I would manage to save almost the entire amount. Working on the farm allowed me to save even more and for this I wanted to work on the farm on every opportunity that I got. During the summer breaks in particular, I would manage to save over 2000 dollars [USD]. I learnt about ways in which I can work for longer hours to save more money and did that every chance I got. I particularly enjoyed working in the nursery tending to the calves as the pay rate was higher and I could have worked longer hours as there was always a need for hands to attend to the nursery” (Lucy, 7)*

Lucy's entrepreneurship was evident in her ability to select and perform work that allowed for the greatest income opportunities. This level of financial thinking was prudent as Lucy developed her savings capacity over the years. Lucy's experiences in the dairy farm also highlighted that she saw the farm and her experiences there as a business opportunity rather than attending to a job in the care and management of animals. Lucy's preference of working in the nursery section of the farm was also related to the increased income opportunities present there. The working experience for Lucy was linked to her parent's role as managers in the farm operations as she remarked:

*“... Whenever I worked on the farm, I would take a ride with my dad as he would head to the farm early and we would return late in the evening. His long schedule for each day and over the weekend worked best for me. In fact, working on the farm was made possible for me through my dad as he was a manager of operations at the farm. This made it easier for me to get the schedule of work that I wanted ... but, it also allowed me to appreciate the long and labourious work days that my parents did over the years. The farm work always seemed to go on and there was hardly any down time to be had” (Lucy, 8)*



At the farm, Lucy interacted with her parents and relatives more often than she would away from the farm. Lucy's life and that of her family seemed centred around the farm and the farm was held in high esteem by everyone who worked there, including Lucy. Lucy described the farm as:

*"... It was a private farm which produced and supplied pasteurized milk for the state and I am certain elsewhere in the country. Our family depended on the farm for our income and we had a very good life growing up because of the farm. All of our relatives who worked on the farm also gained their livelihood from the farm. Even at school, most of the other students had parents who worked on the farm as well"* (Lucy, 9)

Lucy, at the time of high school, began to consider a career path as she had an interest to move onto college. Lucy shared:

*"... My parents both went to college and are now managers at the dairy farm. My father went to [university named] and my mother went to [university named] right there in Minnesota. My parents always encouraged my brothers and I to go to college as I decided that I will. My brothers after completing high school decided to go to work on the farm as they were not interested in attending college. I on the other hand continued to study hard all the way through high school and after sitting the SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] received a scholarship to attend [university named] to pursue my undergraduate degree"* (Lucy, 10)

Lucy's choice to pursue higher education at a university was influenced by her parents own experience and encouragement to earn a university degree. Additionally, Lucy's academic performance provided an opportunity to be offered a scholarship. When probed to learn about the choice of her brothers to work on the farm rather than continue onto college, Lucy commented:

*"... My brothers were not exactly high achieving students throughout school and I think like many of my relatives, they just decided to work on the farm full time after high school. Everyone seems to be settled with the*

*idea of going to school, working on the farm, getting married and having a family. That is the story of my family... Even my parents who went to college eventually went back to the farm, got married and had a family”*  
(Lucy, 11)

Lucy separated herself from her brothers by her high academic performance in school and had a different ambition from that of her entire family. This was the first time in Lucy’s life history chronology that I note her as not having the desire and ambition to follow in the footsteps of her parents, family and even her community. When I enquired further on Lucy’s wish to study in college, Lucy admitted that when she applied and received a scholarship with her admission, she was not sure what career path she was preparing for and had no clear idea of what direction of education she wanted to pursue. Lucy recalled:

*“... In my application, I selected business studies as the area of study at [university named] ... I was not familiar with any other area of study and I had some interest in pursuing business when I thought about it”* (Lucy, 12)

Lucy’s selection of business is from her parent’s experience of working in the farm. Earlier, I noted Lucy’s entrepreneurial quality and financial stewardship of her income while growing up. Business, as a projected career path, was a natural consequence of Lucy’s family background and environment. Lucy remarked on her choice of undergraduate study as:

*“... The good thing about [university named] is that in the first year, all students were required to complete a certain set of foundation courses that was applicable to all majors. I pursued courses in statistics and psychology during my first year as I just picked courses to make up the credit requirements for the term as I was not even sure if I really wanted to do a business major ... I remember going to my academic counsellor in the second semester of the first year as I needed to select my major going into second year ... Fortunately, I did well in all my courses as I could have changed my major in business if I wanted to. Eventually I decided to maintain the business major as I did not think much of any other options that were available ... what I did know was that I did not want to return to work in the farm”* (Lucy, 13)

Lucy's apprehension towards her choice of a major at college showed her unsettled position about a career path. What emerged from this portion of the interview was Lucy's decision that she did not want to return to work in the farm where she worked part time. Lucy further added:

*"... During my time at [university named] being an all-female college, and where my mother attended, it was approved for me to study there. I don't think that I would have been allowed to go to college anywhere else for that matter" (Lucy, 14)*

Lucy described her choice of [university named] and her academic and professional ambitions to be limited to expectations from her family to maintain the traditions of her family to work and get married. Lucy added:

*"... When I returned home during breaks in semesters, everyone from my parents, brothers and relatives would share with me their views that I need to marry and have a family. My elder brother was already planning his marriage and my parents began discussing and identifying boys for me to get married to" (Lucy, 15)*

Lucy also shared:

*"... I grew up with everyone being on the farm ... I appreciate what working there has done for my family but working on the farm and getting married to someone was not what I wanted ... If I could have stayed in the dorms at [university named] during breaks I would have done so" (Lucy, 16)*

Lucy protested against the career and personal expectations of her family. This position of Lucy against her family's expectations I consider a significant aspect of Lucy's life experiences throughout her life history and was instructive in the decisions Lucy made towards her career choice eventually. Lucy continued to complete her business degree at [university named] and in her final year of the undergraduate programme, she began to consider her next options after her degree. Lucy recalled:

*“... I would visit the career advisor on a regular basis. My first approach was to obtain a job immediately after completing my degree somewhere out of state. After attending the job fair on campus, there was limited opportunity to obtain jobs in business as this was the time of the economic downturn in the US ... I tried to get a job at [university named] but that was not forthcoming due to no available positions and that in itself was a last resort for me as it was still close to home ... I was thinking that if I leave the state [Minnesota], then I would have less of the family issues to deal with”*  
(Lucy, 17)

Lucy began to identify with a need to relocate from the physical location of her family as she sought to escape the influences and the expectations of marriage and towards having a family. Lucy was driven by her desire to become mobile and admitted:

*“... I even went on-line and sent applications to several countries around the world in various job positions that were advertised ... I would have gone anywhere if I was given a job”* (Lucy, 18)

Lucy's desire to escape her family became clear and one that I probed further. Lucy, I believe, would have had other experiences in her life related to her family that warranted for her to consider these drastic measures to relocate from her family. Lucy began to share that she was very young when she saw her father physically abusing her mother and throughout the years, her parents had a difficult relationship as they were always arguing whenever they were around each other. Lucy shared:

*“... My brothers were caught up with themselves and were oblivious to what was going on. My father and mother I guess just lived in the same house with each other but I never felt comfortable. I wanted to leave home since I was young and said that if I got a chance that I would ... that was why I was saving money and working every break that I had to have sufficient earnings to leave the house as I got older”* (Lucy, 19)

Lucy was emotionally distraught as she shared these particular personal details with me. At this point in time, I gave Lucy the option to discontinue the interview if she wanted and

provided the option to reschedule for another time or whatever will be comfortable for her. Lucy regained her composure and agreed to continue if I had any further questions for her. I then focused my questions for Lucy to explain the circumstances that led to her decision to pursue veterinary medicine.

On Lucy's pathway towards veterinary medicine, she remarked:

*"... I am not quite certain that I want to be a veterinarian as I chose to come to S.G.U. because veterinary medicine seemed the most interesting programme offered here [S.G.U.]" (Lucy, 20)*

Lucy further explained that during one of her several visits to the career advisor at [university named] in her final year, she recalled seeing a brochure of S.G.U. in the office. Lucy shared that she immediately saw the picture of the campus and noted that S.G.U. was in the Caribbean and contained programmes that took several years to complete which would work for her. Lucy recalled:

*"... I spoke with my career advisor about S.G.U. and he [advisor] was shocked that I was thinking about S.G.U. I wanted to learn more and I contacted S.G.U. ... S.G.U. was very prompt to respond to me and I got to learn about their medical and veterinary programmes which were both four years in length. I chose veterinary medicine as the first three years of the programme was held in Grenada followed by a fourth year which could have been completed in countries outside of the US. This was better than the medical programme as after two years, I would have had to return to the US ... I applied to the veterinary programme and in a short space of time received an acceptance letter. Furthermore, I was counselled through the process of receiving federal loans for my study and with my savings that I accumulated over the years, I enrolled into vet school here at S.G.U."*  
(Lucy, 21)

In addition to Lucy currently being a year three student who is preparing to complete her fourth year of training in Australia, Lucy has not returned to the US since first arriving in Grenada immediately after earning her college degree two and a half years ago. Lucy also

has intentions of pursuing a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at S.G.U. after completing her veterinary programme. Lucy reported that she does not have plans of becoming a practicing veterinarian but enjoys studying veterinary medicine.

Lucy's life history for me was a challenging one. While I note that everyone has a unique set of life experiences, I would not have envisaged the experiences of Lucy to be part of my enquiry. However, while I questioned whether Lucy's life experience was relevant to this thesis in the beginning, I recognize that Lucy's choice of veterinary medicine as a female was related to family and social factors that all converged to create a desire to escape her home environment. . Over the course of Lucy's life history, I note Lucy's interest in national geographic and reading to serve as an escape for her as a child. Also, Lucy initially did not wish to be associated with the dairy farm except when she earned money from her involvement. Throughout Lucy's undergraduate life, she was less focused on a career but rather opportunities to delay or remove the possibility of returning home. Lucy's experiences as a female in relation to family expectations for her to get married and raise a family was also part of the determinants for Lucy's decision to relocate. Consequently, Lucy's choice of veterinary medicine is part of her continuing need to secure opportunities to be removed from her home environment. As such, Lucy's choice of veterinary medicine was to not become a veterinarian but to access the international opportunities of veterinary medical education. The socio-cultural factors were prominent as influences for Lucy's choice to pursue veterinary medicine.

At the end of the interview, I had a moment when I wanted to refer Lucy to our student counselling services at S.G.U. but I chose to remain a student researcher and resisted the urge to advise Lucy as a faculty. I do feel that Lucy can benefit from some counselling as she is socially and professionally unsettled but I remain divided on how to proceed.

### **Age of choice of Veterinary Medicine**

From the life history chronology reported by Lucy, her choice to pursue veterinary medical education was an opportunistic one that occurred in the final year of college. At that time, Lucy was 23 years of age. Lucy recalled:

*“... The choice of veterinary medicine for me was only after identifying and learning about the international opportunities that was available at S.G.U. that I could have pursued” (Lucy, 22)*

Lucy further shared:

*“... At that time, I was just about to graduate from college, I was unsuccessful in obtaining a job using my undergraduate qualifications and I did not want to return home” (Lucy, 23)*

This period was also the time when Lucy’s family was expecting her to return home to get married, having identified a person to whom she should get married.

Lucy’s choice to pursue veterinary medicine was to escape her family influences and it occurred at a time when opportunities to have international experiences were made available. The age at which Lucy decided to pursue veterinary medicine was not the usual childhood decision which the literature alludes to and which was noted among other students in this thesis. What is also interesting is that Lucy was exposed to animals, a farm environment and had close family and relatives that worked in a farm but they were not influential in Lucy’s current enrolment as a student of veterinary medicine. In fact, by Lucy’s own words:

*“... I did not consider any particular career growing up as I was just looking for opportunities to leave home ... the first time I was asked to choose a career was in my college applications and even then, my choice of business at that time was not to pursue a business career per se but just to submit an option in my application” (Lucy, 24)*

I believe that while Lucy is currently pursuing veterinary medicine, her career path remains unresolved as she is considering pursuing an MBA degree after her veterinary programme.

## **Impressions of Veterinarians**

*“... My only memory of knowing any veterinarians was when I worked in the dairy farm as a part time worker during school breaks. Especially, when I worked in the nursery, I had to report any suspicions of illness, abnormal*

*behaviour, difficulty breathing, improper gait, abnormal discharges and stool and in appetite [not consuming food] to the veterinarian on the farm ... the veterinarian would attend to the animal but I never paid attention to all the things they did ... I considered them like any other worker on the farm” (Lucy, 25)*

Lucy did not form any particular impressions of veterinarians that she interacted with while working on the farm. When asked about her impressions about veterinarians in general while growing up, Lucy remarked:

*“... I think they were professionals that had an important job to do ... I thought they were more skilled than doctors as they could not speak to their patients” (Lucy, 26)*

This position of veterinarians by Lucy at least suggested that she held a positive impression of veterinarians towards their professional care and management of animals. Lucy is more informed about her impressions of veterinarians today. Lucy was passionate when she shared:

*“... the faculty here [S.G.U.] are all international experts in what they do ... the faculty travel a lot and are always presenting at various conferences their research work ... I am always interested to learn about their international experiences and this is something that I would like to experience myself” (Lucy, 27)*

The international experiences of veterinary faculty at S.G.U. were observed by Lucy which was of interest to Lucy. The veterinary profession does contain opportunities for mobility and diverse international experiences which Lucy was and is in search of. Lucy’s current international perception of veterinary medicine is in line with her personal and professional ambitions which have converged to respond to the personal and social challenges in her home environment growing up.



## Female Veterinarians as Role Models

Lucy noted only when she joined S.G.U. that she first began to be exposed to female veterinarians. Lucy commented on her exposure to female veterinarians by stating:

*"... While I never aspired to be a veterinarian, there were also no female veterinarians that I knew growing up" (Lucy, 28)*

The experience with female veterinarians which are faculty at S.G.U. formed Lucy's views about female veterinarians. Lucy shared:

*"... The majority of my professors are females and especially those that are practicing veterinarians... there are some female faculty that I believe can inspire students as there are times that I find myself wanting to be like them [female faculty at S.G.U.] ... I would say that they can serve as role models for students as I would like to be just like some of them" (Lucy, 29)*

Lucy recognized female veterinarians as role models for students. However, the context used by Lucy was based on the independence and internationalism of the female faculty which Lucy aspired towards for herself and not specific to the faculty as veterinarians. The qualities of veterinarians identified by Lucy was based on her experience at S.G.U. and included:

*"... Female faculty are the majority of clinicians here [at S.G.U.] ... the majority of male faculty are the traditional professors who lecture and conduct research but when it comes to working in the clinic or even with animals, the female faculty are the main clinicians" (Lucy, 30)*

Lucy also observed that female faculty was the ones who went beyond teaching and was always available to meet with students. Lucy noted that:

*"... Female faculty are more approachable than male faculty as they were more willing to talk after class and outside of office hours while there were the specific office hour times male faculty made themselves available ... female faculty seemed more student friendly and would even invite*

*students to their homes which developed a greater relationship with students” (Lucy, 31)*

I would comment that as a male faculty, I would confine my meetings with students to scheduled appointments in my office and would not have contact with students outside of the campus environment. As a male faculty in a school of veterinary medicine with a predominantly female student population, I take extra caution and I would imagine the same for other male colleagues in maintaining a strict professional relationship with students. Lucy however highlighted the active practicing of veterinary medicine and the availability and accessibility of female faculty to be qualities that she also admired.

### **Female Students Academic Record**

*“... At school I always performed well and was a top student wherever I went and also throughout my time here at S.G.U. thus far” (Lucy, 32)*

Lucy reported that in terms of school performance, she was always a top student. Lucy did indicate having an affinity for reading and educational pursuits at an early age. Also, from the interpretation of Lucy’s life history, her experiences that led to seeking relocation required for the savings and academic success to enable Lucy’s desire to leave her home environment. Lucy’s academic success I connect with her interest to seek opportunities outside of her home environment and she recognized her education as an opportunity to do so.

In relation to Lucy’s performance when compared to her male counterparts, Lucy stated:

*“... I was ahead of my class and there were no male students over the years that I can recall performed better than I did. Other female students were also ahead of the males during school, college and now here at S.G.U.”*  
(Lucy, 33)

Female students performing better than males was the experience of Lucy throughout her educational experiences.

Lucy's application and admissions process was a seamless one in her gaining entry at S.G.U. Lucy shared in her life history chronology earlier that she received communication and responses from S.G.U. in a timely and positive manner. Lucy again shared:

*"... I was very impressed with the people in New York [S.G.U.'s admission's office] as they called me and showed a lot of interest in my application ... I received my admission for the pre-vet programme first in around two weeks after sending my application in which I thought was very quick"*

(Lucy, 34)

While the administrative application and process for Lucy to gain entry into the veterinary school at S.G.U. was an efficient one, I am reminded by the overall context of the manner in which Lucy chose to pursue veterinary medicine at S.G.U. The opportunity to travel out of the US and remain away from the home environment was the primary factors that contributed to Lucy's choice.

The life history interview provided a great sense of exploration and revealing the breadth and depth of Lucy's social and historical experiences which somehow always featured in each question that was asked. This socio-cultural context of Lucy's life is evident in interpreting the overall educational and admissions process beyond the reported reality by Lucy.

### **Barriers and Opportunities for Female Veterinary Students**

*"... I would think that with female students performing at a very high level, they will have the qualifications that are necessary to receive admissions into the education programmes of their choice"* (Lucy, 35)

Lucy, suggested that female students that gain admission into educational programmes of their choice were due to their academic successes. Lucy's view provided her with a conclusion that female students performed at a higher academic standard than males which allowed preferential enrolment into veterinary medical education. On the specific note regarding opportunities provided to female students towards their choice of education, Lucy claimed:

*“... I do not think that female students receive any opportunities to pursue higher education but rather their success is based on their high level of achievement” (Lucy, 36)*

Lucy remained consistent in her position that the high level of her academic achievement resulted in her admission into the veterinary programme. On the other question about whether opportunities influenced the choice of veterinary medical education for Lucy, she noted:

*“...As we just discussed, I concede to your [myself] point that the circumstances surrounding my relationship with my family and my interest not to return home can be considered as the opportunity that led me to choose S.G.U. and vet medicine” (Lucy, 37)*

As a follow up query with Lucy, I asked about any barriers to the eventual choice of veterinary medicine to which she responded:

*“... I knew that my family did not want me to pursue anything except to return home from college and do what they wanted for me to do [get married]. My coming here to Grenada was and is a major problem for my family and they disapproved me coming here” (Lucy, 38)*

Lucy's family position about her relocation and study in Grenada was a barrier, but, Lucy, in choosing to come to Grenada, was overcoming a barrier for herself related to not accepting her family's expectations.

As a side note, Lucy described a delay in processing her federal loans application and also said she needed to include her family name and contact in the application form. However, Lucy noted that she also had savings of her own which she used in support of her loan application and doubt that even the family information she included in the application did not matter.

The barriers reported by Lucy suggest her concern about her personal relationship with her family and their lack of support for her to pursue any life outside of the home and community environment. Lucy's desire to pursue relocation was based on her discomfort

over the years growing up and living with her family amidst the domestic abuse and strained relations she observed with her parents as well as family unmatched expectations for her to get married and raise a family.

As I spoke more with Lucy, I learned more about Lucy's current relationship with her family. Lucy noted:

*"... I have not spoken with my parents since I came to Grenada. I have shared a few emails with my eldest brother who has a family of his own with kids and sometimes sends me photos of them ... Apart from that, I have no communication with anyone back home and I am fine with that. I feel just fine being away from there [home] as I am very happy in Grenada and I chose to leave home when I came to Grenada"* (Lucy, 39)

Lucy and her family no longer have any communication apart from the limited exchanges with her brother. My reading from the non-verbal communication body language of Lucy is that she is contented with not having a relationship with her family. Lucy did however express feelings of pain and discomfort when she reflected on her adverse memories about growing up with her parents at home which further explains her decisions to seek external opportunities.

Today, Lucy continues to pursue her veterinary medical education and also seeks additional educational opportunities in Grenada after her veterinary programme. Lucy expects to attend her final year of clinical training in Australia and return to Grenada; she is adamantly and consciously staying away from the US. Lucy to this effect said:

*"... This is why I want to obtain an MBA after the vet degree as I can see myself more in the business of veterinary medicine as a career option for me ... but, if this takes me back to the US, it will have to be outside of Minnesota"* (Lucy, 40)

## **Knowledge and Experience of Veterinary Medicine**

Lucy reported not having any detailed knowledge about veterinary medical practice apart from the time she worked on the dairy farm during school breaks. Even during those times,

Lucy's interaction with veterinarians and veterinary practice was negligible. Due to the nature of Lucy's choice to pursue veterinary medicine to escape the social expectations of her family, the practice of veterinary medicine or knowledge of it would not have factored as a reason for Lucy's choice. With the enrolment of Lucy at S.G.U., she did share some views of veterinary practice but these were after her choice to pursue and enrolment in veterinary medicine. Lucy shared:

*"... I would have thought about how veterinarians worked to heal animals ... while growing up with my brothers rearing chickens at home, when a chicken was ill, it eventually died and we just buried the carcass. When I suspected a young calf as ill, I would refer the calf to the veterinarian on the farm. Now that I am in vet school, I know that veterinarians treat and care for animals in a similar way that doctors do for people ... vet medicine is essentially medicine but just that animals are the patients"* (Lucy, 41)

Lucy's knowledge of veterinary practice only began after her enrolment into veterinary school at S.G.U. This knowledge however occurred after Lucy choice to pursue veterinary medicine.

### **Extraneous Experiences**

The interview conducted with Lucy was the reason why I explored extraneous factors on the need to escape any personal and social circumstances with all students in the study as it emerged as a central reason for Lucy's choice to pursue veterinary medicine. The issue of escaping family influences and the home environment brought the dynamics of family relationships and how through personal struggles, Lucy selected veterinary medicine as a response to her life history. The fact that Lucy was female also played a role in the family dynamics as the expectations to return home, work on the farm and marry may have been a gender specific challenge for Lucy that escalated her choice to seek outside opportunities which veterinary medicine at S.G.U. provided.

Within the context of my enquiry, Lucy's choice of veterinary medicine was an opportunity to gain independence from her family. I also note Lucy's academic success contributed to her admission but the underlying desire to relocate was her main reason to pursue

veterinary medicine at S.G.U. The experiences of Lucy towards her choice of veterinary medicine also suggest that S.G.U. being outside of the US was a critical criterion for her in making her choice. The discussion with Lucy revealed that she chose S.G.U. first and then the veterinary programme which was more applicable for her need to be away from her home environment.

## Chapter 7 Interview 4: “Sanju’s Tale of Two Medicines”

Sanju is an Indian-born student whose family migrated to the US when she was young. Throughout Sanju’s life experiences, the cultural characteristics for her family played an important role in understanding the landmarks events that informed the choice of veterinary medicine.

### Life History Chronology

Sanju was born and grew up in India, in the state of Gujarat. As a child, Sanju used the language of her parents which included Gujarati and Hindi. Sanju noted that her parents also knew English but always spoke Gujarati at home. Sanju recalled her early childhood memories in her home as follows:

*“... My brother, my mother and I would be at home while my father went to work in the day. My father was a doctor who worked in a nearby hospital. Where we lived was where my father was born. We also lived with my grandparents [paternal] who were farmers as they had a coffee plantation. My mother was a stay at home mom and looked after my brother and I. On a regular basis, we would attend the Hindu temple for puja [prayers] where we would meet all of our cousins and other aunts and uncles. At least once per week when my father came home, he would take us for a drive in his car while my grandparents, and my grandfather in particular, would tell us about his life growing up and his stories were about where we visited during the drive. My mother was from Delhi and we would visit her family during Divali [Hindu festival] time. My father would always take vacation during Divali and it was the best time for me as we got to play with our cousins and make decorations for the house. Where my mother’s family lived in Delhi was also a fun place to visit as there were fireworks and lots of people that celebrated Divali” (Sanju, 1)*

Sanju described a traditional Indian and Hindu early childhood experience and shared the structure of her family which included her parents, brother and grandparents who all lived together with the family including close relations to the extended relatives also. There was a



strong family presence in Sanju's life and many activities revolved around religious events. Sanju, as a child, noted her father as a doctor and her grandparents as farmers. When asked about any other professions with which she was familiar as a child, Sanju shared:

*"... My uncle from Gujarat was also a doctor and worked in the same hospital as my father. My mother's family also had uncles and cousins who were doctors in Delhi"* (Sanju, 2)

Medicine was Sanju's main exposure in terms of her family's profession and what Sanju knew growing up. I enquired about what was Sanju's career interest in her early childhood and she stated:

*"... I had no particular interest in any career although everyone in my family always said that they wanted my brother and I to be doctors ... My grandparents would always tell my brother and I when we came home from school that we needed to do our homework and study hard to become doctors"* (Sanju, 3)

Medicine was Sanju's family expectations and it also assumed a central part of the early influence for her. Sanju also shared:

*"... While at home, my mother and grandmother would be mainly in the kitchen. In our yard at home, we grew many vegetables which we used for cooking. I also had a pet dog who we kept in the yard ... he was an old one which my brother had even before I was born and he used to take care of it. But, as I got older, my brother depended on me to feed the dog"* (Sanju, 4)

Sanju's account of her early childhood was very detailed as she fondly remembered her time in India growing up. The pet dog which Sanju took care of was her first experience in animal care. Sanju indicated that back in India, they had no cause to take the dog to a veterinarian. Sanju explained that whenever the dog seemed ill, her grandfather would use a home based remedy. Sanju said:

*“... My grandfather would take the dog to eat some grass when he did not want to eat and when the dog had like bruises and wounds, my grandfather would wash the affected area with kerosene fuel which he took out from the lamps in the house” (Sanju, 5)*

The care for the dog when Sanju was a child occurred without veterinary services so she had no interactions with veterinarians in India.

*“... Everytime there was school, I would always resist going so my father and mother had to take me ... I began to speak English while in school and we learned how to read and write it as well. My grandparents did not know English so I continued to speak Gujarati and Hindi at home” (Sanju, 6)*

Sanju’s background in India made her a multilingual speaker and the intergenerational exchanges that occurred in her family were also noted. Sanju was very fond of all of her family and as she got older also started to enjoy school. Sanju recalled:

*“... I liked to go and play in school with my friends as my brother never played with me ... My father would sit with my brother and I every evening and reviewed our homework. We also read lots of books and got to buy whatever books we wanted to read from the store” (Sanju, 7)*

Sanju received mentorship at home to complement her schooling which reflected the importance her parents and in particular her father placed on education.

*“... There was a time when my father left home for a short period as he had to travel to the US ... I know now that he was going to interview for jobs in the US ... When my father returned home, he would bring us many gifts and I particularly enjoyed the computer he returned with which he set up at home for my brother and I to use ... My brother spent all the time playing games on the computer and I had to fight him to get anytime on it ... Shortly after my father returned from the US, he shared with our family that he was preparing for us to go with him to the US where he would work. My father stopped working in the hospital [in India] and began to pack the things we needed to ship to the US. I remembered the time when*

*we left as we had to say goodbye to all our relatives and my friends at school. I was very sad to leave India but my father promised that we would visit as often as we can ... My cousins and everyone came to our home and spent a few days before we all went to the airport to depart India” (Sanju, 8)*

Sanju and her family migrated to the US as her father began a new job. The migration of Sanju’s family, including her grandparents, to the US was a significant landmark in her life. Once in the US, Sanju and her family settled in Los Angeles, California where they moved into an apartment for a few months and then into a house. As soon as Sanju arrived in the US, she and her brother were also admitted into schools where they began to meet new friends. Sanju recalled:

*“... It was not as difficult as I thought it would be. Los Angeles[LA] reminded me of Delhi and the school I went to was a very nice one. I even met some students at the school who were also from India ... My brother and I eventually settled down to a routine of school and home once again ... my parents were however very strict that we maintained our customs from India so we found a temple [Hindu church] which we attended with my grandparents once per week and there we met several other Indian families that also migrated to the US just like us. Some of the persons even worked with my father in the hospital in LA” (Sanju, 9)*

The migration experience for Sanju’s family was buffered by their ability to maintain some of their Indian traditions. The presence of Sanju’s grandparents also played a major role in her life as she said:

*“... My grandparents were obviously bored being in the US as they had nothing to do there but I spent a lot of time with them. My father worked long hours in his new job so we seldom saw him, my mother looked after the house and with my brother busy doing his own thing, I spent my time with my grandparents” (Sanju, 10)*

The presence and role of Sanju grandparents in her life history was significant as she began to associate her grandparents as the adults in her life. With Sanju's father occupied at work, her mother busy at home and her brother being more independent, she received her guidance as a young teenager from her grandparents. Sanju comically remembered her grandparents saying to her:

*"... You would need to learn to cook and look after house as you will need to do these things when you get married regardless of if you are a doctor ... My grandfather would add that you can only get married to a boy from India". (Sanju, 11)*

After about one year in the US, Sanju's family returned to India when her father took some vacation. Sanju noted that on a yearly basis, when her father was on vacation, they would all return to India. Sanju shared

*"... We would take lots of gifts which we bought for our cousins. It was always nice going back to India but I also remember that it was nice returning to the US as well since we had a life there too" (Sanju, 12)*

Sanju began to identify and accept her life in the US. In the US, Sanju's parents placed a lot of emphasis on her brother's school performance as well as hers. Sanju recalled:

*"... My brother was in high school and my father would scold him if he slacked from maintaining a strict study schedule. While we were invited to parties and other school friend's houses, we had to remain at home and study" (Sanju, 13)*

The pressure for Sanju to study increased as her brother left for college where he stayed in the campus. She explained:

*"... My brother studied pre-medicine as he was expected to move into medical school after ... I also had to follow in my brother's footsteps as during my final year of high school and as a senior, I never attended any school events as I just remained home and studied" (Sanju, 14)*

Sanju's account of her study schedule and the pressure placed on her by her parents highlighted the priority that her family placed on her to become a doctor. Sanju's brother was on track to attend medical school and the same applied to her. Sanju recalled her college time as:

*"... Eventually, I completed high school and received the grades to attend [university named] which was close to where we lived. Unlike my brother who was allowed to live on campus, I had to live at home. My father bought a car for me which I used to drive between campus and home ... My brother at this time had completed his pre-medical programme but had difficulty getting into medical school. My parents were very tense during this time as my father took charge of my brother's applications to medical schools. After not having any success, my father began talking about medical schools in the Caribbean where my brother received an acceptance to attend ... My father and brother travelled here [to Grenada] for him to begin medical school ... From my brother's experience, and not gaining admission into a US medical school, my father added more pressure on me to do well at [university named]" (Sanju, 15)*

Sanju's family focused on education for her and her brother growing up is consistent with the experiences of migrant families from Asia to the US and the United Kingdom. The Asian family by virtue of the extended family structure and close parental and children supervision as observed with Sanju's family associated medicine as a profession of high social esteem. This cultural aspect is linked back to India where Sanju's family was involved in the medical profession so the expectation is for their children to also pursue medicine. If the children are unable to pursue medicine, it is considered a failure on the part of the family. The Indian family, of which Sanju is part, places a lot of value on the medical profession. Sanju's family's behaviour and drive for her brother and herself to pursue medicine is a reflection of their level of career associated esteem with the medical profession. Sanju further added:

*"... My father did not want to return to India for our annual trips unless my brother was in medical school. Only after my brother started S.G.U., we returned to India after two years of not visiting ... when I enrolled into*

*[university named], I did so in the pre-medical programme, however, I did not see myself studying medicine. I was not sure what I wanted to pursue but I know that I did not want to become a doctor” (Sanju, 16)*

Sanju chose to pursue the pre-medical programme at [university named] only out of respect to obey her parents rather than pursue medicine. I explored further why Sanju did not consider medicine in spite of all the influences and pressure from her family and she shared:

*“... I knew that the pre-medical degree was a track to medicine but it is also an undergraduate degree which I could use elsewhere ... My main issue with medicine was that after growing up with my father as a doctor and seeing how hard he worked in India and in the US, and how stressful he always is with his job, I said to myself that I would never want a career like my father ... I see myself getting married and having children and I would not want to be a doctor and have a family as I knew fully well how hard it is having observed my father as a doctor” (Sanju, 17)*

Sanju described her personal objection to becoming a doctor after observing her father’s career. Sanju noted that she had ambitions of a family and did not see medicine as beneficial to her personal ambitions.

An interesting development occurred for Sanju in her third year as a pre-medical student at [university named]. S.G.U. held an open house in Los Angeles, which Sanju attended with her parents, as her brother was attending school there. At the open house, S.G.U. included a presentation on their summer academy which occurred for a two week period during the summer vacation. Sanju’s parents became interested in her attending the summer academy and for the entire family to visit her brother in Grenada. Sanju recalled being very impressed when she saw the campus for the first time. Sanju’s family was able to spend time with her brother who was finishing his second year of his medical programme and was about to leave Grenada. Sanju recalled:

*“... The summer academy was for college students like me who had an interest in medicine as well as veterinary medicine. We were exposed to lectures, labs field trips together as a single group. So I was able to go to*

*the anatomy lab to observe dissections of human cadavers and visit an animal farm on the same day. I was particularly interested in all the sessions that came from the vet school. The activities seemed calmer to me and the facilitators from the vet school were definitely friendlier than those from the med school. I also enjoyed seeing the veterinarians in a small animal hospital and thought to myself that I could see myself doing that. The veterinarians were so nice and we got a chance to talk with them and they all seemed to be happy with their work and spoke about their family and children which inspired me the most” (Sanju, 18)*

Sanju received her first exposure to veterinarians and veterinary medicine at S.G.U.’s summer academy. Sanju initially went to the summer academy to learn more about medicine, however, she was more interested in the veterinary component to the summer academy. Sanju and her family including her brother returned to the US after the summer academy; she returned with an interest in veterinary medicine. It was only after Sanju returned to the US with her family that she began sharing her interest in veterinary medicine which was dismissed by her father. Sanju recalled:

*“... My father scolded me and said that veterinary medicine was no medicine and he did not want his daughter to become a dog doctor”*  
(Sanju, 19)

Sanju described her remaining period in her pre-medical programme at [university named] as a very stressful one. Sanju, in one of her arguments with her father, said:

*“... I compared the salary, professional esteem and standing of medicine and veterinary medicine with veterinary medicine leading medicine in all areas ... My father kept saying that everyone knows that I am supposed to study medicine and here I wanted to be a vet” (Sanju, 20)*

The conflict between Sanju and her father was created by her interest in veterinary medicine which went against the expectations of her family. Sanju’s mother supported her father’s position and her grandparents also maintained that she should study medicine. Sanju shared:

*“I reminded them that we were no longer in India where vets were not very well accepted like how they are in the US” (Sanju, 21)*

Sanju continued in the conflict until just prior to completing her final examinations in her pre-medical programme. During that period, her grandfather passed away. Sanju did describe her grandparents as getting older and she knew they were not as healthy as they were before. The passing of Sanju’s grandfather meant that they all had to return to India with the body to perform all the funeral arrangements. The period of Sanju’s grandfather’s death was also the time when she had to apply for her medical school. Sanju shared with me that she knew she should not delay her applications and she had a private conversation with her father where she told him that she really did not want to become a doctor. Sanju described that she begged her father to allow her to study vet medicine and he agreed and said that he would support her. Sanju got on the internet in India and started to contact S.G.U. about the veterinary school. Sanju also noted that she would obey her father’s decision and she would have pursued medicine in spite of her interest in veterinary medicine. After the funeral service and the rites performed by Sanju’s father were completed, they returned to the US. Sanju said, upon returning to the US:

*“... I received a response from S.G.U. indicating that I would need to complete a one year pre-veterinary training after which I would enter into the veterinary school. My father and my family took it all in and they travelled with me here [to Grenada] where I started my one year pre-veterinary programme. My brother at this time was completing his clinical training at a hospital in New York. I successfully completed the one year pre-vet programme and gained an automatic entry into the vet school” (Sanju, 22)*

Sanju, coming from a pre-medical background, needed to complete undergraduate courses related to veterinary medicine, which she completed successfully in the pre-veterinary programme. Sanju shared:

*“... Since my grandfather passed away, my father became less focused on working long hours and more inclined to visit me in Grenada and he has accepted that I am going to be a veterinarian” (Sanju, 23)*



Sanju added that she would like to become a small animal/companion medicine veterinarian and return to the US to work in a clinic for a short period before having a family and building her own veterinary practice.

Sanju's journey towards selecting veterinary medicine for her career was an interesting dynamic of socio-cultural influences and the clash between her own individual interests and family expectations. Sanju's life history is filled with experiences and opportunities that intersected towards her choice of veterinary medicine as opposed to medicine. Sanju identified her father's work experience as a doctor as not feasible for her own personal ambitions of a family life. Sanju in her choice of veterinary medicine challenged her socio-cultural upbringing which required for a strong conviction and firm resolve on her part for veterinary medicine.

### **Age of choice of Veterinary Medicine**

*"... I first became interested in veterinary medicine when I visited the summer academy at S.G.U." (Sanju, 24)*

Sanju, for her entire life, was influenced by the socio-cultural factors of her family which was focused on a career in medicine. After being exposed to veterinary medicine at the age of 21 years, she began to develop an interest towards it. However, her obedience to her parents dictated that she follow the preference of her father towards medicine. The period in which Sanju made her decision was an interesting one. Sanju and her family used the opportunity of her brother attending medical school at S.G.U. to visit Grenada. The family also decided to enrol Sanju into the summer academy program me at S.G.U., which they learnt about during an open house presentation by S.G.U. at [university named]. Sanju remarked:

*"... I think my parents did not know that S.G.U. had a veterinary school. My father came with my brother when he first enrolled into S.G.U. and we all thought S.G.U. was a medical school. Only when I came to S.G.U. for the summer academy, I met students who were interested in veterinary medicine and the summer academy was a Med/Vet programme incorporating both medicine and veterinary medicine" (Sanju, 25)*

For Sanju's life history up until the point of S.G.U.'s summer academy, the only profession she was familiar with was medicine. However, after Sanju's first exposure to veterinary medicine, she became interested in it. Sanju, however, shared with me:

*"... I would never have gone against the decision of my father as I would have gone along with medicine unless I got his permission to study vet medicine" (Sanju, 26)*

The socio-cultural value system which Sanju was part of dictated that she obeyed the decisions of her father which she accepted although did not agree with. During this period of time, Sanju also stated:

*"... I never wanted to become a doctor as I never liked the way that my father lived as a doctor. When I saw veterinarians and how more relaxed they were, I began to think that I can work with animals as it is easier and that I still would be a doctor, just an animal doctor... in a sense, this was the first career that I was interested in because I never knew anything else besides medicine which I was not interested in ... I am also set to engage someone who my family has arranged for me back in India so I will be getting engaged after my veterinary degree. For me, being married and having a family is always on my mind and I did not want to relive the life that my parents had ... my father only worked and my mother lived a lonely life although she never complained about anything ... I thought I would be able to have a better life as a vet rather than a doctor" (Sanju, 27)*

Sanju's interest in veterinary medicine and her decision to pursue it could only have been made after her father gave permission. Sanju's father did give permission for her to pursue veterinary medicine although the decision was in the period of mourning the death of her grandfather. Sanju then pursued the application process at which time she was 22 years old.

Sanju's view towards veterinary medicine as a family oriented profession emerged out of this interview in a significant way. Sanju's socio-cultural background was such that encouraged her to pursue medicine, which she was on the path toward doing out of respect for her family wishes. But, at the same time, Sanju's socio-cultural tradition was also strong

in the area of promoting family life with her even having an arranged engagement planned. The socio-cultural background of Sanju's life history, therefore, intersected with the influences of her life experiences and resulted in her interest towards family life and her connection with that and veterinary medicine. Sanju father's decision at the point of her grandfather's funeral provided permission to pursue veterinary medicine. Socio-cultural factors were therefore evident in Sanju's choice of veterinary medicine.

A note from the life history chronology reported by Sanju also recognized her interest in female veterinarians at the S.G.U. summer academy. Sanju seemed particularly impressed with the female veterinarians' account of their family life and experiences which supported her desire for a career that allowed for a family life which she associated with veterinary medicine.

### **Impressions of Veterinarians**

Sanju had no impressions of veterinarians as a child and growing up. The impressions that Sanju currently holds are based on her experiences with veterinarians at S.G.U. Sanju commented:

*"... I find veterinarians to be friendly, pleasant and courteous people even more so than any other profession that I know. Doctors are visibly arrogant and proud which I thought was uncomfortable. I find myself to be a very calm, peaceful and friendly person which is what I find with veterinarians. It is almost like if my personality is fit to be a veterinarian .... Here at S.G.U., the veterinarians are intelligent and very competent in what they do. I haven't started doing clinical work just yet but from all the courses that I have completed; they [veterinarians] are all great at lecturing" (Sanju, 28)*

Sanju noted her personal characteristics of interest as being compatible with her observed characteristics of veterinarians. I would suggest that Sanju identified personally with being a veterinarian based on her observations of other veterinarians. Sanju in her description of veterinarians from the summer academy focused little on the veterinary practice aspect. However, Sanju's impressions of veterinarians were based on their personalities and their own family life experiences which she identified with. Sanju would have compared her

experience of doctors and her awareness of veterinarians which formed her impressions. Sanju holds a pleasant and family oriented view of veterinarians in the society which is what she aspired to for her own life and why she chose to become a veterinarian.

### **Female Veterinarians as Role Models**

*“... Dr. X [faculty at S.G.U.] was the person that I first met from the vet school when I attended the summer academy in 2009. Dr. X was in the small animal clinic and demonstrated bandaging of dogs to us. We also got a chance to talk with Dr. X who also shared with us her own family life and stories about her husband and children. I remember that she and her family were going on a vacation after the summer academy and how she spoke about her family with such happiness ... Coming back to S.G.U., I got a chance to meet and talk with Dr. X on a couple of occasions and although she has not taught me just yet, I admire her a lot” (Sanju, 29)*

Sanju since her time at the summer academy recognized one of the female veterinary faculty as a person whose life she looked up to. The qualities of Dr. X as described by Sanju related to Dr X's personal life which caught her attention and still does today. The issue of family life for Sanju in terms of her own family life is important as she intends to get married. The characteristics of Dr. X as a married female veterinarian with an active family life are qualities Sanju admires. With regards to other veterinarians, Sanju also shared that there are many other female veterinarians that are at S.G.U. but was not familiar with them personally. All Sanju knew about other female veterinarians was:

*“... They are all really good at what they do which I also see and want for myself. I am impressed with how they can come in day after day and be so knowledgeable about so many courses that they lecture on. If I was to lecture, I would want to be just like them” (Sanju, 30)*

Sanju also revealed professionalism and proficiency of female veterinarians on faculty at S.G.U. as qualities that she admires. Sanju saw in female veterinarians at S.G.U. role models in whom she can pattern her life. This aspiration on the part of Sanju led to her interest to consider veterinary medicine and maintain her interest as a veterinary student. Also, Sanju's

inspiration was drawn from Dr. X and other female veterinary faculty, I did not consider it related to their work as veterinarians but rather their personalities and lifestyle which interested her away from medicine and towards veterinary medicine.

### **Female Students Academic Record**

*“... As a student growing up, I had to perform well ... back in India, I enjoyed going to school as I learnt a lot and had fun with my friends at school. However, in the US, I was sheltered by my family and with that never had any out of school opportunities. I performed well as all I did was attend classes and studied at home. My parents always wanted me to study and I studied all the time ... I ended up always being in the higher performing percentage of students in school” (Sanju, 31)*

Sanju performed well at school academically and based on her discipline of study and focus on school, she maintained a top placement in school throughout her formative years. Sanju even recalled:

*“... I remembered how surprised and disappointed my pre-medical advisor was when I shared with her my decision to pursue veterinary medicine. My advisor shared with me that I was the top pre-medical student and was certain to get accepted into the medical school I choose to apply to” (Sanju, 32)*

Sanju’s academic performance was therefore of a very high standard coming into the veterinary school at S.G.U. Sanju reported that she always outperformed her male colleagues as her successes outperformed the majority of students. Sanju added:

*“... Certainly, most of the top students in the pre-medical programme were female students and throughout my schooling, even back in India, the girls were always outperforming the boys” (Sanju, 33)*

Sanju suggested that female students perform at a higher level than male students.

The application process for Sanju she noted was an easy one. Sanju after applying to S.G.U.’s veterinary school received a response that she was being considered for a one year pre-

veterinary programme as Sanju did not have any specific undergraduate courses related to veterinary sciences. Sanju shared:

*“... I thought I would have been accepted into the vet school easily but I understood that I did not have some of the pre-requisites that were needed which I received from the pre-veterinary programme. My parents were not that happy as beyond not going to medical school, I was also delayed by a year before I could start vet school. But, I came to Grenada and nothing was difficult for me since then” (Sanju, 34)*

Sanju successfully completed the pre-veterinary programme with a perfect 4.0 GPA [Grade Point Average] and got an automatic admission into S.G.U.’s veterinary programme. Sanju’s application was not a difficult one although the pre-veterinary programme was required because she did not have any prior academic experience in courses related to veterinary medicine. Sanju was a high performer at school and continues her high standard of academic success as a veterinary student.

### **Barriers and Opportunities for Female Veterinary Students**

From Sanju’s life history chronology, the opportunity to attend and participate in the S.G.U. summer academy in 2009 was the genesis of her interest in veterinary medicine. The experience of the summer academy and Sanju’s alignment of veterinary medicine with her personal and family-oriented aspirations were the circumstances that occurred which influenced her interest and decision towards veterinary medicine. Sanju reminded me:

*“... I went to the summer academy with the understanding that I would have gotten some exposure to the school of medicine at S.G.U. where my brother attended. I had no idea about the vet school and that it would interest me but I did get interested and I am glad it did” (Sanju, 35)*

Sanju referred to her father and family as also creating opportunities for her to pursue veterinary medicine. Sanju explained that the same opportunities she had for medicine would have applied to veterinary medicine such as the funding support to pursue higher education. While Sanju’s family opposed her interest in veterinary medicine, the passing of her grandfather and the emotions surrounding the grief created the opportunity for her

father to approve her application to veterinary school at S.G.U. Sanju's father was the main decision maker for her family and she required for her father's approval before she applied. The timing of Sanju's grandfather's death and her application timeline was fortuitous towards her veterinary interest albeit in a time of grief. Sanju even reported:

*"... Only because of the period surrounding my grandfather's death I was able to receive permission to pursue veterinary medicine from my father as I doubt that I would gotten it otherwise"* (Sanju, 36)

The opportunities provided by both the summer academy at S.G.U. and the period of bereavement in the passing of Sanju's grandfather were in contrast to the barrier of socio-cultural expectations of her family towards medicine. The socio-cultural barrier included a strong influence of medicine for Sanju as a child, a structured education pathway to medicine, clear family expectations to become a doctor and the rejection of Sanju's initial interest towards veterinary medicine. The socio-cultural barriers for Sanju were significant ones and kept her from sharing her negative opinions about medicine with her father and family. The socio-cultural barriers were so strong that Sanju was in a direct pathway towards medicine although she did not want to become a doctor. However, without Sanju's father's permission and by extension her family's acceptance, she would not have been in veterinary school today. Therefore, the socio-cultural aspects of Sanju's life in terms of the role of her father's influence in decision making represented a barrier to pursue veterinary medicine. However, the barrier changed to an opportunity due to the experiences of both Sanju and her family.

### **Knowledge and Experience of Veterinary Medicine**

Sanju's familiarity with veterinary medical practice itself is limited to her experiences at S.G.U. Sanju did not relate anything in her life history chronology with regards to any experience and knowledge of veterinary medicine. When reference was made to veterinary medicine and veterinarians, Sanju referred to the personal characteristics of veterinarians and the lifestyle of those in veterinary medicine. In this context, the veterinary profession in terms of a female's ability to balance her career and a full family life was Sanju's perception of veterinary medicine. The family oriented nature of veterinary medicine which Sanju observed was the knowledge that she gained from the summer academy and took with her

towards the decision to pursue veterinary medicine instead of the socio-cultural expectation of medicine.

### **Extraneous Experiences**

The query on extraneous experiences did not apply to Sanju. The socio-cultural context of Sanju's life imposed a pathway towards medicine, but Sanju received support for the alternative of veterinary medicine. This may be interpreted as an extraneous choice and experience, however, with the norms of socio-cultural expectations of the Indian family, the influences for Sanju to pursue medicine is within normal family expectations. I do not identify extraneous experiences that influenced Sanju to choose veterinary medicine as a career option to escape any family or social factors. While being a veterinary student, Sanju maintains her family relationships and has expectations to return home to marry and continue her socio-cultural traditions.

Sanju's life history refers to a strong and consistent effort and expectation for her to pursue medicine. Sanju in her experiences growing up formed impressions of medicine that were not compatible with her aspiration towards family life. In particular, Sanju's observations and silent protest about her father as a doctor reflected her non-interest in medicine. The knowledge of veterinary medicine gained by Sanju during the summer academy provided her with an alternative to the expected pathway of medicine for Sanju. Veterinary medicine was seen by Sanju as a profession that was supportive of strong family relations. The choice of veterinary medicine satisfied the personal expectations for Sanju as she projects to transition from her student life to family life of her own upon completing her veterinary programme.



## Chapter 8 Interview 5: “Miracle on Marie’s Street”

Marie is in term six of the third year of her veterinary programme and the January to May 2013 term when the interview was held was the final one of classes before she proceeded to her fourth year of clinical training. Marie is 28 years old and was born and grew up in Philadelphia in the US. Marie is of African American ethnicity and comes from a single parent home.

### Life History Chronology

*“... I grew up in Philadelphia itself in the old historical district together with my mother and two brothers. My father died when I was a baby and I have no memory of him. My father was shot in an act of violence when he died which caused my mother to leave the west side of Philadelphia to where we now live. I grew up in an apartment building together with my mother and two brothers. My mother when I was a child worked as a housekeeper in a nearby hotel. My two brothers are both older than I am and we lived in a simple way but we are all close” (Marie, 1)*

Marie’s childhood was one that may be considered unfortunate with the tragic death of her father and the struggles of her single mother who managed the family. Marie and her family also grew up in an inner city type environment in an apartment which did not provide the autonomy of their own home and social environment. As part of her early childhood, Marie commented on early school memories when she shared:

*“... My brothers would take me to school where I would spend the day. I alone went to the junior school as my brothers were in middle school. My mother worked every chance she got while we were at school and even when we went to bed at night ... School was enjoyable for me as I liked leaving the small apartment and moving around the large spaces in school. I also enjoyed walking to and from school with my brothers. In school, there were a lot of students but I never spent anytime making friends. My mother would always say to us [Marie and her two brothers] to go to*

*school not for friends but to learn. My brothers also ensured that we returned home immediately after school” (Marie, 2)*

Marie’s account of her early school experience revealed the strict discipline that her mother placed on her and her brothers. Marie also gave some insight into the hard working life of her mother. The socio-economic circumstances that surrounded Marie’s early childhood were considered limiting for her family. The death of Marie’s father may also explain her mother’s strict measures to confine Marie and her brother to the apartment and school. In terms of other social experiences in Marie’s life growing up, she shared:

*“... At least once per month when my mother took a day off over the weekend, we would visit my grandmother [deceased father’s mother] on the west side of Philadelphia where I was born. My mother always shopped at the supermarket near my grandmother as she said it was cheaper than where we live in the city. I always liked visiting my grandmother as she had dogs that I would play with and a yard to run around in. My brothers would visit the nearby garage which was operated by our uncle as they liked working on the vehicles in the shop. We would only spend the day at my grandmother’s house and returned to the city before it got dark in the evening ... I always wanted to have dogs like the ones at my grandmother’s house but no pets were allowed in the apartment where we lived” (Marie, 3)*

Marie, in her recall of the visit to her grandmother’s house, established her exposure to animals by having fond memories of playing with the dogs in the yard. Marie’s early experience with the dogs occurred when Marie was eight to ten years old. Marie also observed the financial frugality of her mother at an early age in her life and she understood it. Marie stated:

*“... My brothers and I never bought anything [at school] as everything that we ate for meals or snacks was what my mother bought for us” (Marie, 4)*

Marie’s understanding of the family’s financial situation was a childhood characteristic that would inform her decision making over the years. Marie stated:

*“... My brothers as they grew up began to work at a nearby deli store at which time I also wanted to work. I was told that I was too young but I got the chance of returning home with the school bus after school by myself as my brothers went to work. In the evenings, I would take the bus home and walked along the block where the apartment building was where we lived. Close to where we lived on the way that I walked from the bus stop to home, there was a vet clinic. I would pass by the vet clinic every evening. I would pass by just to see what types of animals, mainly the dogs that were in the clinic. It became a habit for me to stop in the vet clinic and I even got to know the people who worked there. I got to pet the dogs that were there. Some of them I could not pet as they were bandaged up and some I was told were aggressive so I was not allowed to touch them. One of the persons who worked in the vet clinic also lived in the apartment building where I lived so I got to see the dogs often” (Marie, 5)*

Marie in her first independence of returning home from school by herself, began to explore her immediate neighbourhood environment. Marie, who had an early interest in pets from her grandmother’s house, took a liking to see the pets in the veterinary clinic which she visited on her way home from school. When Marie arrived in the apartment, she would assume responsibilities to clean and perform household chores in time for when her mother and brothers returned home in the evenings. Marie recalled as part of growing up and wanting to assume more responsibilities:

*“... My mother and brothers would usually walk with food from the hotel and the deli where they worked which we ate for dinner ... My brothers also began to learn to drive and I became jealous as everyone was working and earning money except me. I wanted to work as well which I got a chance to do when I was in middle school” (Marie, 6)*

Marie recognized the benefits of working and earning money from her mother and brothers and wanted to financially contribute to her family as well. Marie stated:

*“... I liked that my brothers began paying some of the bills as it reduced the stress on our mother. I also wanted to start to earn to help out as well because she [the mother] worked very hard” (Marie, 7)*

Marie also saw how her brothers helped as she noted that they bought a car after getting their driver’s licenses so that they could have driven to her grandmother’s house instead to having to travel with taxi taking back all the grocery items they bought in the supermarket.

*“... My brothers bought a car from my uncle’s garage and we got to visit people or just drive around on Sundays” (Marie, 8)*

Marie, through the maturation of her brothers, saw the opportunities that were presented by working. An opportunity came up for Marie to work at the veterinary clinic during one of her routine stops after school. Marie recalled:

*“... I was in the clinic just talking with everyone about a new dog that came in. I got a chance to walk the dog a bit and took it back to the cage. Dr. Z [the clinic veterinarian] asked me if I would be interested in a part time job on evenings and Saturdays. I was overjoyed as I was thinking about getting a job and this was perfect as I liked being in the vet clinic anyway. I told my mother about this opportunity and convinced her to come with me to the vet clinic. My mother saw how I knew everyone, what I would be doing and how much I wanted the job. My mother agreed for me to work at the clinic as long as it did not affect my school grades ... I looked forward to leaving school on the evenings and when I got to the vet clinic, I would wear a coat over my clothing which I used for work ... At the clinic, I would walk the dogs, clean their cages, place fresh bedding of paper and also feed the boarded [staying at the clinic but not for veterinary reasons] dogs at times. I would even assist Dr. Z when he asked me to hold a dog and would get supplies for him when he needed as well. There were even times when people would bring cats into the clinic and on rare occasions, birds. It was always a treat to see new animals and everyday seemed different as there was something new to do. I also got paid on Saturdays and that was really*

*nice as I would take the money and give it to my mother which I always enjoyed doing” (Marie, 9)*

Marie, as a young teenager, spoke little about her school activities but rather described her job at the clinic. Also, Marie matched her passion of working in the clinic by sharing her earnings with her mother. Marie, as a part time worker at the clinic, recalled thinking about working as a veterinary technician as she progressed through school, and thought about a career. Marie shared:

*“... Working in the clinic was like a dream come true for me to be around animals. I particularly liked it when Dr. Z asked me to do anything especially in the presence of a pet and its owner. I felt important helping Dr. Z and thought about becoming a veterinary technician after high school”. (Marie, 10)*

I probed why Marie thought about becoming a veterinary technician instead of a veterinarian and she commented:

*“... I never would have thought about being a veterinarian as it would have been something that we could not afford. I never even thought about it as a vet is like a doctor which needed a lot of money to study. I also never thought about going to college as I did not talk about it as that was something that I felt would have stressed my mother as we would never have been able to afford it” (Marie, 11)*

Marie recognized financial barriers that served to restrict her ambitions growing up and considered working as a veterinary technician for her career. Also, around this time, one of Marie’s brother [the eldest] enlisted in the US Army and her other brother was going to do the same. Marie stated:

*“... My brothers saw the military as a career option as it did not require any expenses from my mother and they would be taken care off in the service. Also, I remembered my eldest brother indicating that he would have opportunities to attend college through the military” (Marie, 12)*

Both Marie and her brothers recognized the socio-economic limitations of their family and while Marie's brothers pursued careers in the military, she never considered any ambitious pursuit. The socio-economic reality for Marie was a challenge but also proved to instill personal characteristics in Marie that informed her development.

Marie, while at high school, focused on becoming a veterinary technician and learned from the veterinary technician in the clinic about the steps needed to become one. Marie reported being focused in high school on becoming a vet technician. Marie recalled:

*"... With my brothers off to the military, it was just my mother and I at home. I ensured that I kept my grades up and worked in the clinic as much as I could have to earn as much as I could each week. I was given more responsibilities at the clinic and even received a pay increase from Dr. Z. I was earning around 500 dollars [USD] per month which I gave all to my mother ... There was an evening at the clinic when Dr. Z overheard me talking with the staff at the clinic about being a vet technician. That evening Dr. Z spoke with me at length even while he was attending to animals as I followed him around. I remembered him [Dr. Z] telling me if I liked working in the clinic so much, then why don't I consider becoming a veterinarian. I felt impressed that Dr. Z considered me to the point that he thought I could have been a veterinarian. I told Dr. Z about my financial limitations and difficulty to go to college first and even study veterinary medicine after. Dr. Z shared with me his own experiences and how he worked from coming through a poor family and described the stages he took to become a vet. This was the first time I learned about the steps it took to get to college and then what was required to become a veterinarian" (Marie, 13)*

The intervention by Dr. Z educated Marie about scholarship and funding opportunities that she never knew about before. Marie's family did not have a history of higher education so she was not exposed to different procedures to pursue higher education. This new knowledge positioned Marie to begin thinking about going to college and possibly becoming a veterinarian. Marie stated:

*“... I did not share anything with my mother but I went to school after talking with Dr. Z and spoke with my advisor who said similar things that Dr. Z told me. I began to think that I can do this and if I could go to college and even become a vet, I would be able to take care of my mother and she would not have to work any longer” (Marie, 14)*

Marie learned more about available opportunities to advance to college, and she proceeded to work hard toward her goal. Marie prepared for the college admission tests and started applying to colleges in the area where she lived. Marie applied for part-time programme only, as she wanted to continue to work at Dr. Z’s veterinary clinic. A community college gave Marie the opportunity to earn a degree in business administration, which she accepted. The transition for Marie from identifying veterinary technician as a career she wanted to pursue to enrolling in college was a significant one. Marie received a full scholarship for her tuition fees and was able to maintain her job at the veterinary clinic working with Dr. Z. The influence of Dr. Z to provide Marie with a vision towards college and veterinary medicine combined with Marie’s desire to support her mother and work with animals all intersected to allow her to consider becoming a veterinarian. Marie’s enrolment in college was a significant step towards becoming a veterinarian. Marie described her mother’s reaction to her college admission and interest to become a veterinarian as “quiet”, as her mother continued to work long hours while Marie worked at the clinic during the day and went to classes in the evenings.

At college, Marie was purposeful, as she said:

*“... I knew what I wanted to do and what I needed to do. I had to get the best scores possible so that I could apply to veterinary schools after my degree. I worked hard in my first year of college and earned a perfect 4.0 GPA [Grade Point Average]. In the years to come, I refocused my studies a bit and did courses in sciences based on advice from Dr. Z towards meeting requirements towards applying to vet schools ... Dr. Z even treated me like a vet technician now as I did everything that the vet technician would do and he also increased my salary to a full time worker. I learned more about veterinary medicine at the clinic and the more I learned, the more I wanted*

*to become a veterinarian. Even the owners of animals that came to the clinic would ask me questions which I was able to answer as I became familiar with the work at the clinic” (Marie, 15)*

Marie’s college experience was successful as she performed very well and she was increasing her work responsibilities and competency at the clinic. In terms of the other aspects of her life during this time, Marie shared:

*“... My brothers sold the car when they left for the army so my mother would make less visits to my grandmother. My mother even began to do her shopping at the local supermarket and I would see her being more settled and less concerned about expenses which brought a lot of joy to me. I had no social life other than work and classes. I was never one to be involved with friends and I never had personal relationships like a boyfriend or anything like that”. (Marie, 16)*

Marie and her mother seemed settled in their social environment and was contented with the life they lived.

Upon completing her undergraduate degree, Marie began applying to veterinary school and with each application, requested scholarship opportunities. Marie, in her quest to gain admission into veterinary schools, recognized that she would need to separate from her mother for the first time and her mother would be left alone. Marie said:

*“... I was excited about the prospect of studying vet medicine but did not want to leave my mother alone. Since there was no vet school in the immediate area, I would have to leave. In the meantime I continued to work with Dr. Z and was able to share with my mother, my contribution to our family income to help pay our bills ... I did receive acceptance from one of the vet schools I applied to but I had to decline as I did not get a scholarship and could not afford the fees ... I did not give up pursuing vet school as I continued searching for scholarship opportunities. I did not want my mother to take out a loan as we were not in a position to do so. Plus, if I*



*was in vet school, I would not be able to work with Dr. Z and earn an income” (Marie, 17)*

Marie interestingly gained admission in a veterinary school, but was unable to afford to pay the costs. Marie also did not share the acceptance to a veterinary school with her mother as she did not want to have the conversation regarding payment with her. Dr. Z in the meantime kept encouraging Marie to pursue veterinary medicine. After a while Marie got a job at her college to work as a laboratory assistant, which she accepted, and then went part time at Dr. Z’s veterinary clinic. With two sources of income, Marie was becoming comfortable with her jobs and at the same time, her mother received a promotion to manager of housekeeping at the hotel in which she worked, resulting in an increase in salary. Marie stated:

*“... We were doing well with paying our bills and having savings” (Marie, 18)*

Marie’s decision not to pursue veterinary school applications while working in her two jobs was due to her concern about leaving her mother alone and being comfortable with the income that she was making. For two years after completing her college degree, Marie continued with her two jobs. While working in the lab at her college, a professor who was familiar with Marie’s interest in veterinary medicine gave her a brochure on a veterinary mentorship scholarship programme. Marie shared the scholarship application with Dr. Z who committed to serve as the mentor for the application which was required. Marie recalled:

*“... Dr. Z completed his sections in the application within one day and I had to complete the other parts and attach supporting documents. At that time, I sort of forgot about vet school, but when I saw the criteria for the award of the scholarship, I recognized that I met them all ... I remember waiting for the response while working as I became interested once again” (Marie, 19)*

The opportunity to apply for the scholarship with Dr. Z served to reactivate Marie’s interest in veterinary medicine and it was an opportunity which she received. Marie recounted:

*“... I opened the envelope and there were a lot of documents but on top was a letter with congratulations on being accepted ... My mind went blank as to what happened afterwards but all I know was that I was overjoyed. I told my mother and Dr. Z and everyone at the clinic. I can remember Dr. Z saying that he can now begin to plan his retirement as I would return to work in the clinic as the veterinarian ... Everyone started calling me doc and it was a great feeling” (Marie, 20)*

Marie’s success in gaining the scholarship was joyous but one that was met with the reality that she had to separate from her mother. Additionally, the school that offered the best opportunity for Marie was S.G.U. Marie shared:

*“... S.G.U. was the only school in the list that was also giving me accommodation with the scholarship as others covered only tuition. I communicated with S.G.U. who I spoke with at length and they also provided me with opportunities to work while at S.G.U.... With S.G.U. located in the Caribbean, it was difficult for me but it was the best package so I chose to come here [S.G.U.]” (Marie, 21)*

Marie’s choice of S.G.U. was an opportunity for her to have the least expenses to study veterinary medicine. Together with Dr. Z who was invited to S.G.U. as part of the mentor scholarship programme, Marie travelled to Grenada with her mother for the first air travel trip she ever taken.

Marie is currently identified as the top student in her class, and has received several awards for her academic performance and research work. Marie conducts a significant amount of research with faculty where she receives portions of research grants as a student researcher. Marie has also been sponsored by S.G.U. to attend international conferences to present her work where she has also published two research papers that she has written.

Marie noted:

*“... To maintain my scholarship, I have to achieve high scores throughout vet school and conduct research as well. I also work as a tutor for students in the lower terms and get paid for that. I particularly enjoy doing research*

*as it has given me opportunities to travel and experience different countries like Thailand and Australia. Because we were poor growing up, coming to Grenada with my mother was our first opportunity to travel. I plan on continuing to do research once I graduate and will want my mother to retire and join me in travelling” (Marie, 22)*

Marie now seems focused on international opportunities for travel instead of the clinical care of animals. Marie had an early interest in pet animals and overcame significant socio-economic barriers to pursue veterinary medicine. The influence of working in the veterinary clinic with Dr. Z was critical towards allowing Marie to consider and experience veterinary medicine for her career. Marie’s choice of veterinary medicine and S.G.U. was tempered by her separation from her mother, but one that was overcome through her scholarship, research, travel experiences and desire to support her mother when she starts working as a veterinarian.

Marie’s life history is connected to socio-economic realities to seek upward mobility through education. The limiting financial circumstances growing up for Marie however promoted a mature and financially disciplined person who worked hard, sought and received opportunities to emerge as a veterinary student today. The life history of Marie is an inspiring one for me as I interviewed her and report on her experiences.

### **Age for choice of Veterinary Medicine**

*“... I realized I was interested in veterinary medicine when I was in high school after talking with Dr. Z about his experiences in becoming a veterinarian. At that time, I was around 16 years old and was thinking about being a vet technician. It was only after talking with Dr. Z, I started to think about being a veterinarian” (Marie, 23)*

Marie’s thoughts suggested that she considered becoming a veterinarian only after learning about the steps to be taken and getting support and encouragement from Dr. Z. I however would propose that Marie, based on her socio-economic reality, did not seek to become a veterinarian although she may have wanted to become one but the issue of affording to study veterinary medicine was a concern. Within the limits of Marie’s financial capability,

she still considered becoming a veterinary technician. Marie also had an early liking for pets as she appreciated visiting her grandmother and the neighbourhood veterinary clinic to play with pets. Marie's early interest in animals together with her work and experience in the veterinary clinic all led to an aspiration to first become a veterinary technician then a veterinarian. Marie mentioned when asked if she would have considered being a veterinarian if she had the ability to pay to study veterinary medicine when she shared:

*"... I first went to the clinic just to see the dogs on my way home from school. It was a nice break for me as I enjoyed dogs. When I got to know Dr. Z, I will admit that I may have wanted to be a vet myself but I never thought that was possible so I did not decide that" (Marie, 24)*

Marie, early in her experience with veterinary medicine, admitted that she may have chosen to become a veterinarian if she knew about the opportunities to fund the education although not being able to afford the cost of study. The career of a veterinarian was one that Marie considered to be out of reach so she did not aspire to become one. However, had socio-economic realities been different, Marie may have considered being a veterinarian earlier in life. Marie's gravitation towards veterinary medicine I would not consider as an early interest because her decision to pursue veterinary medicine was only decided upon after realizing that a veterinary career may be possible in spite of her socio-economic realities.

## **Impressions of Veterinarians**

Marie's first impression of a veterinarian was based on her experiences with Dr. Z and the veterinary clinic. Marie shared:

*"... Dr. Z was a very kind man and he had a soft spot for me. I think my neighbour who worked in the clinic would have told the staff about my family situation as everyone was always so nice to me. Dr. Z always took an interest in my schooling and was sure to give me opportunities to work and earn more money in the clinic as I grew older. For Christmas and my birthdays, Dr. Z would give me extra money and I felt looking back that he was like a father figure to me" (Marie, 25)*

Marie's impressions of veterinarians as a child were represented by her experiences with Dr. Z. Marie shared a special relationship with Dr. Z which was a personal one. Marie stated:

*"... He [Dr. Z] was good at what he did. There were times when an aggressive dog came into the clinic and not even the owner could have controlled the dog. Dr. Z would come in and immediately handle and manage the dog. Dr. Z was also a very much liked person as people would always stop by to say hello and the clinic was a place where people would talk about everything. I would always listen to what was being said and learned a lot from what Dr. Z told me"* (Marie, 26)

Marie's experience with Dr. Z demonstrated him to be a kind and generous person who she looked up to. Marie also noted that Dr. Z was a respected and liked person and these formed the first impressions she held towards Dr. Z and him being a veterinarian. Marie remarked:

*"... I did not think that I could have become a veterinarian as it seemed difficult to achieve. Apart from the need to afford it [study of veterinary medicine], it required intelligent people to study it. I think veterinarians are intelligent people who have the best job in the world as they get to work with animals and people, be able to travel all over the world and make a lot of money which is why I look forward to graduating"* (Marie, 27)

Marie associated veterinarians with being esteemed members of society. Marie's impressions today of veterinarians are what she wants for herself which includes the esteem of the profession with the benefits of a good paying job with opportunities to travel.

### **Female Veterinarians as Role Models**

*"... There are many female faculty at S.G.U. that I look up to. They are well dressed, have nice cars and I am sure live in some nice houses here [in Grenada]. Plus, every time I hear about them, they are always attending international meetings and travelling a lot"* (Marie, 28)

Marie identified with female faculty at S.G.U. whose lifestyle she described as attractive to her. In Marie's description of female S.G.U. faculty, she notes some of the life characteristics of female veterinary faculty as qualities of veterinarians that she aspires to have. Marie notably in her recall and discussions, rarely identified the professional qualities of veterinarians associated with the practice of veterinary medicine. I believe that one of the main factors influencing Marie today is the opportunities for upward socio-economic mobility, which she observed as the life of female veterinary faculty. The understanding about the lives of female veterinarians by Marie is what she admires the most. The socio-economic focus of Marie is understandable as through her experiences growing up with her mother and two brothers, she recognized the challenges they faced as a family and views the opportunities of a career in veterinary medicine as a better life for her and her family.

### **Female Students Academic Record**

*"... I was a disciplined student as my mother had my brothers and I focused on school at an early age. I was not however a high performing student growing up. Even until high school, I was maybe about an average performer. Other students performed better than I did and even male students too" (Marie, 29)*

Marie reported her early schooling experiences leading up to her high school as average. Marie however indicated her focus started in high school after learning about veterinary medicine from Dr. Z. Marie shared:

*"... Up until when I decided to pursue college and consider veterinary medicine, I did not require having a high standard of performance as I thought I would have become a veterinary technician which was more of a vocational training. At that time I received passes in everything I did but I only worked to pass my classes. Since I got interested in veterinary medicine and thought about college, I changed my focus and started achieving high scores in high school, throughout college and now here at S.G.U." (Marie, 30)*

Marie's standard of her school work changed to that of performing at a higher level of success after deciding to pursue veterinary medicine. This change on Marie's part was in response to her pursuit to become a veterinarian. The decision to become a veterinarian was accompanied by a change in Marie's attitude towards school work and she excelled academically. Marie's decision to pursue veterinary medicine was an influence to improve her school performance and meet the requirements to progress through the steps to admission into a veterinary school.

Marie reported on the period of application that her acceptance and scholarship opportunities formed a pleasant admission experience into S.G.U.'s veterinary school. Socio-economic factors played a role in delaying Marie's admission after her first period of applications to veterinary schools was challenging due to the inability to afford the tuition costs. This period of working and earning income was followed by a loss of focus in veterinary medicine. Then, the scholarship opportunity of the veterinary mentor scholars programme provided the needed financial support for Marie to be enrolled into S.G.U.'s veterinary school. The socio-economic factors led to Marie having a challenging application and admissions experience but not due to academic performance.

### **Barriers and Opportunities for Female Veterinary Students**

*"... Dr. Z was my opportunity to decide to pursue veterinary medicine. It was because of him that I thought beyond becoming a veterinary technician and started to think about being a veterinarian" (Marie, 31)*

Marie identified Dr. Z as the opportunity which influenced her decision to pursue veterinary medicine. Dr. Z's life experiences provided an example and the knowledge for Marie to pursue a path towards becoming a veterinarian. The socio-economic limitations of Marie and her family may have served as a barrier as she did not aspire toward veterinary medicine growing up and was not able to accept her first admission offer into veterinary school which required for her to pay. However, the socio-economic reality for Marie and her family I consider also as an opportunity while being a barrier in different ways. Marie's socio-economic situation was the same realities that allowed her to want to improve and drive her decisions and accept opportunities for upward social and economic mobility. Marie's choice of veterinary medicine represented the opportunity for social and economic

improvement. The role of Dr. Z and the mentor scholarship programme I view as resulting opportunities from Marie's drive and persistence.

When asked about opportunities specific to females, Marie also referred to Dr. Z when she said:

*"... Dr. Z would say on different occasions that I was like the daughter he never had as he had two sons with his wife who were all married and living separate lives. I would frequently visit Dr. Z's house as he would take me there for dinner and I felt comfortable around Dr. Z and his family"* (Marie, 32)

The relationship between Dr. Z and Marie was one that only she as a female could have experienced and she recognized that. Marie as a female specifically was able to experience a relationship where she was viewed as a daughter to Dr. Z and benefitted from the personal experiences because she was a female.

### **Knowledge and Experience of Veterinary Medicine**

Marie's knowledge of veterinary medicine did influence her decision to pursue it. However, during the life history interview, Marie made minimal reference to the clinical practice of veterinary work but rather to the aspects of the lives of veterinarians that she identified with. Marie's knowledge about veterinary practice was significant, but her focus was on the characteristics of life as a veterinarian.

The particular characteristics of the lives of veterinarians that Marie admired were the affordability to live a quality of life that she aspired towards. Marie in her observations of Dr. Z said:

*"... I always saw how Dr. Z would help so many people out as over the years of working in the clinic, people would always depend on Dr. Z to loan money and in his kind and generous ways, he would help people as he did for me. I always thought that Dr. Z as a veterinarian could afford to help so many people... Dr. Z also lived a nice life as he had a huge house and a nice car"* (Marie, 33)



Marie reflected on the financial capacity of Dr. Z to help people and live a good quality of life for himself and his family.

Dr. Z, as Marie's first employer, provided her with an income for many years of her life. Marie had a financial dependence on Dr. Z which would have also contributed to her recognizing a veterinarian as having the ability to earn sufficient money to also support several people. Marie's earlier reference to the lifestyle of veterinary faculty at S.G.U. also highlighted that the socio-economic characteristics associated with veterinary medicine was an attraction for her. The financial opportunities that veterinary medicine can provide were the main aspect of veterinary medicine that contributed to Marie's decision to pursue its study.

### **Extraneous Experiences**

Marie's choice to pursue veterinary medicine was not associated with any extraneous circumstances. Marie's desire to earn and gain a higher socio-economic standing she identified with veterinary medicine and not a need to escape any social realities. In fact, Marie's brothers are in their military bases and she intends for her mother to join her when she graduates and begins to work. There is a very close bond between Marie and her mother, especially because of her upbringing by her mother.

I found Marie's life history to be an inspiring one. Marie overcame significant socio-economic barriers to her ambitions and education choices to now be on track to graduate as a veterinarian. The socio-economic background and experiences of Marie served as a major influence in her eventual choice to pursue veterinary medicine with a firm and passionate determination to improve the quality of life for her and her mother.

## Chapter 9 Interview 6: “The Life and Times of Anne”

Anne is from the state of New Jersey in the US and is currently in her second year in the veterinary programme and has been in Grenada for three years. Anne is 27 years old and her family includes her two parents and two siblings. Anne’s family from her grandparents (maternal and paternal) was migrants from Italy and has a strong Italian American culture with very strong family bonds.

### Life History Chronology

*“... As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a vet. I grew up thinking that I would become a vet and now I am in vet school” (Anne, 1)*

Anne described veterinary medicine as her childhood aspiration and one that persisted throughout her life. The early decision made by Anne was reflected by her memory of the following:

*“... Each Sunday, my family would visit different relatives as we all alternated among the various houses where we would have Sunday lunch and spend the Sunday afternoon together. Although my entire family is in the business and banking sectors, even as a child they would refer to me as the vet in the family. I would be occupied wherever we went with pets and I groomed and attended to dogs wherever we went. I had dogs growing up and although they all belonged to the family; everyone knew they were my dogs” (Anne, 2)*

Anne explained that her family associated her with being a veterinarian when she was about five years old. Anne, in her demeanour around dogs, also demonstrated elements of care for dogs beyond the regular playing with dogs. Anne was familiar with grooming her dogs and even clothed them. Anne’s interactions with dogs at her home and that of her relatives was an early exposure towards her childhood choice to become a veterinarian. Anne also described her family as having careers in business and finance; a path she did not take. Anne’s family career nature in business was not one that served as an influence for her.

Anne's early experiences also included exposure to veterinarians who attended to her dogs at home. Anne shared:

*"... My mother kept dates on the calendar when we needed to call the vet to give our dogs their routine shots and check-ups. The vets would come home to attend to the dogs and I was always at home as I wanted to see what they did. I was the only one that could have spoken to the vets about the dogs as I was the one who looked after them. The vets when they came home would have me lead each dog to have their check-up. When it was time to get their shots, I had to hold them to distract from the needle. The vets spent a lot of time when they came home and I even told them that I would be a vet just like them when I grow up"* (Anne, 3)

Anne's exposure to the veterinarians that visited her home was an important part of her early experience. Anne noted that she always wanted to take care of her dogs but it was only from knowing about veterinarians and what they do that she got the idea to want to be a veterinarian herself.

Anne's early decision to be a veterinarian was linked primarily with her experience and knowledge of veterinarians that attended to her dogs. Anne's early attention to her dogs and other pets of relatives was a genuine affection for animals. This affection for animals and her aspiration to become an "animal doctor", as she said in the interview, were the early factors that promoted her decision to become a veterinarian. Anne also shared that her family would give her gifts that were related to being a veterinarian such as a veterinary tool kit and dolls and toys of veterinarians. Anne's family all knew that she wanted to become a veterinarian as she shared:

*"... Even for Christmas, I would also receive t-shirts with words printed like young vet, future vet which I kept with me and still have them stored somewhere home".* (Anne, 4)

Anne at an early age described a strong influence by her family for her becoming a veterinarian. Anne's strong family encouragement and support were also important reasons for her to maintain her interest to become a veterinarian.

School life for Anne was an uneventful one growing up. Anne indicated that she attended a private school where she met other students with whom she made friends. The classes in school were part of Anne's routine as she shared:

*"... I don't think that I learned anything from school as all we did was to play in groups and had activities like swimming, tennis ... the best part of school for me was the turtles, rabbits and fish that our classroom had ... I got the chance to feed them when I was in class and I was the only one that took care of them from among the students in my class ... I cried when they died and got concerned when they looked ill ... I remember even trying to get the school to call the vet when they were ill but no one ever call the vet and they died ... And, I said to myself that is why I would be a vet so that I can save all the animals that I know" (Anne, 5)*

Anne's recall of her early school experience was linked to her tragic memories of animals that were kept by the school that often died. These experiences would have served to reaffirm Anne's interest to become a veterinarian as she wished she could have done something to save the animals. The connection Anne made with sick animals and calling a veterinarian became a natural one for her. Anne also reported another tragic experience with an ill pet when the eldest of her pet dogs had to undergo surgery after a long period of bone cancer. Anne recalled:

*"... Bobby was a bob-tailed doberman pinscher who I had all my life ... For months, Bobby was getting ill and had frequent visits by the vets ... Bobby was diagnosed with a bone cancer and a decision was made to amputate the back left leg ... We all went with Bobby to the vet hospital and I stayed there for some time. I saw Bobby after surgery and would visit him regularly before he was able to return home ... I was upset that the vets had to amputate the leg as I wanted them to treat the cancer and not remove the leg. I remembered telling the vets in anger that I would be vet and I would be able to treat bone cancer instead to removing the leg of a dog" (Anne, 6)*

Anne described the experience of her dog's amputation as a tragic one. The experience exposed Anne's resolve and commitment to become a veterinarian as she spoke in a manner that she would become a veterinarian. Anne further explained:

*"... Bobby was never the same after the amputation and although I know differently now that what we did for Bobby was the best for him, after months of struggling from not eating and moving around and constant visits by the vets, Bobby was eventually euthanized. I did not understand at the time what that was about and I became very angry with the vets and my family and I let them know that I thought they killed Bobby ... I really wanted to become a vet then as I began to be upset with the way Bobby died"* (Anne, 7)

Anne experience with the death of her dog was another experience that supported her continued desire to become a veterinarian. Anne's real life experiences growing up with veterinarians were a mixture of both pleasant and tragic outcomes but regardless of the outcome, her commitment to become a veterinarian remained.

As Anne grew up, she began to attend middle and high school. During this time, she became more independent. Anne's father was a real estate executive, her mother an insurance agent who also worked with her father. Anne's two brothers had graduated from college and were working in banking institutions and living in New York City. Anne continued to be enrolled in private schools throughout high school. For Anne's sixteenth birthday, she received a pet dog as a gift from her parents as she remembered:

*"... Princess was my puppy and the first dog I received for my own. My other dogs we all part of the family and they were all getting older. Princess was the one who slept with me and I trained her to do everything. Princess would be there to greet me after school and we spent all the time together. We had a housekeeper who looked after our home with my brothers in New York City and parents busy at work. I was left to my own devices. As I grew up we also spent less time with our relatives as much of my other cousins were also grown up, some even married and living their own lives"* (Anne, 8)

The aging pets in Anne's home were having difficulty in movement and other illnesses. One of the dogs was getting blind and the two others began to experience significant weight loss and lack of mobility. But, being old dogs, and with Anne being more mature from the time of her pet Bobby and his tragic death, the family eventually euthanized the dogs. Anne commented:

*"... This time it was not as difficult for me as I was older and I saw the discomfort. But, it still pained me and I knew that I would not euthanize animals when I become a vet" (Anne, 9)*

The illness of Anne's dogs served as reminder for her on issues of animal care as a projected veterinarian and she even formed strong opinions about euthanasia which is a part of veterinary practice. Anne with her new pet, Princess, being the only animal around bonded even more. Princess represented a new opportunity for Anne to care for a pet which may have been the reason why she received Princess from her parents.

Anne, commenting on her high school social experiences, shared:

*"... As I was in high school, I started having friends over at my house and throughout high school, I had a couple of boyfriends who I would spend time with. However, a condition for me to have a boyfriend was for Princess to like the guy otherwise there was no way I was dating that person" (Anne, 10)*

Anne and her relationship with Princess went beyond the human-animal pet relationship as Princess personified a person, maybe family or friend to her who she had human like social interactions with. During high school, Anne recalled having to go through career guidance seminars and appointment with counselors. Anne shared:

*"... There was never any mention of veterinary medicine as a career option and I knew more about being a veterinarian than what the counsellor in my school told me about. I knew that I needed to attend college and from there enter into a veterinary school" (Anne, 11)*

Anne, through her lifelong decision and vision to become a veterinarian, was knowledgeable in what she needed to do to accomplish this. Anne began college in upstate New York and had to relocate from her family home in New Jersey. Anne recalled:

*“... I was excited to go to college as I was always at home which was no fun. At college, I lived off campus as I was not allowed to have pets in the dorm and there was no way that I was leaving Princess at home [New Jersey]. I wanted Princess to be with me and I got a nice apartment just outside of the campus. I lived there for my entire college life and my parents visited me to see the place and would also mail me packages from home with things that I would use” (Anne, 12)*

Anne’s relationship with Princess was an inseparable one as she relocated to college with her pet dog. Anne attended a private college and her parents provided the funding to pay the fees. Anne was from an upper class family which provided the necessary finances to support her education. At college, Anne was not focused on her study, and reported even failing classes. Additionally, she was uncertain of what major she should pursue. Anne’s college experience was not a very productive one as she reported:

*“... College was a major disaster for me as I partied all the time and even missed a lot of classes which I failed. I tried to avoid harder courses and chose courses that my friends were taking. At the end of the first year, my advisor said that I needed to take more science courses which I did not do particularly well in either. I know I needed certain classes to apply to veterinary school and I took them but did not do well. I also found it difficult to leave Princess alone in the apartment for a long period and opted out of attending classes many times. I also had a boyfriend who I met in college and we were spending a lot of time together so my degree took a nose dive” (Anne 13)*

Anne’s college experience was not a productive one as she was not focused on her classes and suffered academically. Anne’s lack of class attendance and her party lifestyle would have distracted her focus on her study. The overall college experience was a difficult one for Anne as she struggled to complete the requirement of her degree programme. After Anne

eventually graduated one year after the four year length of the college programme she had difficulty in gaining a placement in a veterinary school. Anne returned to her family home in New Jersey and remained there while attempting to apply to veterinary schools. Anne recalled:

*“... My parents were embarrassed by my inability to get admitted into a veterinary school as all of my relatives knew that I wanted to be a vet and my parents had to make up excuses for me as to why I was delayed in finishing my undergraduate degree and was at home and not moving on to a vet school ... I applied everywhere and always received the same rejection letter. I was depressed and frustrated with not even Princess being able to help console me” (Anne, 14)*

Anne’s family with their strong connection to other relatives expressed their embarrassment at her lack of academic success and subsequent failure to gain admission into a veterinary school. This family’s position together with Anne’s unsuccessful applications resulted in a stressful period for her. I am of the view that with Anne spending her entire education at private institutions and her enrolment and promotion based on meeting financial payments provided a false sense of academic success for her and her family. Anne’s applications to veterinary schools was the first time she was judged by performance rather than her and her parents ability to fund her education. The resulting difficulty was Anne spending two years at home after college without any productivity towards attaining admission into a veterinary school.

While at home, Anne remembered attending an open house session hosted by S.G.U. which featured the veterinary school. Anne recalled her exchanges with S.G.U. as:

*“... I told the persons there about my predicament as I want to pursue veterinary medicine which I wanted all my life but due to poor grades, I was being rejected. The folks from S.G.U. were really nice and gave me materials about their vet school and encouraged me to apply. The representatives said that they would look beyond my GPA as I also have qualities that they thought I could use in my application essays. I even got a chance to speak with graduates who were there and they all shared with*



*me the great experiences they had at S.G.U. I returned home and reviewed the vet programme at S.G.U., did my research online and had several phone calls with their admissions office. I even visited their [S.G.U.] office in New York as I saw S.G.U. as an opportunity. The school seemed pretty amazing as I learnt about it and I decided to apply... I received a call from an admissions person at S.G.U. who spoke with me about my application on the phone. The person shared with me that my application to the vet school would not go through but they offered me an opportunity to complete a one-year pre-veterinary programme and gave me a grade stipulation to achieve in order to be considered for a place in the vet school. I immediately agreed on the phone and within a few days, received a letter for the pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. Together with my parents who supported paying for the programme, we travelled to Grenada” (Anne, 15)*

The opportunity for Anne to learn about S.G.U. and to receive a pathway through a pre-veterinary programme towards a potential placement in a school of veterinary medicine was a significant development. Anne began her pre-veterinary programme in a very determined and driven manner. Anne said:

*“... I realized that the pre-vet programme was my one and only chance to get into vet school and I studied very hard. This time around, I stayed in a dorm on campus and did not walk with Princess, I went to all my classes and all I did was study. At the end of the year, I earned a 3.8 GPA which was above the requirement to gain a place in the vet school which was the happiest time in my life”. (Anne, 16)*

Anne, after receiving an opportunity to gain admission into the veterinary school at S.G.U. and learning from her previous experiences what was necessary to gain admission, performed at a high level in order to earn above the grade requirement that was set for the pre-veterinary programme. Anne also noted:

*“... I think I worked harder than I ever did in my life in the pre-vet programme and it was my greatest accomplishment in school as I got A*

*grades in all my courses with the exception of one B which was close to being an A" (Anne, 17)*

Anne's desire and persistence to become a veterinarian together with her family's support for her education and the opportunity provided by S.G.U. were all part of Anne's life history. Anne's experiences although diverse in personal, financial and academic nature led to her enrolment into a veterinary school. Anne has since progressed into the second year of the veterinary programme, although she had some difficulty in year one, where she was placed on academic probation. Anne has since met the requirements for satisfactory academic progress and has been removed from probation.

Anne's life history chronology was relevant to her choice to become a veterinarian. Anne early exposure to pet animals and their care from veterinarians allowed Anne to identify with veterinary medicine. Together with encouragement from Anne's family, her interest in veterinary medicine was maintained especially during the tragic events related to the death of her pets. Anne's socio-economic status also provided the luxury for her to choose veterinary medicine without having concerns about how to afford the study. In spite of these influences, Anne's academic performance did serve as a barrier for her to progress into a veterinary school. This barrier was overcome through the S.G.U. pre-veterinary programme in which Anne excelled. Anne, who is expected to graduate in three years, intends to return to the US to complete her final clinical year then practice as a veterinarian by opening her own veterinary clinic.

### **Age for choice of Veterinary Medicine**

Anne chose to become a veterinarian at an early age when she recalled her decision around the age of five years. Anne stated:

*"... I always wanted to be a veterinarian" (Anne, 18)*

There were several influences from Anne's family and social environment that would have informed her decision to become a veterinarian. Anne's immediate environment included pet dogs which she always referred to and veterinarians which she aspired to become. The tragic experiences of illness and death of Anne's dogs also provided events that supported her early decision to become a veterinarian. Anne's family, by their encouragement through

considering her a young veterinarian and providing items related to veterinary medicine as gifts and a new pet in Princess, continued the many early influences. The financial support provided to Anne throughout her schooling provided the comfort of affordability for her to pursue veterinary medicine.

Anne never considered any other career option as a child or while growing up. Even after college when Anne was not successful in gaining placement into a veterinary school, she remained persistent to pursue veterinary medicine. Anne shared:

*“... When I was at home for those years, I was not thinking about getting a job or studying for a different career. I wanted to be a veterinarian and nothing else” (Anne, 19)*

Anne’s family socio-economic status allowed her to continue to aspire to become a veterinarian as she did not need to seek work or alternate career pathways to earn an income.

The family and relatives also placed extra pressure on Anne by their expectations and assumption that she would become a veterinarian. The expectations may have also allowed for Anne’s parents to maintain their support for her while at home. Anne shared:

*“... My parents kept silent with our relatives when I was not getting accepted in a vet school but when I got accepted into S.G.U., they held a party and began to talk about me going to vet school even when I was heading to the pre-veterinary programme and not accepted into vet school as yet” (Anne, 20)*

The role of Anne’s family environment was influential and challenging towards the experiences she had growing up and her resulting choice and sustained desire to pursue veterinary medicine. Veterinary medicine while being Anne’s choice was also the choice of her family which created the influence and expectations that spanned her entire life history.

## **Impressions of Veterinarians**

*“... I particularly liked it when the vets would visit our home as I got to see what they did and spoke with them. I thought that vets had the best job and I quickly wanted to be a vet as well” (Anne, 21)*

Anne’s impression of veterinarians began with her early and positive perceptions about the work of veterinarians as a child. Anne’s experience with veterinarians continued with the leg amputation of one of her pets and subsequent euthanasia of other pets. These experiences questioned Anne’s view on the work of the veterinarians but did not alter her intention to become one. Anne, in her life history chronology, highlighted her experiences with veterinarians as some of the major landmarks in her life. The impressions of veterinarians by Anne were linked to the importance of her pets to her and her family. The interactions Anne had with veterinarians were important examples for her to know as she grew with the intention to become a veterinarian herself. Today, Anne maintains a positive impression of veterinarians. Anne remarked:

*“... Veterinarians probably have the best jobs in the world. To be a doctor and work with animals and get paid for the work is like getting paid for having fun” (Anne, 22)*

Anne maintained her positive view of veterinarians as a student at S.G.U. Anne commented:

*“... Vets are intelligent people, you [myself] for example taught us about all the diseases that animals transmit to humans, every single one of you [veterinary faculty] have so much qualifications and even being a vet and going through vet school requires so much knowledge and skill in medicine and surgery to areas of food production to welfare ... I think veterinary medicine includes everything” (Anne, 23)*

Anne, as she progresses through veterinary school, identified with the knowledge base and qualifications of veterinarians which reflect the most recent impressions of Anne’s view of veterinary medicine. Anne, throughout her life, have maintained positive impressions of veterinarians which were based on her life experiences and would have also contributed to her choice to pursue veterinary medicine.

## Female Veterinarians as Role Models

Anne, in her reporting of interactions with veterinarians throughout her life history, did not reflect any gender differences among the veterinarians she encountered. Anne generally considered both male and female veterinarians in terms of her overall impressions. I would consider veterinarians in general and the work of veterinarians to be the qualities Anne admire. The view of veterinarians as role models for Anne would therefore apply to both male and female veterinarians. Anne also remarked:

*"... There were male vets and female vets who came home and they all attended to the dogs. They all did a great job with them ... Even in the hospital where Bobby's limb was amputated; the vets were males and females" (Anne, 24)*

There is no specific female veterinarian that Anne noted but rather referred her admiration to all veterinarians. The qualities of the veterinarians Anne admired the most were the manner in which they cared for her pet dogs. Today, Anne admires the knowledge and qualifications of veterinarians that she encounters at S.G.U. Anne recalled:

*"... Bobby in particular was a difficult dog to manage even when relatives visited. We had to leave him outside while everyone was in the house and keep him inside when everyone went out. However, when the vets came, they would have him calm and he was very disciplined around them. The other dogs were all friendly and the vets would give the shots and do their work without any fuss. The dogs would not even listen to me and I thought that it was the white coat or the medication smell or something from the veterinarians that made them calm and obey" (Anne, 25)*

Anne as part of her admiration of veterinary faculty at S.G.U. also commented on the additional qualifications of being a veterinarian which was inspiring. Anne stated:

*"... I thought that all you needed to teach in a vet school was to be a vet but we have vets here that are anatomist, biochemist, microbiologists, pathologist and all specialties with advanced degrees" (Anne, 26)*

The veterinary faculty at S.G.U. has therefore assumed a role model position for Anne since she enrolled as a student.

## **Female Students Academic Record**

*“... As you would tell, I was not particularly a good student in school. I usually got by with a pass in most of my classes but also failed some as well. It was only when I came into the pre-vet programme that I started to study really hard and perform well. I am sure that there were male students who performed better than I ever did in school and college. But, I was the top student in the pre-vet class of my year which also included male students” (Anne, 27)*

Anne admitted that her performance in school was of a low standard and only when she began her pre-veterinary study she started to work hard and perform well. Anne’s family financial security may have created a false sense of success which I noted earlier when Anne completed all of her training at private schools and college. Anne also admitted:

*“... I was accepted at college only after being rejected from my other college applications but it was a private college which was willing to accept me as it had a relationship with the high school that I attended” (Anne, 28)*

Anne, however, excelled in her pre-veterinary programme which was due to a combination of her previous failure, frustration to gain acceptance at a veterinary school and her desire to get the opportunity of admission into S.G.U.’s veterinary school which was based on her performance. Anne shared:

*“... When I was at home seeking for somewhere to study vet medicine, I was looking at countries all around the world. I said to myself if I could have done college all over again, I would have worked harder to get better grades” (Anne, 29)*

Anne recognized her earlier failure and wished to do better which she took into the pre-veterinary programme and topped her class to get accepted into the veterinary school at S.G.U.

Anne's application and admission process into veterinary school was a challenge for her. Due to Anne's lack of academic requirements to meet admissions requirements into several veterinary schools, she was constantly denied admission in response to all her applications. Anne's opportunity to gain admission into a veterinary school came through a trial of the pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. Anne noted:

*"... If not for the opportunity given to me by S.G.U., I do not know what I would have done ... maybe remained at home and gone into depression which I was experiencing at the time"* (Anne, 30)

The difficult period of applications and eventual enrolment into veterinary school took more than three years after completing college for Anne. However, Anne's childhood desire met with opportunity to pursue veterinary medicine.

### **Barriers and Opportunities for Female Veterinary Students**

*"... The opportunity for me to become a vet was the one provided by S.G.U. Without the pre-vet programme, I was losing faith and hope of becoming a veterinarian. Only when S.G.U. came along at that open house I began to believe again that I had a chance to do vet medicine"* (Anne, 31)

Anne placed the opportunity provided by S.G.U. for her to become a veterinarian as a priority and felt obligated to S.G.U. as the institution that accepted her when everywhere else she applied rejected her applications. Other opportunities from Anne's life history were her family encouragement and support over her years of schooling even when she was not successful in gaining placement into a veterinary school. Also, when Anne decided to become a veterinarian at an early age, her family supported her to become a veterinarian. Anne's main challenge was to gain admission in a veterinary school. Anne did not have the concern about funding her studies, although, I would have noted earlier that Anne's financial comfort may have contributed to her lack of performance in school and at college and therefore serve as a contributing factor to her academic barrier. The early experiences with Anne's exposure to pet animals as well as their care were also opportunities that led to her early interest and decision by her to become a veterinarian.

The main barrier for Anne to pursue veterinary medicine was not in her choice to pursue it, as she had all of the support that she needed, but rather once she chose veterinary medicine for her career to gain admission into a veterinary school. This barrier to study veterinary medicine was overcome by the opportunity of the pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. and Anne's meeting the performance requirements to gain admission into the veterinary school.

### **Knowledge and Experience of Veterinary Medicine**

Anne had an early introduction to veterinary medicine and its practice as a child. Throughout Anne's life, she consistently interacted with veterinarians through the care of her pets and she also observed and critiqued veterinary practice on the tragic illness and death of her pets. From Anne's memories of veterinarians handling and caring for her pets to even surgical procedures and euthanasia of her dogs, Anne was very familiar with veterinary medical practice. Anne in her life history chronology made reference to the practice of veterinary medicine which was associated with her aspiration to become a veterinarian. Anne related more to the practice of veterinary medicine by veterinarians in general as she did not have any preferences of males or females for veterinarians as role models. The practice aspects of veterinary medicine described by Anne were the professional handling and treatment of the animals that were her pets. Anne also related a high level of knowledge and expertise that veterinarians have as professionals.

### **Extraneous Experiences**

Anne's life history identified her early childhood interest and decision to become a veterinarian. A strong family encouragement and support was part of her social environment. However, poor academic performance served as a challenge to Anne's pursuit to begin veterinary medical education. The academic challenge was overcome by the opportunity of a pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. which Anne excelled in to gain admission into the veterinary school.

Anne did not have any extraneous circumstances in life to escape her family and home environment which would have encouraged a decision to relocate and seek outside opportunities away from home. Rather, Anne's only option to pursue veterinary medicine



was at S.G.U. which was why she came to Grenada. Anne has intentions to return to her home community and work as a veterinarian. Anne shared:

*“... I love my life in Jersey and will definitely return there to work and live my life. My family and everyone that I know and love is there. I would not want to be away from that after studying in Grenada for so long” (Anne, 32)*

The life history of Anne included opportunities, challenges and many influences that allowed for her to decide to pursue veterinary medicine and be on the pathway to becoming a veterinarian where she is today.

## Chapter 10 Data Analysis

### Introduction

In this thesis, I have presented and analyzed the life history of six female veterinary students enrolled in St. George's University, School of Veterinary Medicine. The data was collected to explore the life histories of the female students as it related to their choice of veterinary medicine for their higher education and career. In this chapter, I explore the characteristics of the students, review their life experiences, and provided specific and collective interpretations from the reports of the interviews in such a way that it throws light on their personal career decisions.

The anatomy of the students' chronology report on their life history was similar for each of the six students in this study. Each student went through a period of early family life, schooling and post education experiences resulting in their enrolling in S.G.U.'s veterinary school. While the actual life experiences for each student were unique, the time frames and activities they engaged in from home to school to veterinary education were similar. The students' early life was associated with family experiences including parents and siblings, with the exception of Mary, as she did not have any siblings. As the students got older, between the age ranges five to ten years, the phase of schooling commenced, which continued through the teenage years into high school and college. The period after undergraduate education and prior to enrolment into veterinary school was a gap of between one to four years for the students that eventually led them to enter the veterinary school at St. George's University. This timeline was consistent for the six students throughout their life experiences. The socio-cultural characteristics including socio-economic status, parents and family profession, family life and behaviours, ethnic backgrounds and social interactions were the life history characteristics that provided diversity of experiences reported by the students.

This chapter analyzed the student characteristics that were personal and intrinsic to each student and how they informed the emergent themes from the students' life histories.

Themes that emerged from interviews with the students are summarized in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Themes Emerged from Students Interviews**

	Mary	Jane	Lucy	Sanju	Marie	Anne
Decision to be a veterinarian	<i>I note the period in middle school around 11 to 12 years old when I was asked about my career option and I reported veterinary medicine at school</i>	<i>If I were to give you a year, I would say that as young as four to five years old was when I wanted to be a veterinarian</i>	<i>The choice of veterinary medicine for me was only after identifying and learning about the international opportunities that was available at S.G.U.</i>	<i>I first became interested in veterinary medicine when I visited the summer academy at S.G.U</i>	<i>I was around 16 years old and was thinking about being a vet technician. It was only after talking with Dr. Z, I started to think about being a veterinarian</i>	<i>I always wanted to be a veterinarian. [recalled around five years old]</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students decided to become veterinarians before the age of 12 years</li> <li>• Knowledge of veterinary medicine was learnt at an early age</li> </ul> <p>There was an early interest and decision to become veterinarians among students.</p>						

<p>Life experiences surrounding the decision to be a veterinarian</p>	<p><i>I shared with my teacher and my class that I wanted to be a veterinarian when I grow up to save animals from suffering and dying.</i></p> <p><i>At least every Saturday, I would go to the clinic to assist the veterinarians.</i></p> <p><i>All of these opportunities I fully enjoyed as it showed me how veterinarians did</i></p>	<p><i>I protested that the clinic was our life and livelihood and what I wanted to return to after I became a veterinarian. My father agreed to hold on to the clinic and my mother would assist on weekends.</i></p> <p><i>I will be in the clinic and I did all of the administrative and technician support services.</i></p>	<p><i>working on the farm and getting married to someone was not what I wanted.</i></p> <p><i>I even went on-line and sent applications to several countries around the world in various job positions that were advertised.</i></p> <p><i>I chose veterinary medicine as the</i></p>	<p><i>I was not sure what I wanted to pursue but I know that I did not want to become a doctor.</i></p> <p><i>I also enjoyed seeing the veterinarians in a small animal hospital and thought to myself that I could see myself doing that.</i></p> <p><i>The veterinarians were so nice and we got a chance to talk with them and they all</i></p>	<p><i>Dr. Z shared with me his own experiences and how he worked from coming through a poor family and described the stages he took to become a vet.</i></p> <p><i>This was the first time I learned about the steps it took to get to college and then what was required to become a veterinarian.</i></p>	<p><i>it still pained me and I knew that I would not euthanize animals when I become a vet.</i></p> <p><i>My parents were embarrassed by my inability to get admitted into a veterinary school as all of my relatives knew that I wanted to be a vet and my parents had to make up excuses for me as to why I was delayed in finishing my undergraduate degree and was at home and not</i></p>
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	<p><i>their work and confirmed for me that I wanted to become a veterinarian as well.</i></p>		<p><i>first three years of the programme was held in Grenada followed by a fourth year which could have been completed in countries outside of the US.</i></p>	<p><i>seemed to be happy with their work and spoke about their family and children which inspired me the most</i></p>	<p><i>I began to think that I can do this and if I could go to college and even become a vet, I would be able to take care of my mother and she would not have to work any longer.</i></p>	<p><i>moving on to a vet school.  my parents who supported paying for the programme.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students noted financial needs towards supporting themselves and their family</li> <li>• Students identified personal needs to support care of animals themselves as veterinarians</li> <li>• Students identified social and cultural needs that were related to the choice of veterinary medicine including for and against family and society expectations for higher education and professional career, social class factors for and against pursuing particular career paths</li> </ul> <p>All of the students expressed personal, financial and socio-cultural needs that were related to their choice of veterinary medical education</p>						

**Needs from a personal and financial perspective within the context of each student socio-cultural life experiences were central themes that emerged from the initial interests of students towards veterinary medicine**

Early Childhood Experiences with animals	<i>my first recall from my history was the time of my pet dog Bruno</i>	<i>I grew up with my parents who are both veterinarians and owned a veterinary clinic</i>	<i>My entire family and the entire community is associated one way or another with the dairy farming practices</i>	<i>I also had a pet dog who we kept in the yard</i>	<i>I grew up in an apartment building together with my mother and two brothers</i>	<i>I would be occupied wherever we went with pets and I groomed and attended to dogs</i>
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- Students had recall of pets at the start of their life history was noted  
Pet ownership and early exposure to animals was common among students

Noted Experience with animals	<i>I would take Bruno to the pet shop to get his coat groomed.  Bruno was hit by a car ... I thought</i>	<i>I told my parents that I wanted to keep the clinic going as I was going to become a veterinarian and wanted to work in</i>	<i>My mother worked at the farm, my father and all my relatives all</i>	<i>My grandfather would take the dog to eat some grass when he did not want to eat and when the dog had like bruises</i>	<i>I would pass by just to see what types of animals, mainly the dogs that were in the clinic.</i>	<i>I remembered telling the vets in anger that I would be vet and I would be able to treat the cancer</i>
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	<i>to myself that I wanted to be a veterinarian as I would have saved Bruno</i>	<i>our family owned clinic</i>	<i>worked on the farm.  For me, working on the farm was a good way to earn some extra cash.</i>	<i>and wounds, my grandfather would wash the affected area with kerosene fuel</i>	<i>I was overjoyed as I was thinking about getting a job and this was perfect as I liked being in the vet clinic anyway</i>	<i>instead to removing the leg of a dog.</i>
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- Students had personal traumatic experiences with their pets which led to their declarations to become veterinarians
- Students had financial interests towards working with animals

Students related experiences with animals to personal tragic experiences and financial/employment interests towards becoming veterinarians

**Pet Ownership and Knowledge of and Exposure to Veterinary Medicine and Animals/Pets were early and common Experiences for the Students**

Experience with veterinarians	<i>It actually became fun for me to visit the veterinarian with Bruno.</i>	<i>Veterinarians [parents] were my heroes growing up and still are today.</i>	<i>I think they [veterinarians] were professionals that had an</i>	<i>I find veterinarians to be friendly, pleasant and courteous people</i>	<i>Dr. Z always took an interest in my schooling and would be sure to give me</i>	<i>I particularly liked it when the vets would visit our home as I got to see what they</i>
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	<i>My view of veterinarians today, well, I am engaged to one and I intend to marry him after I graduate.</i>	<i>The veterinarians that came through the clinic were always young and friendly people who I enjoyed having around</i>	<i>important job to do. I am always interested to learn about their [veterinary faculty] international experiences.</i>	<i>even more so than any other profession that I know. It is almost like if my personality is fit to be a veterinarian</i>	<i>opportunities to work and earn more money in the clinic as I grew older. Dr. Z would give me extra money and I felt looking back that he was like a father figure to me.</i>	<i>did and spoke with them. To be a doctor and work with animals and get paid for the work is like getting paid for having fun</i>
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- Students had prior experience with veterinarians
- Students had early life experiences with veterinarians
- Students associated positive experiences and impression with veterinarians

Students related their experience with veterinarians to their personal lives and interests as follows:

- Personal relationships
- Family business
- International experience
- Matching personality



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial gain</li> <li>• Animal care</li> </ul>						
Academic experience	<i>I was never really a good student before coming to S.G.U.</i>	<i>I excelled in all my classes and was always in the top list of the class even during my college years.</i>	<i>At school I always performed well and was a top student wherever I went</i>	<i>I performed well as all I did was attend classes and studied at home.</i>	<i>I was not however a high performing student growing up. I was maybe about an average performer.</i>	<i>I was not a particularly good student in school. I usually got by with a pass in most of my classes but also failed some as well.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students reported not being academically successful students</li> </ul> <p>Academic experiences for the students was challenging throughout their schooling lives.</p>						
Admissions process into veterinary school	<i>After several attempts and applications, I was unsuccessful in gaining admission.</i>	<i>After initial difficulty in gaining a place at a vet school. I could think of the financial strain my veterinary education</i>	<i>I applied to the veterinary programme [S.G.U.] and in a short space of time received an</i>	<i>Only because of the period surrounding my grandfather's death I was able to receive permission to</i>	<i>I did receive acceptance from one of the vet schools I applied to but I had to decline as I did not get a</i>	<i>I applied everywhere and always received the same rejection letter. The folks from S.G.U. were really nice and</i>

<p><i>I would say that the opportunity to work at the veterinary clinic during my middle and high school years was related to my ability to care and comfort animals in the clinic.</i></p> <p><i>I would have to admit that my fiancé [graduate of S.G.U] was and is the main reason that I am here today.</i></p>	<p><i>would place on my family.</i></p> <p><i>Every time I applied to veterinary schools, I also enquired about scholarship opportunities</i></p>	<p><i>acceptance letter.</i></p> <p><i>I concede to your [myself] point that the circumstances surrounding my relationship with my family and my interest not to return home can be considered as the opportunity that led me to choose S.G.U. and vet medicine</i></p>	<p><i>pursue veterinary medicine from my father as I doubt that I would gotten it otherwise.</i></p> <p><i>I received a response from S.G.U. indicating that I would need to complete a one year pre-veterinary training after which I would enter into the veterinary school.</i></p>	<p><i>scholarship and could not afford the fees.</i></p> <p><i>S.G.U. was the only school in the list that was also giving me accommodation with the scholarship which covered tuition</i></p>	<p><i>gave me materials about their vet school and encouraged me to apply</i></p>
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- Students had continued difficulty gaining admission into veterinary schools for academic performance reasons
- Students had financial difficulty that factored into their admission into veterinary school
- Students had personal opportunities related to S.G.U. that supported their admission into veterinary school
- Students had financial opportunities related to S.G.U. that supported their admission into veterinary school
- Students had academic opportunities related to S.G.U. that supported their admission into veterinary school.

Students had personal, financial and academic barriers towards gaining admission into veterinary school. Students also had personal, financial and academic opportunities that supported their admission into veterinary school at S.G.U.

**Personal, Financial and Academic reasons not only influenced the students' interest as characteristics of their respective lives, but also were barriers and opportunities that challenged their choice to pursue veterinary medicine and also were the opportunities throughout their life experiences that led to their choice of veterinary medicine. These features manifested as students transitioned their early interests based on exposure to and knowledge of veterinary medicine towards their decision and enrolment into veterinary medicine. S.G.U. was a consistent factor that offered academic and financial opportunities directly and personal opportunities indirectly for the choice of veterinary medicine.**

The data analysis section included themes identified from student interviews as well as other issues identified from interviews as presented in the following subheadings:

- Student Characteristics
- Age of choice for of Veterinary Medicine
- Impressions of Veterinarians
- Female Veterinarians as Role Models
- Female Students Academic Record
- Barriers and Opportunities
- Previous Knowledge and Experience with Veterinary Medicine
- Extraneous Experiences

The analysis also included how the various themes interacted with each other and the overall linkages between life history, veterinary medicine and S.G.U.

### **Student Characteristics**

Mary, Jane and Ann reported their early life history as linked to pet animals. Early experiences with animals were connected to their interests and decisions to become veterinarians. The relationship between the students and animals emerged as early experiences for the students. For Lucy, Sanju and Marie, they also reported early experiences with animals although there was not the associated interest in initially becoming veterinarians. Early experiences with animals provided a common experience for all the students.

All the students reported their country of origin as the US with the exception of Sanju, who was born in India but resides currently in the US. The student's country of origin being the US was a common trend among the students. The life history of the students and resulting themes that emerge from the data analysis may also assume an American social, economic, cultural and educational point of view.

The age range for the students in this study was between 26 and 31 years. This age range is a reflection of the general student population at S.G.U. with a veterinary student population's average age of 27 years (S.G.U. Annual Report 2013). The age range of the students in the study also referred to a period that was on average one to four years after

the completion of undergraduate training and prior to enrolment into veterinary school. The one to four years period is significant as all six students noted a delay in time between completing undergraduate education and enrolment into veterinary school (See Appendix 6). The delay in enrolment was a result of difficulty matriculating into veterinary schools based on academic performance, financial difficulty to cover cost of tuition and having incomplete pre-requisite coursework for veterinary medicine which required a pre-veterinary programme experience. Sanju and Lucy application was solely to S.G.U. while the other students were unsuccessful in their initial attempts to obtain placement in veterinary schools in the US.

The socio-economic status of the students varied from upper class to middle and low income. This was based on my interpretation of described family background and the respective student's need for financial assistance or use of private resources to pursue veterinary medicine. There was no discernible theme in the student's and their family's financial capacities towards supporting veterinary medical education. Students from different socio-economic backgrounds pursued educational opportunities in veterinary medicine. For Jane and Marie, their education is supported through tuition covered scholarships, Lucy is funded through federal student loans from the US government and Mary, Sanju and Anne are financially supported by their family.

All of the students with the exception of Mary had siblings in their family. For these students, their siblings were brothers who did not share their sister's interests in veterinary medicine. The choice of veterinary medicine was specific for each female child in their respective families. While this thesis noted the influence of female veterinarians on the students' choice, there was also the case of particular relationships with the students being female. Mary's relationship with her fiancée, Jane and Sanju's relationship with their fathers and Marie's relationship with Dr. Z were specific female to male interactions that was only possible due to the female characteristics of the students. The characteristic of being female is a noted one for this thesis.

In terms of early experiences with animals, all of the students had exposure to animals at an early age. The early exposure was related to personal pets in the case for Mary, Sanju and Anne, other pet animals for Jane and Marie and farm animals for Lucy. The early animal

exposure was a common experience shared by all students in the study. The students also reported continued and sustained experiences with animals as a common life experience.

For Mary, Jane and Anne, veterinary medicine was their early career interest. For Marie, her limited family income did not initially allow her to aspire towards veterinary medicine. For Sanju, medicine was her family's experience and expectations which was also her focus until the S.G.U. summer academy exposure which informed her interest towards veterinary medicine. For Lucy, the choice of veterinary medicine was based on her interest for external opportunities outside of the US to escape personal issues. For Mary, Jane and Anne, there was an early intention to pursue veterinary medicine and their early interest was sustained over time. For the other students (Sanju Marie and Lucy), veterinary medicine was an opportunity for each of them to accomplish a personal desire. For Sanju, she identified veterinary medicine as a career to build a family life (Sanju 27, Ch. 7, p.116), for Marie, it was an opportunity to seek upward socio-economic mobility (Marie 27, Ch. 8, p.135) and for Lucy, it provided international experiences and a means to escape undesirable family circumstances (Lucy 21, Ch. 6, p.95). The choice of veterinary medicine is made early in life from an interest as a child or a career that allows for persons to accomplish personal and career aspirations.

### **Age of choice for Veterinary Medicine**

The age of choice for students towards veterinary medicine was distinguished between the age of interest and the age of deciding to pursue veterinary medicine. The age of interest, as in the student characteristics, was prior to the age of twelve years old for Mary, Jane and Anne. However, only Jane and Anne matched their early interest with their choice to become veterinarians at the same time. Whereas for Mary, her interest to become a veterinarian, was early in her life as a child but her decision to pursue veterinary medicine occurred several years after during a career guidance session at school. For Lucy and Sanju, their age of interest and choice to pursue veterinary medicine occurred while at college as adults. The exposure to veterinary medicine as an international opportunity led to the choice for Lucy. This interest by Lucy was based on her need to seek experiences outside of her home environment which the veterinary programme at S.G.U. provided. Sanju's interest and choice for veterinary medicine as that of Lucy was based on exposure to the veterinary

profession later on in her life. For Sanju, she became familiar with veterinary medicine and its compatibility with family life after attending the summer academy at S.G.U. Marie's interest and decision towards veterinary medicine did contain a gap in time. However, Marie's interest occurred after opportunities were made aware and available for her to become a veterinarian in spite of her and her family's socio-economic inability to afford the cost of study.

### **Impressions of Veterinarians**

The student's impressions of veterinarians occurred in two stages of their life history which I referred to as their pre-S.G.U. and S.G.U. phases. Although, the S.G.U. stage in their life history is based on their current experiences as students, the S.G.U. impressions would not have influenced the decision to pursue veterinary medicine. Sanju however is an exception as her pre-S.G.U. and S.G.U. impressions of veterinarians are the same. Sanju's exposure to veterinary medicine was from S.G.U.'s veterinarians at the summer academy she attended, which formed her interest and eventual decision to pursue veterinary medicine. Sanju's positive and admiring impressions of veterinarians at S.G.U. were consistent from the summer academy experience and her time as a veterinary student. Sanju's impressions of veterinarians while being linked to S.G.U. was consistent in terms of her positive views and opinions, exemplified a trend of positive views towards veterinarians in general among the students.

Mary, Jane, Marie and Anne's pre-S.G.U. experiences with veterinarians began at an early age before their teenage years. For Jane, her parents being veterinarians themselves provided the earliest exposure among all the students. Veterinarians represented the care of personal pet animals for Mary and Anne, the care of general animals for Marie as she did not have pets and the veterinary clinic for Jane which was her family's business. In Lucy's life history, veterinarians played a negligible part in her reporting, and, her views and impressions of veterinarians are based on her experiences as a student at S.G.U. Mary and Anne's experiences with veterinarians while centred on their personal pets growing up included tragic events of injuries, diseases and death of their pets. However, in spite of the emotional distress associated with the loss of pets, both Mary and Anne maintained their aspirations to become veterinarians and held positive views of veterinarians. The tragedy of

illness, injury and loss of pets even served as encouragement for Mary and Anne to pursue veterinary medicine (Mary 11, Ch. 4, p.54), (Anne 7, Ch. 9, p.143). For Mary, her positive impressions extended into her personal relationship with her fiancé who is a veterinarian himself. Jane's impressions of veterinarians were informed mainly by her father who served as the main veterinarian in their family owned veterinary clinic. There were however several other veterinarians that traversed the clinic over the period Jane was growing up. Jane's mother was also a veterinarian but Jane never referred to her in the light of being a veterinarian as her mother was an academic faculty more than a practicing veterinarian. Marie had a personal relationship with Dr. Z who served as a mentor for her in life and who was primarily responsible for influencing her interest and decision to become a veterinarian. Personal relationships with veterinarians were the experience for Mary, Jane and Marie which were positive ones and informed their overall impressions of veterinarians.

The student's impressions of veterinarians at S.G.U. occurred after their choice and enrolment into the veterinary school (with the exception of Sanju). The student's positive impressions continued at S.G.U. which indicated positive impressions of veterinarians as a trend that emerged from the interviews. The positive impressions included identifying with the qualifications and skills sets of veterinarians, their professional status, international mobility and experiences, family oriented lifestyle and financial security. The student's responses highlighted the continuing positive impressions that veterinarians occupied throughout their lives.

### **Female Veterinarians as Role Models**

The consistent positive impressions that students held towards veterinarians in general created a case for veterinarians to serve as role models. The life history perspective also provided the opportunity to identify the student's experiences with female veterinarians as role models. Jane was particularly fond of female veterinarians who worked in her family's veterinary clinic. Jane identified with the female veterinarians as big sisters to her and share many social experiences with the female veterinarians. Sanju reported identifying with female veterinarians and in particular one female faculty (Dr. X) whose life experiences she found complimentary towards her aspirations for a family life of her own. Mary and Marie also shared having experiences with veterinarians but they were male veterinarians. Lucy



and Anne did not report any specific interactions with female veterinarians. The positive impressions of veterinarians by Anne were based on general experiences with both male and female veterinarians. Jane and Sanju were the two students with experiences that included female veterinarians who they identified as role models. Female veterinarians as role models for the students prior to their enrolment into veterinary school at S.G.U. provided an influencing factor.

Female veterinarians at S.G.U. also served as role models to the students. However, the S.G.U. female veterinarian experiences occurred after enrolment into the veterinary school. Mary made the comment that the majority of the faculty at S.G.U.'s veterinary school is females (Mary 22, Ch. 4, p.62). The overall [veterinarian and non-veterinarian] faculty ratio of females to male in the veterinary school at S.G.U. is approximately 1 to 1. However, there is a 2 to 1 female to male ratio for faculty that is veterinarians. Therefore, female veterinarians on faculty at S.G.U. were a prominent feature of the student's responses towards female veterinarians as role models. The students all responded favourably to S.G.U. female faculty as role models for them in veterinary school.

Mary related her difficulty in gaining admission into veterinary schools in the US and developed respect and admiration for female veterinarians based on her challenges towards becoming a veterinarian. Jane developed a greater appreciation for her mother as a veterinarian and professor through her understanding of female veterinary faculty at S.G.U. (Jane 25, Ch. 5, p.81). Lucy made it clear that she aspired to be like S.G.U. female veterinary faculty after observing their internationalism and independence. Sanju spoke with admiration about Dr. X, who she first met at the summer academy, which introduced her to veterinary medicine and who she acknowledges aspiring towards. Dr. X portrayed an image of strong family life qualities which Sanju aspired towards as she intends to get married after her veterinary programme completion. Marie's desire for upward socio-economic mobility was the lens that allowed her to view female faculty at S.G.U. and their socio-economic status as role models which she aspired to emulate. Anne also admired the knowledge and qualifications of female veterinarians at S.G.U. Each of the students had their own and different reasons for identifying female faculty at S.G.U. as role models. However, they were all consistent in their admiration and aspiration towards female faculty who serve as role models for them.

## **Female Students Academic Record**

Each of the students experienced a gap in time between the completion of their undergraduate education and enrolment into S.G.U.'s veterinary school. In the case of Mary and Anne, this gap in their matriculation was associated with failing to meet the academic admissions requirements for veterinary schools in the US. Their academic performances did not allow admission into US based veterinary schools - their original intention. Mary admitted that she was not a good student prior to her S.G.U. experience and Anne similarly shared that she was not a high achieving student. Marie also self evaluated herself as an average student experienced the enrolment gap, but financial resources were also prominent in her case.

Jane, Lucy and Sanju reported being focused, disciplined and high performing in their school life. Jane shared that she was on a waiting list for US based veterinary schools; she was also accepted into a US based veterinary school. However, based on Jane's family's financial challenges with their veterinary clinic and the need to avoid her mother as a professor at the veterinary school where she was accepted, she sought financial aid and a different veterinary school experience which S.G.U. provided. Lucy and Sanju were also academically high performing students but their high performance was not linked initially to any aspirations towards veterinary medicine. Both Lucy and Sanju became interested in veterinary medicine while in their undergraduate training at which time they were consistently high performing students. Lucy and Sanju's undergraduate training was not related towards veterinary medicine so they also had a gap to pursue pre-veterinary requirements for admission into the veterinary school at S.G.U.

The students had a mix of academic performances growing up, ranging from low and average performances to high academic achievements. For Mary, Lucy, Sanju and Anne, they completed a one year pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. where they were all successful in meeting a high standard of academic performance to gain admission into S.G.U.'s veterinary school. The pre-veterinary programme seemed to bring out the best in Mary, Lucy, Sanju and Anne as it was their opportunity to gain direct enrolment into the veterinary school at S.G.U. The pre-veterinary programme for Mary and Anne gave them both an opportunity to receive a path to veterinary medicine when all other options

previously were unsuccessful. For Lucy and Sanju, the pre-veterinary programme gave them the requirements which would have allowed for their enrolment into the veterinary school which they wanted. The students accepted the challenge of the pre-veterinary programme and excelled in their performance gaining admission into the veterinary school. The students all reported meeting satisfactory academic performance at the current time in the veterinary school.

On the point of academic performance of female students versus male students, Mary (25 Ch. 4, p.63), Jane (28 Ch. 5, p.82), Lucy (33 Ch. 6, p.100) and Sanju (33 Ch. 7, p.119) made specific comments relating to females performing at a higher standard than male students. The students also shared that their performance in the pre-veterinary programme for Mary, Lucy, Sanju and Anne were higher than all students including their male counterparts. The students did perform at a mixed level of academic standards together with academic challenges growing up. However, there was a consistently high level of performance when a clear path and opportunity to pursue veterinary medicine was provided in the pre-veterinary programme and in veterinary school.

## **Barriers and Opportunities**

All six students interviewed shared as part of their individual life histories events, persons, family life, beliefs and traditions, academic performance and socio-economic factors that served both as barriers and opportunities towards their choice and pursuits of veterinary medicine. Barriers and opportunities were consistent experiences in the lives of the students that interacted during their respective life histories and eventually resulted in the students being in veterinary school today.

For Mary and Anne, their barriers towards pursuing veterinary medicine were their lack of academic performance which resulted in their unsuccessful attempts to gain admission into veterinary schools in the US after their undergraduate training. Jane and Marie identified financial reasons which limited their progress into veterinary education. Sanju's personal and family life beliefs and traditions were her barriers initially due to her family's expectations for her towards medicine together with Sanju's belief and tradition to obey her parent's choices. However, in Sanju's case, her barrier was only for a short period of time because her knowledge and interest in veterinary medicine occurred at a comparably later

time in her life during her college years as opposed to Mary, Jane and Anne as well as Marie to some extent who all experienced barriers for a longer period of time in their life history. For Mary, Jane, Marie and Anne, the academic and socio-economic barriers were part of their overall life history and experiences. Lucy's case was a bit different in terms of identifying barriers towards her choice and pursuit of veterinary medicine. Lucy's family expectations of her was to remain within the family community, get married and have a family which was not shared by her and resulted in a barrier. However, it can also be interpreted that because of Lucy's family expectations which was not shared by her, it led to Lucy's choice for relocation, mobility and her choice of veterinary medicine.

With each student's barriers, there were opportunities which resulted in barriers being overcome. The fact that the students are in veterinary school is a result of successful use of the opportunities that formed part of each life history account. Personal experiences, influential persons and specific academic and financial aid options were made available for the students as the main opportunities.

Mary's opportunities I considered to be the vehicular accident of her pet dog, as while this was a tragic event, the experience served to reinforce Mary's resolve to pursue veterinary medicine. Mary's fiancé and the support and knowledge he brought regarding S.G.U.'s veterinary school also allowed for Mary to pursue S.G.U.'s route towards veterinary medicine, and in doing so, overcome the academic barriers which previously prevented her from gaining admissions. Jane's first opportunity growing up was the immediate environment of her family's veterinary clinic and her parents as veterinarians. However, the scholarship opportunity from S.G.U. was the one that allowed her to overcome her financial barrier which challenged her admission into veterinary schools. Lucy's family expectations represented her habitus as the expectations was to remain the dairy farm, get married and have a family were family practices that were adopted by many. Lucy's family expectations were discussed in terms of being a barrier and an opportunity at the same time. I maintain that the very same barrier of having her family disapprove her choice to relocate outside of her hometown served as the influence for her choice to seek external opportunities which S.G.U.'s veterinary medicine programme provided. It is also interesting to note that Lucy's choice of veterinary medicine was also based on the length of time for the veterinary programme which she commented would have allowed her to remain out of the US for the

longest period. Sanju's barrier for her choice to pursue veterinary medicine was her family expectations to pursue medicine based on their traditions. The opportunity that allowed Sanju to pursue veterinary medicine came at a time of bereavement for her family associated with the death of her grandfather. Sanju's father after dismissing any approach by Sanju to speak about her interest in veterinary medicine empathized with her and allowed her to apply to the veterinary programme at S.G.U. But, it was through the summer academy at S.G.U. which provided Sanju with the initial opportunity to be exposed to veterinary medicine and even consider it as a career option. Marie's socio-economic barrier was overcome firstly in the person of Dr. Z who served as an employment opportunity for Marie and encouraged and supported her ambitions towards veterinary medicine. Dr. Z then served as a mentor for Marie's scholarship programme which S.G.U. participated in as the main opportunity towards her being a student in S.G.U.'s veterinary school. For Anne, the opportunity of the pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. provided her with an option towards veterinary medicine which emerged after years of unsuccessful attempts to seek admission in other veterinary schools.

Barriers such as academic challenges, financial limitations and personal family expectations were the themes that emerged from the student's life history. Opportunities such as personal life events and influential people were also noted. However, a common trend of opportunities reported by the students was related to S.G.U. Opportunities such as financial aid, scholarships, pre-veterinary programme route to veterinary school admissions, the summer academy and the international location for S.G.U. in Grenada were all features of S.G.U. that the students identified with as reasons which served as opportunities to overcome barriers in their pursuit of veterinary medicine.

### **Previous Knowledge and Experience with Veterinary Medicine**

All the students chose to pursue veterinary medicine and all shared particular experiences with veterinary medicine growing up which may have contributed to their choice. Mary and Anne spoke specifically about their experiences with veterinarians and their care for pet animals growing up. The element of care for animals and admirations for the work of veterinarians emerged as a quality of veterinary medicine that was part of their knowledge and experience. Jane's knowledge and experience with veterinary medicine was the most

extensive of all the students through her family owned and operated veterinary clinic. Jane's focus on veterinary medicine was however on the management and operations of her family's clinic rather than the care of animals. Jane's focus on the clinic was also due to her interest to maintain the sustainability of the clinic where she intends to return to practice as a veterinarian. Lucy unlike the other students had the least experience with veterinary medicine coming into veterinary school. Lucy's reference to veterinary medicine prior to S.G.U. was a mention of veterinarians working on the farm where she earned extra money during breaks in school. Lucy's knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine was more linked with her experience at S.G.U. Lucy emphasized that her choice of veterinary medicine was due to the longer time frame it provided as a study programme than others at S.G.U. and not based on any prior knowledge and experience that she had. Sanju, like Lucy also had limited experience with veterinary medicine growing up. But, for Sanju, she identified with veterinary medicine in terms of the family life qualities of veterinarians she observed during the summer academy experience she had. Marie's knowledge and experience with veterinary medicine was linked more towards the lives of veterinarians than the practice of veterinary medicine. Marie in her respect and admiration for Dr. Z associated veterinary medicine with a life of affluence which she aspired to for herself.

The student's knowledge and experience with veterinary medicine prior to their enrolment into veterinary school was significant for Mary, Jane, Marie and Anne. Lucy and Sanju were the only two who did not have an early interest in veterinary medicine. Students with knowledge and experience tended to have an earlier interest in pursuing veterinary medicine which suggests that knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine informed student's interest to pursue it as a career path. The students also in describing their knowledge and experience recognized benefits of healing and caring for pet animals, socio-economic mobility, pursuing family life and escaping undesirable family expectations to be connected with their choice of veterinary medicine. The diversity of students needs to be fulfilled also suggested that veterinary medicine appears flexible to meet varying expectations of students based on their individual and social needs. Even for Lucy and Sanju, who had limited knowledge and experience, they found veterinary medicine to meet their specific personal and social needs in their lives.

## **Extraneous Experiences**

The issue of extraneous experiences for the students that led to their choice of veterinary medicine centred on Lucy's need to escape personal and social experiences. This topic became an issue when I interviewed Lucy as her life history referred to personal family experiences which were uncomfortable for her growing up and family expectations for her which she did not accept for herself. Lucy's experiences with her family resulted in her need to seek separation from her home environment which veterinary medicine at S.G.U. provided for her.

Mary did report being neglected by her parents whom she blamed for her poor academic performances and difficulty gaining admissions into veterinary schools. Jane queried her own mother's commitment as a veterinarian to their family owned clinic which faced financial difficulties. Sanju's socio-cultural family traditions did imposed medicine as her career path. However, none of these students sought to remove themselves from their social environments as Lucy did.

Lucy's life history did contain characteristics which I described as extraneous experiences that were specific for Lucy. Even in what I described as extraneous experiences for Lucy, she was able to identify with veterinary medicine for her continued education. The adaptability of veterinary medicine to meet the varied individual expectations and even extraneous experiences emerged as a characteristic of the profession that all the students related to in their choice to pursue it.

## **Interacting Themes**

The data that emerged from the interviews were presented in the categories of life history chronology, age of choice for veterinary medicine, impressions of veterinarians, female veterinarians as role models, female student's academic record, barriers and opportunities for female veterinary medicine and extraneous experiences. For each of the categories presented, themes emerged such as early interests and positive impressions of veterinarians and veterinary medicine from knowledge and experience. Academic, personal and financial barriers and opportunities for gaining admission into S.G.U.'s veterinary school were also noted. All of these categories of data and the themes that emerged served as influences for

the student's interest and choice of veterinary medicine for their study. A summary of themes and its distribution among the students is noted in Table 2 as follows:



**Table 2: Distribution of Emerged Themes from Student Interviews**

Y: Yes      N: No      -: Not Applicable

	Mary	Jane	Lucy	Sanju	Marie	Anne
First recall of life experience involved pet	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Early age of interest in veterinary medicine	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
School performance was average	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Excelled in school	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Attend to personal pet care	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y
Tragic experiences with pet	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Cared for animals other than pets	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Learned about required good grades before veterinary interest	N	N	N	N	N	N
Learnt about good grades after veterinary interest	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Worked in a veterinary clinic	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
Worked in other settings of animal care	N	N	Y	N	N	N

Had academic difficulty in undergraduate education	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Had difficulty with unsuccessful applications to veterinary schools	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Received rejection from applications	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Spent time (ONE or more years) seeking veterinary enrolment	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Gave up on pursuing veterinary medical education	Y	N	-	-	Y	Y
Personal relationship with veterinarian(s)	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
Positive impressions of veterinarians	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Interest in the practice of veterinary medicine	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Admiration of female veterinarians	Y	Y	-	Y	-	Y
Admiration of male veterinarians	Y	Y	-	-	Y	-
View veterinarians as mainly females	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Consider female students perform better than males	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Academic barriers to admission	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Financial barriers to admissions	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N

Personal barriers to admission	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Academic opportunities for enrolment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Financial opportunities for enrolment	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
Personal opportunities for enrolment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Learnt about SGU	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Completed SGU pre-veterinary programme	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Followed career path of parents	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Followed career ambitions of parents	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Extraneous life experiences that influenced interest and choice of veterinary medicine	N	N	Y	N	N	N

Further analysis of the data categories and the emerged themes indicate a level of interaction and relationships that exist among them which will be analysed as follows:

- Relationship identified between veterinary knowledge and experience, age of choice, positive impressions of veterinarians and care of pet animals. (Figure 2)
- Relationship between academic records and barriers and opportunities to pursue veterinary medicine. (Figure 3)
- Relationship between knowledge of veterinary medicine and early interest in veterinary medicine. (Figure 4)

**Figure 2: Relationship between Veterinary Knowledge and Experience, Age of Choice, Positive Impressions of Veterinarians and Care of Pet Animals**

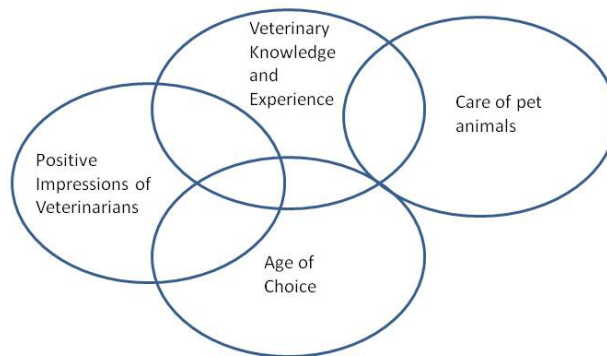


Figure 2 above represents the relationship identified between the age of choice for students, veterinary knowledge and experience, positive impressions of veterinarians and care of pet animals. The age of choice for veterinary medicine was identified as early for four of the six students (Mary, Jane, Marie and Anne). For each of the four students with early interests, they also shared a considerable amount of knowledge and experience in veterinary medicine

growing up. This relationship suggests that early exposure to veterinary medicine for the female students influenced their knowledge, experience, early interests and by consequence, their decision to pursue veterinary medicine. Additionally, the student's knowledge and experience in veterinary medicine was associated with the care of their pet animals, the desire to seek socio-economic benefit and satisfy personal needs by becoming veterinarians. The interests of the students were based on the knowledge and experience they gained growing up. Knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine therefore served to inform the student's attitudes and perceptions towards the veterinary profession which influenced their early interest and decision. Connected to the relationship between knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine and the age of choice for veterinary medicine are the student's impressions of veterinarians. The students all shared positive impressions of veterinarians. The positive position on the part of the students towards veterinarians was based on their interactions with veterinarians growing up which informed their knowledge and experiences and subsequent interest and choice of veterinary medicine. The students' views of female veterinarians as role models was noted but there was also consideration for the influence of male veterinarians on their interests and decisions of veterinary medicine. In the case of Jane and Sanju, they identified with female veterinarians as influences towards their decisions but this role of female veterinarians was not a consistent one for all the students. The views of the students about female veterinarians as role models were also more based on their S.G.U. experiences in the veterinary school as opposed to influencing their decision to pursue veterinary medicine. There seems to be a natural connection with the student's knowledge and experiences with veterinary medicine, their impressions derived from their experiences and the consequential interests and decisions to pursue veterinary medicine. These experiences more commonly occurred early in the lives of the students.

**Figure 3: Relationship between Academic records and Barriers and Opportunities to pursue Veterinary Medicine**

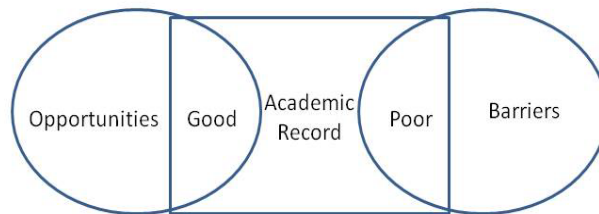
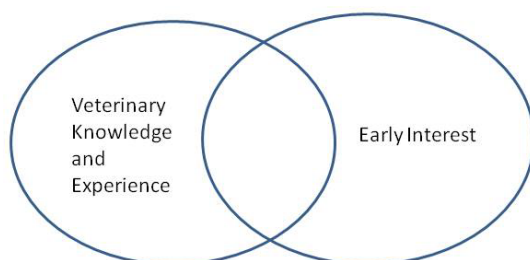


Figure 3 above represents another set of interactions that occurred from the data categories between the student's academic record and barriers and opportunities to gain admission into veterinary school. The student's academic record provided a range from high performances to poor performances. The students that reported poor academic performances had to prove themselves with high academic standards in the pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. to gain admission into the veterinary school as in the case of Mary and Anne. However, while Mary and Anne eventually demonstrated high academic performance prior to entering S.G.U.'s veterinary school, the poor performances during their life history served as a barrier for their application into US based veterinary schools. This interaction between poor academic performances as a barrier into veterinary medical education is a natural relationship as there is a minimum acceptable standard to enter the study of veterinary medicine.

The relation between poor academic performance and a barrier to begin veterinary education was extended further through opportunities such as the pre-veterinary programme to perform

at a high standard and gain admission into the veterinary school. Even for Lucy and Sanju, the pre-veterinary programme removed their barrier of not having the required pre-requisite undergraduate coursework for enrolment into a veterinary programme. The opportunity of the pre-veterinary programme and the financial aid pathway to veterinary medicine at S.G.U. was a consistent opportunity that was enjoyed by the students. The barrier to enter veterinary medicine was an important feature of the student's life history as it occupied a period of years in their life. The barriers were overcome through opportunities including S.G.U. related ones. In addition to the academic records of the students, their socio-economic status and personal and family life experiences also presented both barriers and opportunities as reported by the students.

**Figure 4: Relationship between Knowledge of Veterinary Medicine and Early Interest in Veterinary Medicine**



Further analysis of the data from the students' interviews, showed in Figure 4 above, notes that those with the greatest knowledge and experience in veterinary medicine coupled with the earliest interested and decisions to pursue veterinary medicine. These students were from upper income level families. The students with high socio-economic means as was the case of

Mary and Anne had opportunity to seek veterinary care for their pets, receive the early knowledge and experience and develop the interest to pursue veterinary medicine without having inhibitions of costs for the study. However, Mary and Anne did report the poorest academic performances which were their barriers to gain admission into veterinary schools and may have been due to complacency on their part to academically perform at a high standard. A different trend occurred with Lucy and Sanju, who had limited knowledge and experience with veterinary medicine, showed high academic performances, and whose barriers were personal rather than academic. For Lucy and Sanju, their high academic performance was not linked to any early interest towards veterinary medicine but rather helped to streamline their admission once they decided later on in their life to pursue veterinary medicine. High academic performance is not linked to the student's interest to become veterinarians growing up but it is an expectation for students to gain admission and maintain their progress in veterinary school. The complex interactions revealed among the students interviewed showed common themes and trends but the intersections in the themes and trends showed relationships that led to the choice of veterinary medicine made by students.

Life histories of the six students included commonalities and differences. The most common experiences for the students are their pet ownership and animal care history, educational pursuit of veterinary medicine, positive views and opinions of veterinarians and about S.G.U. and experiences of barriers and opportunities that led them to veterinary medicine. The differences were in the student's life experiences which formed part of each student's unique personal, family, socio-economic, cultural, geographic and overall environment. The differences while being unique for each student also had similar and consistent themes and outcome of veterinary medical education as part of their life experiences.

### **Life History, Veterinary Medicine and S.G.U.**

An apparent relationship that emerged in the latter part of the life history interviews was the link between each student's life experiences, their choice of veterinary medicine and the role S.G.U. played in the students becoming veterinary students. The life history approach revealed different yet similar experiences of the students by virtue of exploring the lives of each student.



The life history was particularly instructive in identifying the influences that informed the student's choice of veterinary medicine. Within the data analysis, there was a particular relationship that emerged for each student and their pursuit of veterinary medicine which centred on S.G.U. The latter part of the student's life history prior to enrolment into veterinary school involved an emphasis on S.G.U. related matters. S.G.U. provided an opportunity for Mary and Anne in spite of not meeting academic standards for veterinary medical education in other veterinary schools previously to pursue veterinary medicine. Jane and Marie benefitted from financial aid and scholarship opportunities provided by S.G.U. to support their veterinary medical education expenses. For Lucy, S.G.U. provided opportunities to escape difficult family expectations and experiences. For Sanju, S.G.U. offered an alternate career path from the family directed pathway to medicine. S.G.U. sustained the student's interests in veterinary medicine and provided opportunities of them to enrol into veterinary medicine. The common factor of S.G.U. was also noted in the student's views and opinions about the veterinary faculty as well as the island of Grenada where S.G.U. is located. S.G.U. therefore assumed a prominent part of the student's life history as it served a critical and central role in the student's choice of veterinary medical education.

## Chapter 11 Discussion

This chapter serves to discuss the themes and issues that emerged from the interviews and its analysis. The application of the grounded theory was employed towards generating a theoretical framework for this thesis and the study objectives are also reviewed in this chapter. The immediate themes that emerged from the data analysis included the personal, financial and academic factors revolving around the students' life experiences. The students themselves, through their individual and collective characteristics, along with S.G.U. as an institution, emerged as relevant to the context of the thesis, and, the application of the grounded theory to the study gave rise to the construction of a Life Stages Theory which is applied to the study. This chapter will include the following sections:

- The Students
- Society and Culture
- S.G.U.: Offshore Medical Institution
- Application of Grounded Theory
- Life Stages Theory

### The Students

Central to this study are female veterinary students, and in particular, students of S.G.U. The role of S.G.U. was based on the institution where the students are enrolled for their veterinary medical education. However, there are characteristics of the students that led each of them to S.G.U. The students selected S.G.U. as their alternative choice after their primary choice for their veterinary medical education was for US based veterinary schools. Mary, Anne, Jane and Marie all attempted to seek opportunities to pursue veterinary medicine in the US. Lucy sought opportunities for employment away from home, and medicine was the choice for Sanju. Unsuccessful attempts to gain admission into veterinary schools by the students led them through various paths towards S.G.U. The students, due to their ranges of academic background and performance, had difficulty in meeting academic requirements for US based veterinary schools. S.G.U. provided an opportunity for these students of different academic

standards of performance to gain admission into its veterinary school through the pre-veterinary programme. The students were all driven to succeed especially based on previous failures to gain admissions into veterinary schools in particular for Mary, Anne, Jane and Marie. The opportunity to study at S.G.U. was also one the students felt very positively about. S.G.U. is seen as the institution that gave the students another chance when all other avenues to pursue veterinary medicine for Mary, Jane, Marie and Anne or seek alternative opportunities for Lucy and Sanju were unreachable.

Another feature of the drive for the students' towards veterinary medicine at S.G.U. was the personal sacrifice each made to attend S.G.U. With the possible exception of Lucy who chose S.G.U. to seek separation from her home environment, all the other students left their home, social network and lives in the US to commit 4 to 5 years of study with S.G.U. This decision on the part of the students demonstrated their continued commitment to pursue veterinary medicine. There is also the additional financial expense of attending a private international academic institution. Some students were supported by scholarships, loans, family and personal finances but the cost burden remains an impact for each student through costs of living and international travel.

## **Society and Culture**

The relationship of society and culture to education and career is explored at length in the literature. Bourdieu (1997, p.51) highlights the relationship with society and culture by describing the concept of 'cultural capital'. Cultural capital as noted by Bourdieu includes family characteristics (particular practices) and social positions (class). Cultural capital suggests that children will have a tendency to adopt the practices of their parents. Also, such practices will conform to characteristics of the respective social classes and will be favored by the children. Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997, p.573) note the application of cultural capital among students of arts. From data collected using surveys, Aschaffenburg and Maas concluded that for students at particular developmental ages, the educational transitions towards the study of arts were related to the influences of family practices and to social backgrounds. Society and culture

therefore seem to interact and produce a particular set of standards and guidelines supporting the educational and career choices of individuals.

From previous reference to Bourdieu and Aschaffenburg and Maas, education and career choices have their genesis in the family and society. The process of decision making is therefore one which cultural influences and social structures establish for an individual. Hodkinson and Sparkes (2006, p.2a) report on the presence as well as dominance of a socially structured pathway towards “careership”. The social pathway can be related to the experiences of different social groups in their education and careers. For example, the educational experience of Asian Americans has been extensively researched primarily because of their higher level of education when compared to other populations. Sue and Okazaki (1990, p.913) wrote that Asian Americans as a social group have experienced upward mobility in careers, especially where education is of significant importance. For Asian Americans, there is a cultural expectation of high levels of education. This cultural influence of a high value placed on education as well as certain professions, also contributes to the pathway in the ‘careership’ concept noted by Hodkinson and Sparkes. The value that Asian Americans place on education and particular professions along with Bledstein (1976, p.11) reporting on the notion that profession becomes a basic behavior among a group in society further supports the establishment of the careership pathway concept.

In terms of education and career choices, population groups can also be discussed in the context of their socio-economic background as it represents a social characteristic. De Graaf (1986, p.237) reported in the Netherlands that the differences in educational attainment from different social backgrounds are disappearing. De Graaf however also noted that the parental occupations and educational levels remain influential on children. The effect of familial influence and the expectations placed on children is also reported in a study on Chinese immigrant families of Canada (Li, 2008, p.3). Li writes that personal life experiences were also noted to shape parental expectations through acculturative attitudes. In fact, the perception of visible disadvantages to minorities in the Canadian society provided the incentive for expectations of higher education attainment for these children.

The issues of experiences of particular groups in society and its influence on education and career choices are apparent in different countries, societies and cultures. And while the society and culture is different for each context, the nature of their impact on education and career choices remains the same. The issue of a social pathway for education and career choices can also denote a practice that is in fact devoid of choice. Furthermore, this social pathway can apply to groups in society where there has been no educational attainment or career development for generations.

As the concepts of education and career are not universal, they should however be placed in context. In fact, a career can be considered a cultural construction that does not apply to all cultures or societies. For example, in societies where children are placed to work in jobs, there is no functional contribution to the career development of the children. The discussion on the socio-cultural influences on education and career is therefore limited to societies and cultures where education is universal and opportunities for career development exist.

The relationship of society and culture in the students' life history and choice towards veterinary medicine was evident in this study (Mary 21, Ch. 4, p.61, Jane 1, Ch. 5, p.69, Lucy 2, Ch. 6, p.87, Sanju 14, Ch. 7, p.110, Marie 10, Ch. 8, p.127, Anne 2, Ch. 9, p.140). Bourdieu (1997, p.51) highlights the relationship between society and culture on education and career development with the concept of 'cultural capital'. Cultural capital incorporates family characteristics, or particular practices and social positions or class. Capital from a cultural perspective acts as a social resource that is extended to include all the goods, material and symbolic representations that can be exchanged in society. Cultural capital of class was represented in the life histories of Mary and Anne who both came from high income families, and as such, shared a particular set of resources and opportunities to support their educational choice of veterinary medicine. Mary and Anne came from a social class that allowed their family to seek personal veterinary care for their pet animals which was an influential part in their early exposure and interest in veterinary medicine. Cultural capital suggests that children will have the tendencies to adopt the practices of their parents. This adoption of career interest was represented in the life history of the students. For Jane, her early ambition was emphasized by

her attachment to her family-owned veterinary clinic and her desire to ensure its success and to train as a veterinarian to achieve her objective. Jane's parents, as veterinarians, provided the template for Jane to adopt. Sanju's cultural capital was firmly linked to a career in medicine. The influence of Sanju's father as a medical doctor together with the expectations of her family and adoption of medicine by her brother, rendered medicine as the only option for Sanju. It was only in Sanju's undergraduate experience she made the transition from medicine to veterinary medicine, following exposure in the summer academy at S.G.U. The experiences of Lucy also reflected the influences of her family towards providing a particular set of standards which initially manifested in her early employment experiences in the farm where her family worked. However, there was a need for Lucy to seek separation from her home environment, which led to her choice of veterinary medicine at S.G.U. Marie's life history reflected an early interest to seek financial opportunities and contribute to her family as a low income household. This was apparent in Marie's ambitions to initially become a veterinary technician in order to secure a contribution for her family's income. However, opportunities presented to Marie adjusted her education and career ambitions beyond the expected values as defined by her cultural capital. From the socio-cultural review of the students' life history, education and career choice had their genesis in the family and society. The decision for the students in their educational and career experiences was one established by cultural influences and social structures. However, for Lucy, Sanju and Marie, other life experiences such as knowledge and impressions of veterinary medicine found favour towards meeting specific personal needs.

This study is specific to the choice of veterinary medicine by female students. Therefore gender as a specific social factor applied to education and career choice is explored in this thesis. In the book, "Degrees of Choice: Class, Race and Gender in Higher Education", Reay, David and Ball (2005, p.7) discussed gender as an issue of society that influences the choice for higher education. I previously referred to class in the application of Bourdieu's cultural capital towards the students' life history and will explore gender and ethnicity and their role in education and career choices. A study by Ball et. al. (2002, p.22), of ninety eight students interviewed, there was a significant report of parental involvement, especially the role of mothers with their daughters' decisions for higher education. The study by Ball et. al. discussed how mothers held

strong views towards higher education which directly influenced their daughters. The impact of the mothers' influence was highlighted in the study wherein mothers rejected certain education choices made by their daughters in favor of opportunities for higher education. The fathers who participated in the same study were reported to be concerned more with the investments required for higher education during the interview process. The study suggested different gender roles between parents regarding the education of their children. I am also drawn to consider the impact of single mothers as it relates to the increasing presence of women in higher education. The number of single parent families is increasing. This conflict within the family seems to create a strong relationship between mothers and daughters. Women are seen as achieving greater success than their male counterparts and the mother and daughter dynamic may be related to the increased value placed on education by parents and the directed expectations for higher educational attainment towards daughters. The parental involvement in education results in a gender bias towards daughters and consequently women in higher education.

In general, there is an increased presence of women in higher education. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported in fall 2012 for the U.S. that there were 10.0 million female undergraduate students (56 percent of total enrolment) and 7.7 million male undergraduate students (44 percent of total enrolment) (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The report further stated that since 1990, female enrolment increased by 52 percent (from 6.6 million to 10.0 million students), while male enrolment increased by 43 percent (from 5.4 million to 7.7 million students). The male to female ratio has shifted in favour of the females. In the US, public universities note a male and female ratio of 43.6–56.4 while private not-for-profit institutions 42.5-57.5 or all private schools 40.7-59.3 (Borzellica 2012, p.x). The nearly 40-60 ratio of male to female students demonstrate the increased presence of females in higher education. This increase represents a relatively new phenomenon particularly in developed countries according to Social Trends (2004, p.x) from the Office of National Statistics in the United Kingdom (UK). As women increase their educational attainment through higher education, a greater diversity of career opportunities would be available to them. For this thesis, the focus

on females in veterinary medicine reflects their increased involvement in veterinary medical education and the profession in developed countries.

The discussion of ethnicity as a social factor also applied to the students' choice of veterinary medicine. With reference to Bourdieu's cultural capital, I would also note that ethnic capital within the context of cultural capital may also be a relevant term in the context of this discussion. Among the students whose life histories were discussed, there were different ethnic identities; Mary, Jane, Lucy and Anne identified with being Caucasian or White American. The White American ethnic identity in the context of the US society was associated with the students of a comparatively higher socio-economic standard as opposed to Marie who was African American. However, with the ethnic classification of Mary, Jane, Lucy and Anne, there were variations of ethnic representations. The Italian American identity of Anne created a strong family-centred approach to her life. The strong social network of family members was influential in encouraging the veterinary career at an early age for Anne. Anne's failure to initially enter veterinary school was a social stress which reflected in the avoidance behaviours of her parents towards other family members. Lucy's identity was of a small town US farm community which presented its own unique socio-cultural characteristics based on the specific value system of remaining within the home community together with getting married and raising a family. Marie, as an African-American, and Sanju as an immigrant Indian to the US also presented a different ethnic perspective than the other students. Marie's African-American identity and ethnic representation were manifested in the form of her family's origin from an urban centre in the city of Philadelphia, representing a low income family status and limited aspirations early in her life towards higher education and professional career. The low socio-economic status of Marie's family eventually served as a barrier for her ambitions to seek upwards socio-economic mobility, which she saw in the career choice of veterinary medicine. Sanju's ethnic characteristic of being Indian was represented in her family structure of an extended family with her parents and grandparents. The Indian culture of female obedience and the maintenance of family traditions were demonstrated in Sanju's path towards engagement and marriage. Also, Sanju's family's expectation of medical studies for her was a socially constructed pathway, as opposed to the other students whose life history and exposure



influenced their interests and decision towards veterinary medicine. For Sanju, her interest in veterinary medicine was eventually decided on after permission from her father as part of the traditional Indian hierarchy of decision making.

The nature of society and culture played an active role in the life history and experiences for all the students including their education and career. Whether it was family, socio-economic, gender or ethnic considerations, all were found to be influential towards the students educational and career choices. The practices and behaviours of the students were reflected in the value and belief systems of their family and socially associated standards. In the context of veterinary medicine as a career, socio-cultural characteristics and its influence on students' choice was apparent. Veterinary medicine in this study and for a career seems adoptable and adaptable to the diverse needs, expectations, and characteristics of the socio-cultural influences on the students' life histories.

### **S.G.U.: Offshore Medical Institution**

Foreign education institutions are a relatively recent but growing phenomenon in the Caribbean. To date, there are more than thirty offshore medical schools in fifteen Caribbean countries (Parolini and Platek 2010, p.1). The first of the offshore institutions was S.G.U. in Grenada founded in 1976 (Brandon 2003, p.23). The structure of the offshore educational institutions is based on a combination of basic medical sciences training on Caribbean campuses with the administration based in the US. These institutions do not fall under the jurisdiction of US accreditation agencies, although of the three offshore institutions that offer veterinary programmes in the Caribbean, S.G.U. and Ross University in St. Kitts are accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) like other US based veterinary schools. St. Matthews University in the Cayman Islands is an offshore institution that also offers veterinary medical education. The quality of education provided by offshore institutions is an area of intense debate. This is based on the premise that the quality of applicants to offshore education institutions is below the matriculation requirements of US based institutions. The evolution of offshore education institutions in the Caribbean has adopted a business model that

specializes in services. The services include those provided by the institution themselves and support services to the student and international community that engage the institutions.

The interdependence between the students and S.G.U. is noted, based on S.G.U.'s ability to meet the students' needs for veterinary medical education through mechanisms of offshore education, and associated lower admissions requirements. The students who do not meet requirements for US based veterinary schools seek alternative educational opportunities such as S.G.U. Among these students include those who can afford and obtain funding to meet the cost requirements for private higher education. These students serve as a market for offshore educational institutions such as S.G.U. The students whose life histories formed this thesis reflected the offshore educational institution academic and financial characteristics through their own personal, financial and academic needs. The context of the students in offshore educational institution dynamics contributes to the overall data, analysis, discussion, theory and conclusion. The point of S.G.U. being an offshore medical institution must therefore be considered as a critical component of the overall study and thesis. The students as students of S.G.U. and S.G.U. as an offshore educational institution are an important fundamental characteristic that needs to be taken into account on the reading and understanding of this thesis.

### **Application of Grounded Theory**

The choice of career is associated with many theories such as the childhood development theory, vocational identity, political and economic theory and *habitus* (as noted in chapter 2, p.27). Theories are constructed to explain or provide a deeper understanding to a problem. In the context of this thesis, 'what are the influences for female students to choose veterinary medicine?' is one such question. The nature of this thesis focused on the life history of students, and the data and analysis conducted referred to themes that emerged and their chronologic and temporal sequence. My application of the grounded theory in the analysis of the study data refer to relationships and inter and intra dependencies of the various themes and how the influences and socio-cultural, economic and academic factors of the students' lives interacted towards their choice of veterinary medical education. Transcripts constructed from

interviews with each of the six students were analyzed to form a chronological sequence of decision making processes that was built from sequential life experiences and culminated with their enrolment into S.G.U.'s veterinary school. Additionally, each student's life experiences were compartmentalized into factors related to the individual student which was considered personal and factors based on each student's social realities which was considered as environmental. The themes and factors that emerged from an analysis of the data through coding and clustering of the data presented from a temporal sequence included the following five components:

1. Need:

The choice of veterinary medicine by the students had its genesis in a specific need on the part of each student. The needs included personal desire on the part of students towards veterinary medicine and the care for animals. The personal aspects of the students need also contained a family oriented component as an influence. Other aspects of students needs included financial in terms of affordability of the study of veterinary medicine, desirability to become veterinarians as well as the socio-economic level of each student and their families. There was also an academic aspect of the students' needs in terms of matching academic performances to enrol into and pursue veterinary medicine.

2. Knowledge and Experience with Veterinary Medicine:

The students demonstrated varying degrees of knowledge and experience towards veterinary medicine. Exposure to veterinary medicine was an essential part for each student's knowledge and experience to make a choice to pursue it. The impressions of students towards veterinarians and veterinary medicine as a career also served to inform the students' knowledge and experience.

3. Interest:

Interest towards veterinary medicine was another essential requirement for each student to first possess. Maintenance of this interest over time through working in veterinary clinics, continued care of pets and sustained family support and mentorship

from veterinarians allowed the student to progress towards the choice to pursue veterinary medicine.

4. Decision:

The decision to pursue veterinary medicine was the result of the interactions among needs, knowledge, and experience of veterinary medicine and the interests of students. The interaction among the components produced the choice of veterinary medicine by the students and enrolment.

5. Enrolment:

The decision to pursue veterinary medicine was the culminating stage for each student. However, there was a gap between the choice to pursue veterinary medical education and the enrolment of the students into their veterinary programme. Enrolment was the final stage towards the student presence in veterinary medicine. Personal, financial, and academic factors as barriers and opportunities interacted to progress the students decision towards enrolment.

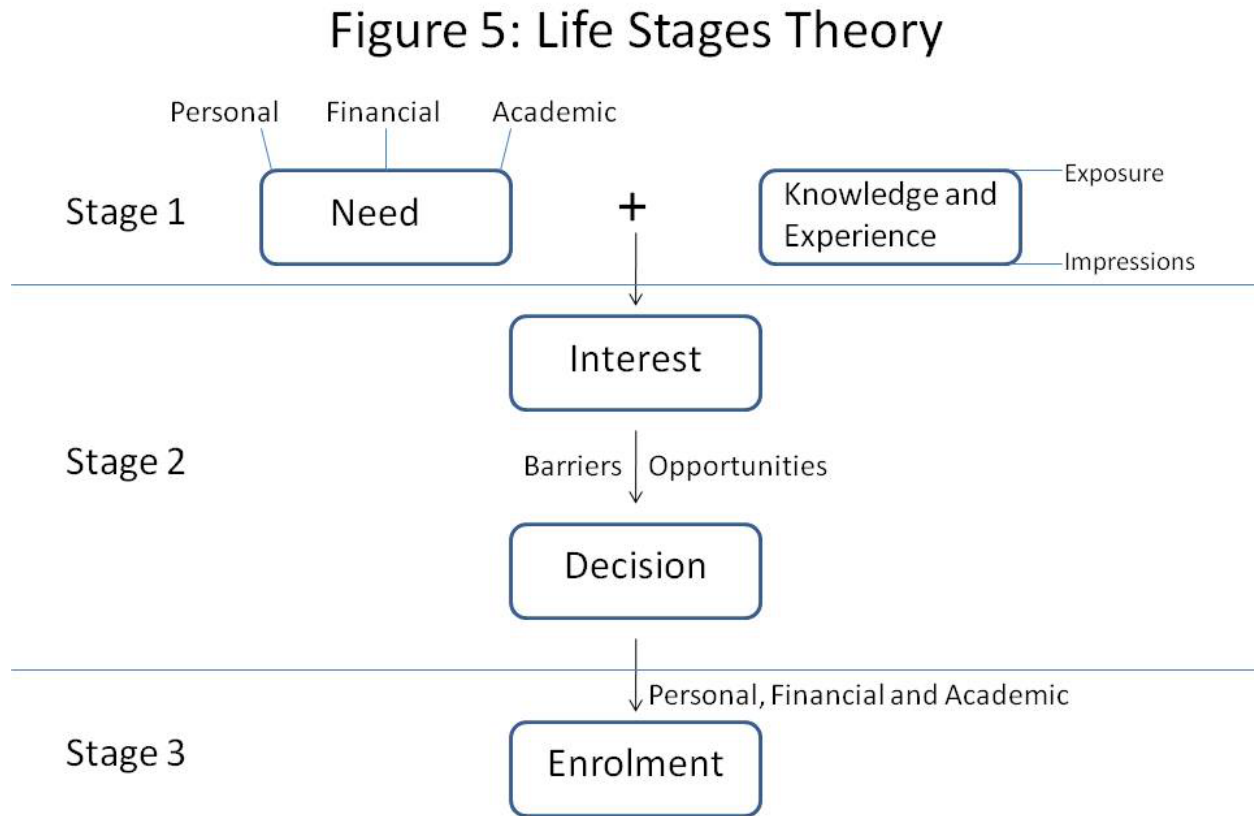
The components of need, knowledge and experience, interest, decision and enrolment are the components of each student's life history experiences. The interacting factors of personal, financial and academic characteristics served as the influences to the need. These interacting factors were within the socio-cultural and economic context as environmental realities towards the students' choice of veterinary medicine. Each of the described components is required towards the choice and enrolment and represents a multi-stage and temporally sequenced interaction. I described the interactions as the Life Stages Theory for the students' which determined their choice of veterinary medicine.

### **Life Stages Theory**

Using the Life Stages Theory I propose to provide an explanation underpinning the student's choice of veterinary medical education by reference to the components of need, knowledge and experience, interest, decision and enrolment as having a specific time sequence and socio-cultural and economic realities throughout the students' life histories. For the decision towards

and enrolment into veterinary medicine to occur, there is a temporal chronologic sequence as shown in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Life Stages Theory



Stage 1 of the Life Stages Theory includes the components of needs and knowledge and experience. Generally, the components of stage 1 occur at an early age as was the case for Anne, Mary, Jane and Marie. However, for Lucy and Sanju, their needs together with knowledge and experience components occurred later on in their life. The component of need reflected the personal and family-oriented influences on the students. Linked to the personal and family influences were the financial and academic aspects of the needs component. The personal needs included, as in the cases of Mary and Anne, a desire to care for their personal pets. The personal need to care for animals and for Mary and Anne occurred at an early age and one that was supported by their respective families. Lucy and Sanju’s need was their personal need to escape family structured expectations which did not meet with their own projected

aspirations. Jane and Marie personal needs included satisfying their family obligations to improve their socio-economic standing in the case of Marie and maintain the sustainability of the family owned veterinary clinic for Jane. Collectively, the students all had a need to pursue academic performance at a higher education level. The need for higher education was also influenced by the factors of family expectations which each student accepted as their own personal expectations as well.

The need component is consistent for all the students and serves as the genesis of the Life Stages Theory towards their choice and enrolment into veterinary medicine. The needs of each student were a result of the socio-cultural, economic and academic influences that created the needs for the students. The needs were also a part of the growing up process in the life history of the students. Based on the experiences of each student and their socio-cultural, economic and academic realities, different needs of the students were expressed.

The second component of stage 1 is the knowledge and experience of the students in relation to veterinary medicine. The knowledge and experience component, like the needs component, is a process that occurs during the developmental part of the students' lives. Exposure of the students to veterinary medicine, and by extension to veterinarians, informed their knowledge and experience. In addition, the students' consistent positive impressions of veterinarians as part of their knowledge and experiences were also influential factors. The students' varying experiences included the care of their pet dogs growing up, working and experiencing a veterinary clinic and learning about the veterinary profession as part of the process towards making their choice of veterinary medical education. Mary and Anne's exposure to veterinary medicine occurred early in their life and included the care of their pets as well as tragic illness and death of their pet dogs. Jane and Marie knowledge and experiences were linked to their work in veterinary clinics and the influences of veterinarians in their lives. Lucy and Sanju's knowledge and experience on the other hand was limited growing up and occurred at a late stage in terms of their exposure and the decision making process towards veterinary medicine. The overall positive impressions of students towards veterinarians were influential based on their respective knowledge and experience related to veterinary medicine.

The needs, knowledge and experience components in stage 1 of the Life Stages Theory I propose interact with each other. Students' needs, which they identified themselves growing up, matched with their knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine. The matching of the students' needs, knowledge and experience was based on the students identifying characteristics of veterinary medicine from their knowledge and experience, in order to satisfy their particular personal, financial, and academic needs. The match between veterinary medicine as a mechanism to care for the animals met the desire for Mary and Anne to aspire to become veterinarians. The knowledge of financial benefits from a career in veterinary medicine matched the needs for sustainability and upward socio-economic mobility for Jane and Marie respectively. Also, the knowledge that veterinary medicine provided to escape family expectations was met with the personal needs of Lucy and Sanju towards seeking alternative opportunities. Interactions between the students' needs and their knowledge and experiences of veterinary medicine served to create a compatibility of the students with veterinary medicine. This compatibility established the interest for the students towards veterinary medicine, which is stage 2 of the Life Stages Theory.

Stage 2 of the Life Stages Theory relates to the students' interest in veterinary medicine. Stage 2 for the students, as well as its component of interest in veterinary medicine, came after the needs, knowledge and experience interactions of stage 1. Stage 2 and students' interest therefore, occurred at a later stage in the life history of the student. However, this later stage is not in the context of the ages of the students, but rather in the chronological sequence of events. The early interests in veterinary medicine as children for Mary, Anne, and Jane were a result of early stage 1 interactions of their needs and knowledge and experience by virtue of their exposure to veterinarians at an early age. Marie's interests in teenage years were based on her knowledge from Dr. Z about opportunities for her to become a veterinarian. Lucy and Sanju had their interaction between personal needs and the knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine occur in their undergraduate training to inform their interests as adults in life.

The transition from stage 1 to stage 2 suggests a relatively short period of time between when needs, knowledge and experience occur. The progression through stage 2 of interest varies in length on the way to the decision component. The influential factors of stage 2 were the experiences of the students to maintain their interest in veterinary medicine. For Mary, Jane, Marie, and Anne, their interests were maintained through continued exposure to veterinary medicine through their years growing up. For Lucy and Sanju, their interest in veterinary medicine was short as they progressed through to their decision in a short time frame. The influences of stage 2 to maintain interests were the continued exposure the students had to veterinary medicine, the continued identification by the students of personal, financial and academic characteristics of veterinary medicine to meet their needs and addressing the barriers and presentation of opportunities for the students to decide to pursue veterinary medicine.

The influences of barriers and opportunities as consistent experiences of the students were critical experiences in stage 2. Having expressed an interest in veterinary medicine, the students faced personal, financial, and academic barriers that challenged the transition of their interests to decision. The personal struggle of Lucy in dealing with the expectations for her to remain in her home environment which she was uncomfortable in was a barrier. The family expectation for Sanju to pursue medicine even when she had shared her interest in veterinary medicine was a barrier. The issue of affordability for Jane and Marie was a financial barrier which challenged their interest in veterinary medicine. Also, the barriers of not meeting the academic admissions for veterinary schools challenged Mary and Anne pursuit of veterinary medicine. The consideration of barriers in stage 2 at the point of interest was the pivot towards the students' successful progression towards decision and enrolment into veterinary medicine.

Another component of stage 2 is the decision making event where the students transferred their interest to choice of veterinary medicine. In the context of time, there may be a point to distinguish between the interest and decision to pursue veterinary medicine. I chose to divide interest and decision into separate components for stage 2 of the Life Stages Theory due to the fact that in the life histories of the students there was a significant lag between their interest and their decision to pursue veterinary medicine. Anne's interest and decision occurred very



early, and her life history recall did not separate these two actions on her part. Mary's early interest only became a decision after her declaration to become a veterinarian in her career guidance session in school, and the challenges to the health of their pets which affirmed her early interest to become veterinarians. For Jane and Marie, their interests in veterinary medicine were tempered by their financial limitations. This limitation was overcome by financial aid and scholarship opportunities that allowed them to fund their veterinary education. Lucy and Sanju's transition from interest to the decision, while seemingly overlapped, was separated by Lucy's loan processing and Sanju's father's change of position to eventually support her application to veterinary school. Opportunities served to overcome barriers which were an important part of the process and transitioned the students' interest to their decision to pursue veterinary medicine.

Stage 3 of the Life Stages Theory relates to the final experience of the students, which was matriculating into veterinary school after making their decision to pursue veterinary medicine. The period of time between the decision-making and enrolment into veterinary medicine varied from several years for students like Mary and Anne, to within one year for Lucy and Sanju. The main influences for the students in their enrolment in veterinary school were academic opportunities in the form of the pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U., as well as the availability of scholarships and financial aid. S.G.U. featured prominently in the students' experiences during stage 3 of the Life Stages Theory which led to enrolment at S.G.U. Even the personal influences for Lucy to seek separation from her family and an alternate career for Sanju towards promoting family life were facilitated by the characteristics of S.G.U. However, the enrolment stage for the Life Stages Theory remains relevant beyond the context of S.G.U. as the students generally experienced a gap of one to four years prior to enrolment into a veterinary programme. The components and time frame of the Life Stages Theory reflects on the life experiences of the students and the timeline of the various influences which resulted in the decision and enrolment of the students into veterinary medicine. Implicit in the Life Stages Theory is the linkages between different periods in the students' lives and the socio-cultural, economic, and academic realities that occurred in their respective life experiences.

In the review of other theories on career choices, relationships can be drawn to the Life Stages Theory I propose. The childhood development theory by Hartung, Porfeli and Vondracek (2005, p.385) relates to the need, knowledge and experience components of stage 1 of the Life Stages Theory which generally was part of the student's development experiences. The identification of needs and the matching of characteristics, occur at an early stage in the lives of students as described by the childhood development theory. The concept of vocational identity from Erickson (1969, p.23) and Vondracek (2001, p.265) was also noted in stage 2 of the Life Stages Theory. Students' interest in veterinary medicine which was maintained over a period of time can be considered how students identified themselves in the future with the vocation of veterinary medicine which defined their vocational identity. The needs and knowledge and experiences also draw similarities to Bourdieu's *habitus* where the students' needs are defined from their immediate social environment. *Habitus* is also demonstrated by the experiences of the students in their early lives. Students' knowledge and experiences was matched with their needs to develop interests to pursue veterinary medicine. Furthermore, *habitus* advocates for the socio-cultural influences as well as economic realities of people's lives in their decision making. The socio-cultural and economic influences of the students' lives were identified and noted in all three stages of the Life Stages Theory.

The Life Stages Theory explains the sequences of events that formed the life history of the students which led to their decision and enrolment into veterinary medicine. The theory was constructed through the data collection, analysis, by the application of grounded theory to the students' life histories towards their choice of veterinary medical education.

## **Review of Study Objectives**

The study objectives which formed the basis of the enquiry for the thesis was also reviewed as follows:

The **first** objective was to identify the reasons using the life history methodology for the choice of veterinary medicine among a group of female veterinary students. The life experiences that influenced the students who participated in this study first included exposure to veterinary

medicine. This exposure commonly occurred at an early age in the students' life history but also occurred later on in life as well for some students. The exposure to veterinary medicine included the veterinary care of the student's personal pets, work in veterinary clinics, experiences with veterinarians and knowledge and observations of veterinary medicine as an international experience and a career that supports family life. Other life experiences included personal, financial, and academic experiences that were both barriers and opportunities, but served to influence the students' choice of veterinary medicine. Personal experiences in the form of tragic illness and death of pet animals served as incentives for students to pursue veterinary medicine for their careers. Personal challenges associated with family expectations for remaining in the home environment and pursuing career in medicine were resolved by the international opportunity of veterinary medical education at S.G.U. and the career of veterinary medicine as an acceptable alternative to medicine for the students. Difficult financial experiences of an unsustainable veterinary clinic and a low income lifestyle influenced students to become veterinarians to support the family owned veterinary clinic and improve the socio-economic standing of the family. Also, financial influences in terms of financial aid and scholarship opportunities were also critical to the students' ability to afford and choose to study veterinary medicine. Academic influences provided through the pre-veterinary programme at S.G.U. were also necessary for the students to gain the opportunity for admission into veterinary school. It is important to note that there is a distinction between veterinary medical education and the career of veterinary medicine. The study itself did not distinguish between the education and career of veterinary medicine but the students' account of their respective life histories did. Mary and Anne were interested for the most part in the career of veterinary medicine to care for animals, work in a veterinary clinic and enjoy the perceived family oriented lifestyle of veterinarians. For Lucy and Sanju, their interest in veterinary medicine was as a means of gaining separation from an uncomfortable home environment and family expectations. Marie and Jane used veterinary education toward a high income earning employment and the need to maintain family business.

The **second** study objective was to examine existing reason from the literature on female choice of veterinary medicine for their education and career including equal admission criteria,

improved veterinary technology and practices, increased number of female veterinary role models and caring image of female veterinarians. This objective sought to compare the outcomes of this study with the findings of previous publications from related work. From the previously reported literature review in chapter 2, the following were identified as reasons for females to pursue veterinary medicine:

1. Equal admissions criteria
2. Improved veterinary technology and practice
3. Increased number of female veterinary role models
4. Caring image of female veterinarians

1. Based on the life histories of the students interviewed for this study, the point of equal admissions criteria reported in the literature did not arise. The students all faced challenges in their admissions process to veterinary schools but these challenges were based on poor performance and incomplete academic requirements for enrolment. The point of females as better performing students compared to males did emerge in the discussion of the students life histories relating to experiences during their years at school. The note of females as higher performing students suggests that females met the admissions criteria for veterinary medical education more readily than male students.

2. Improved veterinary technology and practice as a reason from the literature did form part of the students' life history. The student's knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine influenced their interests and decision to pursue veterinary medicine. Students referred to the care and treatment of pet animals as the main reason associated with veterinary practice towards their particular choice. Additionally, the ability to manage a veterinary clinic and conduct veterinary business, gain separation from the home environment, seek family oriented career and gain upward socio-economic mobility were all identified from the students' knowledge of veterinary medicine. These particular knowledge and experiences the students had of veterinary medicine I would consider was based on characteristics of veterinary medicine as a career and not necessarily due to the practice of veterinary medicine and the use of technology as referred to in the literature.

3. The increased number of female veterinarians and their role in inspiring the students was noted in the life histories as well as reported in the literature. Students identified female veterinarians in the care for their pets, working in the veterinary clinic and even as a parent. These particular roles of female veterinarians were referred to by the students when they discussed their interests in veterinary medicine. The students also communicated positively their impressions of female veterinarians which continued when the students enrolled into S.G.U. The students did however also refer to male veterinarians as role models during the course of their life history who were also influential in support and encouraging their veterinary aspirations.

4. The caring image of female veterinarians as a reason from the literature towards the choice of veterinary medicine was also noted by the students as part of their knowledge and experience with veterinary medicine. But, like the female veterinarians as role models (point previously mentioned), the caring image of female veterinarians was also extended to male veterinarians.

The comparison between the students' life histories and the findings from the works reported in the literature review revealed areas of common trends that emerged as well as some unique experiences specific to the students in this study.

## **Chapter 12 Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The life history study of female veterinary students revealed individual and social realities surrounding life experiences to be critical towards an understanding of reasons for their choice of veterinary medicine. The constructed Life Stages Theory (Ch. 11, p.195) recognized individual needs and exposure to and knowledge of veterinary medicine as critical to inform interests which progressed to a decision and enrolment into veterinary medicine. The progression to students' choice was based on their personal, financial and academic barriers and opportunities. S.G.U. was also noted as a consistent feature in providing the personal, financial, and academic opportunities for the students to pursue veterinary medicine. Finally, the choice of veterinary medicine while common to all students was based on the varied and unique life experiences for each student. This chapter will conclude the thesis with a review of the following:

- Research Findings
- New Insights Created
- Applications of New Insights
- Limitations of the Research
- Final Thoughts and Conclusion

### **Research Findings**

The research question central to this thesis included what were the reasons for female students to choose veterinary medicine for their higher education and career? The use of life history methodology to understand the life experiences of the six female veterinary students revealed the following reasons:

- Personal reasons towards the care of pets and other animals, meet family expectations of becoming a veterinarian, positive experiences with veterinarians, aspiration towards the informed personal life of a veterinarian or escape family oriented socio-cultural expectations through international opportunities in veterinary medicine.
- Exposure to veterinary medicine and veterinarians whether for the care of personal pet animals growing up, the practice and work experience of veterinary medicine in a clinic setting or learning about the lives of veterinarians.
- Financial reasons to seek personal and family socio-economic advancement associated with higher education or a career in veterinary medicine as well as obtain financial aid provided to pursue veterinary medicine at S.G.U.
- Academic reasons through the educational opportunity provided by S.G.U. for veterinary medicine through the pre-veterinary alternative pathway and offshore location.

### **New Insights Created**

This study which identified reasons for female students' choice of veterinary medicine was a diverse one. The diversity of life experiences provided unique life histories for each student which resulted in individual idiosyncrasies of reasons for their respective choice. The individual differences while noted were also placed in context of similarities within diverse life histories for each student. Consistent experiences such as pet ownership, positive perceptions of veterinarians and veterinary medicine, expressed interest in pursuing veterinary medicine together with personal, academic and financial barriers accompanied by opportunities emerged as comparable themes across the respective students' life experiences.

The reasons for choice described by the constructed Life Stages Theory identified different phases (stages) in life as periods of time. Each phase of time related to characteristic life experiences such as early exposure to pets and experience with veterinarians which influenced interests. The Life Stages Theory also considered the experiences in each stage to interact with

socio-cultural characteristics of the respective students lives. Socio-cultural characteristics in the form of parents being veterinarians, socio-economic status as a support or challenge to pursue higher education, family traditions and expectations and ethnically related considerations. The reasons for the choice of veterinary medicine were also commonly reported as personal, academic and financial towards making the final decision to enrol in veterinary medicine. The personal, academic and financial reasons were initially described as barriers which had to be overcome by opportunities received. Personal barriers were managed through challenging and breaking through family imposed limitations and belief systems. Barriers that were academic in nature were overcome through alternative pathways offered at S.G.U. such as the pre-veterinary academic programme. Financial barriers were overcome through opportunities for loans and scholarships.

The progress of reasons outlined by the components of the Life Stages Theory also followed a chronological sequence. The observed sequence of interest in veterinary medicine at an early age required for a maintenance of the interest through the identification of veterinary medicine as serving to specific personal and professional needs of the students. The maintenance of the interest in veterinary medicine occurred during the period of adolescence to adulthood. Challenges of personal, academic and financial barriers occurred at the early adult life which served as the transition period between maintenance of the interest in veterinary medicine and making the decision to pursue veterinary medicine.

There is a distinction to be made in terms of the decision stage of the students' lives to pursue veterinary medicine which only became apparent at the concluding stage of the thesis. Early interest in veterinary medicine as a child and ambitions of becoming a veterinarian can be considered decisions towards the choice of becoming a veterinarian. However, for the purpose of the Life Stages Theory and in understanding the reasons for choice of veterinary medicine among the female students, the point of decision making was that of application and enrolment into veterinary medical education. The inevitable choice of veterinary medicine by the female students served as a culminating experience of individual and socio-cultural interactions that occurred across different stages in the life history of the students.



## **Application of New Insights**

The insights on reasons for choice of veterinary medicine for higher education and career can be applied to student career advisement and review of applicants for admission into veterinary schools. A students' life history provides an understanding into their various life experiences which can be instructively assessed. An assessment of what students were exposed to, their knowledge and interests towards higher education and career ambitions, family and community practices and expectations as well as barriers towards their ambitions and how these barriers can be overcome are all important information that can be helpful in advising and reviewing students for veterinary medicine.

Career advisement for students occurs at the level of high schools and undergraduate education. Exploring life experiences of students using the life history methodology can identify trends with students' knowledge and experience together with their individual and social needs that have been found to be useful to appropriately match students with relevant career options. Identified career options can be followed up by exploring any barriers and/or opportunities to examine the feasibility to pursue a particular career path. Life history is a time consuming process in terms of the effort and commitment on the part of both career advisors and students. However, over the course of high school and higher education experiences, life history interviewing of students can be continued process over the academic time frame for students. In this study, the specific career of choice was veterinary medicine and the particular students of interest were females. However, life experiences when characterized by the accompanied socio-cultural context can create an understanding of a student's career interest which is important in any area of career advisement. This thesis has identified that students' choice of veterinary medicine is varied and advisement on career should accommodate for the differences among students which can be identified from their life history experiences. Lucy for example remains unsettled in her career path as her choice of veterinary medical education was to escape her family expectations which she did not accept for herself. As a student of veterinary medicine she has already identified pursuing graduate education in business administration after completing veterinary medical education. The unsettled education and

career development for Lucy can result in a disservice to her own professional development as well as to the veterinary profession which she does not have any interest in participating and contributing to. An advisement process that incorporated life history interview would have identified Lucy's personal struggles and disconnected choices for her higher education and career development. A life history informed advisement would have supported Lucy to seek assistance with her personal struggles and provide informed recommendations towards more feasible and appropriate options for the choice of higher education and career pathways to match her specific personal needs.

Admission into veterinary schools is another application of the knowledge created from this thesis. Current admissions procedures for S.G.U.'s veterinary medicine program includes a review of undergraduate G.P.A. with consideration for prerequisite undergraduate courses, receipt of two positive recommendations and a essay on a topic of interest in veterinary medicine. This current review process is unable to identify applicants' alignment of their application with their professional intent and interests towards veterinary medicine. A review of students' applications to veterinary schools can employ interviews to explore the life history of applicants. Interviews can serve to identify elements of the students' life history by matching students' experiences with individual and socio-cultural characteristics as outlined in the Life Stages Theory. The use of life history to identify elements of barriers and opportunities for the applicants can determine challenges of the applicants towards becoming a veterinary student. Separate from an interview, an application form can also consider data fields that capture similar information relevant to understanding the life experiences towards applicants' interest and decision to pursue veterinary medicine. However, a life history interview is an interactive process which is important towards understanding the students' life experiences and one which may not be successfully replicated in an application form. As a veterinarian, I assumed that persons who chose to apply to and pursue veterinary medicine have the intention to commit to a lifelong process of professional development and contribute towards the continued development of the profession. The reality that this thesis and life history interviewing identified is that female students' choice of veterinary medicine can be separate from the veterinary profession itself. From an admissions perspective, the goal is to enrol students who

will successfully complete the academic program and serve the profession of veterinary medicine. I would also extend this goal to other professional academic programs and careers. An admissions review can serve to identify students beyond their ability to meet pre-requisites for admissions. Students can therefore be appropriately selected who will join the veterinary profession to positively contribute to its development and allow for this process with admissions into a veterinary medical education program.

The ultimate goal of career advisement is to support the students' choice of higher education and career pursuits that matches their full potential and continued professional development. Likewise, review of applicants for admission into veterinary schools is focused on choosing students that will be successful in veterinary medical education and who will productively contribute to the veterinary profession. Both career advisement and admission review can stand to benefit from identifying the personal needs of students to become veterinarians and gauging their knowledge and experience of veterinary medicine. Once interest is identified, reviewing the students' socio-cultural and economic context to note barriers and identify opportunities can determine their feasibility of a career pathway or enrolment into veterinary medicine.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The study was designed and conducted to the best of my ability with the expectations of producing knowledge in response to the research questions. Inevitably, every methodology contains potential limitations and when applied to human participants would encounter challenges which I would like to note as part of this thesis.

A reflexive account of the strengths and weaknesses of aspects of the research require for a consideration of a) sampling strategy, b) stage theory models and c) approach to interviewing including being a male interviewer.

### **a) Sampling strategy**

The sampling strategy included selecting one student from the six different academic terms of the veterinary medical program offered by S.G.U. in Grenada. This approach allowed for me to

obtain a spectrum of students' experiences across the various academic stages in the veterinary program. Students' representation in each term also allowed for diversity of admissions experiences as each student would have had a different point of entry over a three year period. The time spectrum would have also allowed for different experiences that were time related such as the economic downturn in the US to emerge from the students' experiences. These characteristics of students sampled from each of the six academic terms I consider to add to the depth of life history experiences that I obtained for this thesis.

Conversely, students selected from a particular academic term may have been more consistent in terms of academic veterinary experiences for the study. The selection of students with a U.S. centred social and educational background provides life experiences and view points from an American position and limits the engagement of students' experiences from a non-American/international perspective. My active selection of students across a geographically diverse spectrum could have introduced a more internationally represented group of students to participate in the study and provide a more diverse range of life experiences beyond the American based perspectives. The referred students based on recommendation from class representatives and selection by faculty members would have introduced biases on the part of the class representatives as well as the particular faculty member. A random selection of students using a randomized list of numbers against a class listing may have been an approach to reduce the selection bias possibility from the student class representatives and faculty choices.

While I note the weakness identified from the sampling approach, I am reminded that from the students interviewed, there was a significant diversity of life experiences shared and difference did exist in terms of socio-cultural, economic and academic experiences which contributed to the richness of the data collected. For example, students within a Caucasian American identity, there was also diversity as Anne identified with an Italian American background and Lucy as a small town/agricultural setting.

b) Stage theory models

Stage theory models such as the life stages theory I propose as an outcome of my analysis, I infer from Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, as elements that progress according to a pattern of distinct stages over time (Piaget 1970, p. 716). Stages theory as it is referred to have been successfully applied to diverse applications to explain realities that exist for characteristics of a group including age as is the case for Piaget's developmental theory. Elder and Paul (2010, p.x) include that there are predictable stages through which every person passes. Passage from one stage to the next is dependent upon what occurs at each stage and is not automatic as the success in each stage is connected to the each person and influence choices made such as the Life Stages Theory.

However, stages theory may not apply to individual persons with different life experiences that do not reflect the progression through stages. There can be difficulty applying the elements of a particular stage to different time periods of a persons' life. For example, in the Life Stages Theory I proposed, the stage 1 elements of need and knowledge and experience occurred at different time stages for different students, some at and early childhood and others at the young adult stage which questions the nature and applicability of the stage process itself. The nature of life history methodology and the qualitative research encourages an open and flexible methodological and analytical process which stage theory models in some aspects contradicts as aligning life experiences to a particular structure may be a mismatch for the approach used in this thesis.

I would note that while universal use of stages theory is not always applicable; the process of examining lives with particular reference to development in different stages provides a better understanding of the life phenomenon being studied. In relation to the Life Stages Theory, the stages are not limited to time or age of the students but rather their experiences in a chronologic and sequential manner. Stages theory provides an understanding of life phenomenon by compartmentalizing the knowledge areas into understandable sections with an appreciation of how the various stages interact.

c) Approach to interviewing

Life history interviewing employed was responsible for my ability to thoroughly explore the lives of the students to gain knowledge and understanding on how personal and social experiences informed their choice of veterinary medicine. The interview process I found rewarding as I believe that the opportunity to share in the lives of the students was the most thorough and relevant approach to the study from my research experience. Myself and the students while initially apprehensive about the life history interviewing process found comfort and realization of each others life experiences that was critical towards engaging my enquiry. I believe that the inherent nature of life history interviewing and my application of it provided these strengths which resulted in the outcomes for this thesis.

The life history interviewing however required for students to recall their life experiences from their childhood and report on relevant events that they considered important towards their path to veterinary medicine. The potential for inaccurate and incomplete recall of life experiences from the students' life history may have been possible. Also, the risk of the researcher influencing students' responses was real as questions posed would have had direction to the students' responses as well. This influence on the part of the researcher was difficult to avoid and should be considered as a limitation. Additionally, inexperience on the part of both myself and the students in engaging life history interviewing created a learning process during the actual data collection which may have not allowed for the full spectrum of the life history interviewing potential to be explored and employed. The resultant data, its analysis and findings represent the limitations of the application and engagement of life history interviewing for the first time by both myself and the students.

Another weakness to the life history approach to interviewing that I employed was based on a semi structured interview process used. This limitation relates to the difficulty in beginning the process of life history interviewing with a blank slate and not entering the process with a priori views and opinions which a semi-instructed interview brought into the interviewing process. The life history report told the story about each student regarding their real life which provided an opportunity to understand the social process that took place through detailed description of specific acts, events, relationships and circumstances in particular lives. The life history

interviewing allowed me to attain an understanding towards the female students' choice of veterinary medicine in a way that is lacking in other methods which is a strength.

Being a male interviewer was another possible weakness of the life history approach in the context of this study as the nature of the participants was females. The nature of the life history interviews being narrative and my interpretations towards its reporting was based on my understanding and inferential processing of information and responses from the female students. Inherent in my approach to the interview and processing of interview data was the reality that I was a male and the participants were females. The lens in which I used to view and interpret the life experiences of female students were based on my experiences and characteristics as a male. This position on my part may have prevented my full engagement of the female life experiences perspectives. Woods (1986, p. x) suggests that the attributes of an interviewer include their naturalness. For me, being male, was natural tendencies which I could not avoid but rather my awareness of my natural tendencies serve to acknowledge the limitation of the gender dynamics that existed between the students and myself.

The nature of life history research requires an exploration of personal lives of the students which is also apparent in the life history reports of chapters four to nine. The risk of linking students to their respective life history report is real and a challenge. While I created different identities for each student interviewed, the details of their respective life histories provide a possibility to identify the respective students. The risk of a breach in confidentiality was part of the informed consent of each student which is a concern for this thesis although measures were taken in the data reporting to minimize the risk of identifying students based on the respective life history reports. This is a weakness that is characteristic of life history interviewing but one that should be evaluated in the context of the richness of data collected and the depth and breath of knowledge gained.

Finally, and with particular reference to note the weakness concerns from a quantitative perspective, female students at S.G.U. who participated in this study do not reflect the general population of female veterinary students. The aim of this study was not to generalize the interpretations and conclusion from the data and analysis. Therefore, the knowledge created

from this thesis is only applicable to the female students who participated in the study. The demographic characteristics of the students as US based and being students of an offshore educational institution is another consideration in the overall context of the study findings. I did not enter into this study with the idea of the student demographic characteristics and S.G.U. as an offshore institution being limitations. However, students' demographic backgrounds and the role of S.G.U. emerged as a clear influence on the students' life history. This characteristic of the students' demographics and offshore veterinary education experience also create difficulty when comparing findings from studies present in the published literature with the interpretation and conclusions of this thesis. It should be noted however that the diverse individual and socio-cultural variations of students within this study did result in a common knowledge and understanding as described by the Life Stages Theory. The study findings can be transferrable towards other choices for higher education and career interests among all students.

## **Final Thoughts and Conclusion**

The study on the reasons for the choice of female students towards veterinary medicine resulted in the following conclusions:

- Pet ownership at an early age creates interest among female students towards becoming veterinarians.
- Experience with veterinary medical practice at an early age is influential for female students to choose veterinary medicine for their higher education and career.
- Veterinarians are role models for female students to aspire towards.
- Female students perform better academically and are more successful in gaining admission into veterinary schools than male students.
- Female students continue to pursue their interests and ambitions of veterinary medicine even when barriers are evident that initially prevent them from enrolling into veterinary schools.



- Family is a social influence towards the female students' choice of veterinary medicine through expectations and traditions.
- The impact of family expectations and traditions is more significant for female children than males.
- Offshore institutions such as S.G.U. provide academic opportunities for students to pursue veterinary medicine when not available in the US.

This thesis demonstrates the use of life history interviewing as relevant towards understanding female students' choice of veterinary medicine. Reasons were identified for female students' choice of veterinary medicine. The constructed Life Stages Theory explained the individual and socio-cultural interactions which resulted in the students' choice of veterinary medical education. Finally, the created knowledge of reasons of the choice of veterinary medicine and the Life Stages Theory can be applied towards career advisement and admissions review for veterinary medicine.

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## Appendix 1: Ethical Approval: University of Sheffield, School of Education



**The  
School  
Of  
Education.**

Satesh Bidaisee  
EdD Caribbean

**Head of School**  
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

Department of Educational Studies  
385 Glossop Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2JA

08 November 2012

**Telephone:** +44 (0)114 222 5115  
**Email:** edd@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Satesh

**ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

**What life experiences contributed to female's choice of veterinary medical education?**

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely



Dr Simon Warren  
**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

cc

## Appendix 2: Ethical Approval: St. George's University, Institutional Review Board



# Institutional Review Board

9 November 2012

Dr. Satish Bidaisee  
Associate Professor  
Public Health and Preventive Medicine  
St. George University  
Grenada, West Indies

*Re: Approval of SGU IRB Application 12047  
"What Life Experiences Contributed to Females' Choice of Veterinary Education?"*

Dear Dr. Bidaisee,

This letter certifies that the application for the above-named research project has been approved by the SGU IRB.

Please find enclosed a *Research Interim Review / Completion Form*. An annual summary report is due no later than one year from now, **Friday, 15 November 2013**. The form is also posted on the University's website – use the "search SGU" option to look for the IRB page. Please submit it to the IRB Administrator, Meg Conlon, email [mconlon@sgu.edu](mailto:mconlon@sgu.edu), telephone 444-4175 x 2221, fax 439-4388. An e-version is preferred.

Outcomes of research must be provided to the IRB/SGU Office of Research. Any publications or conference presentations arising from the research should be shared with the Office of Research, and copies of successfully published work should be provided to the Office of Research. All conference presentations and publications are listed in the SGU Annual Report. A comprehensive list of past completed research projects can also be found in this report.

Sincerely,



Robert Hage, MD, PhD, DLO, MBA  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
Professor, Department of Anatomical Sciences

cc: Calum Macpherson, PhD, DIC, Director of Research, St. George's University

St. George's University • Grenada • West Indies  
Telephone: 473 444-4175 x 2221 • Fax: 473 439-4388 • Email: [irb@sgu.edu](mailto:irb@sgu.edu)

### **Appendix 3: Information Sheet**

Research Project Title:

Females in Veterinary Medicine: Why the Choice?

Invitation:

I am conducting research and you have been identified as a potential participant for this study and I would like to invite you to take part in a research project.

Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Purpose of Research

Background: I am currently a student at the University of Sheffield, UK. As part of the requirement for my study, I am required to complete research in the field of education. As a veterinarian, I am interested in an enquiry regarding the increasing number of females that are observed in veterinary medical education. I am therefore conducting research to explore the influences of females on their choice of veterinary medicine for higher education and their career paths.

Aim: The aim of the study is to explore your life history, your experiences to understand the reasons for your choice of veterinary medicine.

Duration: The study is expected to continue for one year however your participation in this study will be limited to one interactive session for approximately three hours in length.

However, you may be asked for an additional session if there is a need for further information.

Selection Process:

You were identified as a possible participant for this study after consultation with the student class representative for your academic term.

#### Voluntary Participation:

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary and that refusal to agree to participate will involve no penalty and you may also choose to discontinue your participation at any time without once again any penalty.

#### Participation:

Your participation should you choose to will include one two to three hour session. I may request an additional session of reduced time later on if I have follow up questions. I will also invite you for feedback on my reporting of the discussions we held. I will meet with you on campus and we can schedule the initial session at your convenience during the Spring 2013 term. For the session, I will provide refreshments to facilitate our discussion. Please also note that the session will be audio recorded using recorder from which I will transcribe to prepare a report.

During the session, I will ask you questions about your past and current life experiences related to your choice of veterinary medicine for your career. These questions will be related towards your choice of veterinary medicine as well as any related experiences that you may want to share for any question asked or even if a question was not asked.

You will be expected to respond to each question as completely and to the best of your recollection. Additionally, if there is any information that you consider is important from your life experience as a reason for your choice of veterinary medicine, you should share. From the discussions, I will prepare a report from the audio recording as well as my notes from our discussions. You will also be asked to review the report from our discussions and provide any feedback that you think is important to you.

#### Possible Disadvantages and Risks of Participation:



A possible concern for your participation is confidentiality as there is a possibility of your information to be linked to you. The reason is that SGU, SVM is a small school where students are very familiar with each other and linkages can possible made from the reporting of the study. Also, as part of sharing past and current life experiences during our discussions, there is a risk for emotional and uncomfortable issues, thoughts or memories to be experienced.

#### Possible Benefits of Participation:

Your participation in the study while carries some psychological and emotional risks have also been reported to be therapeutic as participants can obtain clarity as well as closure on areas of concern from their past.

The research can prove beneficial to the veterinary profession you are entering by developing an understanding of the significant female population of veterinarians.

And, from the standpoint of career guidance and counselling, students may be more informed by a greater understanding of the reasons for the choice of veterinary medical education among female students.

#### What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

In the case that the research is unexpectedly stopped, the reason(s) will be explained to you and any information recorded and reported will be destroyed.

#### Complaints about the Research:

If you have complaints about this research and/or your participation, you may inform me. If you cannot do so based on the nature of your concern, you can contact the study supervisor from the University of Sheffield, School of Education (see contact information below) who will respond to your questions or concerns. Additionally, if you feel as if you were not treated well during this study, or have questions concerning your rights as a research participant you can contact the Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.), Department of Bioethics, St. George's University, top floor of Superdorm 6.

#### Confidentiality:

For the concern of confidentiality based on the possibility of associating reported life stories with individual participants, I will share my narration from the interviews with the respective participants for their review prior to proceeding with any reporting on my part. I will also not include any personal identifiers as part of my reporting of data.

All voice recordings, transcripts and data will be kept in a secure location that only I will have access to as the researcher. All data will be kept for a period of five years from the completion the study after which will be destroyed.

#### Outcomes of Study:

The outcome of the study will be a written dissertation which will also be orally presented. Additionally, there is a possibility for the work to be published in academic publications.

#### Ethical Review:

University of Sheffield, School of Education Ethics Review  
St. George's University, Institutional Review Board

#### Contact for further information:

##### Researcher:

Dr. Satish Bidaisee

Caribbean House

Telephone: 473-439-2000 ext. 3527

Email: sbidaisee@sgu.edu

##### Research Supervisor:

Prof. Bernard Longden

Liverpool Hope University

0044 (0)151-722-6745

bernard.longden@gmail.com

## Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

**Title of Project:** What life experiences contributed to female's choice of veterinary medical education?

**Name of Researcher:** Dr. Satesh Bidaisee, Contact: (473) 439-2000 ext. 3527

**Participant Identification Number for this project:** Vet 1

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated on \_\_\_\_\_ for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
  
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
  
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
  
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*(or legal representative)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Satesh Bidaisee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Copies:

- Participants together with the Information Sheet
- Research File

## Appendix 5: Research Questions

### Research Questions

#### Primary Research Question:

#### **What life experiences contributed to female's choice of veterinary medical education?**

Construct a chronology of your life history from the time you have recall memory to your matriculation into the veterinary school at SGU. During the course of your life history:

- Identify all landmarks in your life that related to your choice of becoming a veterinarian
- For each landmark, describe the social-cultural and all environmental factors that enabled your interest in becoming a veterinarian
- For each of the identified landmarks, describe any barriers for you to become a veterinarian, how did you overcome these barriers and what resulted in your overcoming of the barriers

#### Secondary Research Question(s):

- 1. Is there a specific age when females choose to pursue veterinary medical education?**
  - f. At what age or period of time did you first decide to become a veterinarian?
  - g. Describe the period of time in terms of your family, friends, schooling and other related events?
  - h. Did you have any other career/professional interests besides veterinary medicine?
- 2. What impressions (as a child and currently) do females hold towards veterinarians?**
  - i. What was your impression of a veterinarian in society when you were a child?
  - j. What is your impression today of a veterinarian in society?
- 3. Do female veterinarians serve as role models to aspiring female veterinarians?**
  - k. Are there any female veterinarians that you admire?
  - l. What are the qualities of the veterinarians that you admire?

**4. How will you describe your productivity/success as a student prior to veterinary school?**

- m. Did you perform better than your male counterparts?
- n. Describe your application and admission experience into veterinary school?

**5. Are opportunities presented to females that influence the education choice?**

- o. Did any opportunities arise that influence your choice of veterinary medical education?
- p. Were there any barriers towards your interest in veterinary medicine?
- q. If there were barriers, how did you overcome these barriers to now be a veterinary student?

**6. Can veterinary medical practices contribute to female's choice?**

- r. Did your knowledge of veterinary medical practice influence your education choice?
- s. What about veterinary medical practices influenced your choice?

## **Appendix 6: Biodata Summary for Each Student**

### Biodata for Mary

Age: 31years

Nationality: American

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Family Income Level: High

Sibling History: No Siblings

Family History of Veterinary Medicine: No Family History

Veterinary Education Funding: Private/Family

Educational Background: Private

Pet Ownership: Yes

Veterinary Work Experience: No

Decision on Veterinary Medical Education: adolescent (11-12 years old)

Period of time between Undergraduate Education and Veterinary School: 4 years

St. George's University as First Choice for Veterinary Education: No

Completed the SGU Pre-Veterinary programme Yes

Current Academic Term: Three

Academic Record: Average

Biodata for Jane

Age: 25

Nationality: American

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Family Income Level: Middle

Sibling History: Two Brothers

Family History of Veterinary Medicine: Both parents are veterinarians

Veterinary Education Funding: Scholarship

Educational Background: Private

Pet Ownership: No

Veterinary Work Experience: Yes (In family owned veterinary clinic)

Decision on Veterinary Medical Education: Early childhood (3-4 years old)

Period of time between Undergraduate Education and Veterinary School: 2 years

St. George's University as First Choice for Veterinary Education: No

Completed the SGU Pre-Veterinary programme: No

Current Academic Term: Five

Academic Record: Very Good

Biodata for Lucy

Age: 26 years

Nationality: American

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Family Income Level: Middle

Sibling History: Two Brothers

Family History of Veterinary Medicine: No (however, family employed in dairy production)

Veterinary Education Funding: Government Loans

Educational Background: Public

Pet Ownership: No

Veterinary Work Experience: Yes (negligible on a dairy farm)

Decision on Veterinary Medical Education: Adult (2 years prior to veterinary school enrolment)

Period of time between Undergraduate Education and Veterinary School: 1 year

St. George's University as First Choice for Veterinary Education: Yes (did apply to other non-veterinary graduate options)

Completed the SGU Pre-Veterinary programme: Yes

Current Academic Term: Four

Academic Record: Very Good

\*Extraneous Experiences: Personal family experience which the student is seeking to escape from



## Biodata for Sanju

Age: 24 years

Nationality: American (born in India)

Ethnicity: Indian

Family Income Level: Middle

Sibling History: One Brother

Family History of Veterinary Medicine: No

Veterinary Education Funding: Private/Family

Educational Background: Public

Pet Ownership: Yes

Veterinary Work Experience: No

Decision on Veterinary Medical Education: Late (2 years prior to veterinary enrolment)

Period of time between Undergraduate Education and Veterinary School: 1 year

St. George's University as First Choice for Veterinary Education: Yes

Completed the SGU Pre-Veterinary programme: Yes

Current Academic Term: Two

Academic Record: Very Good

Biodata for Marie

Age: 28 years

Nationality: American

Ethnicity: African

Family Income Level: Low

Sibling History: Two Brothers

Family History of Veterinary Medicine: No

Veterinary Education Funding: Scholarship

Educational Background: Public

Pet Ownership: No

Veterinary Work Experience: Yes (worked in a neighbourhood veterinary clinic)

Decision on Veterinary Medical Education: teenager (16 years old)

Period of time between Undergraduate Education and Veterinary School: Four years

St. George's University as First Choice for Veterinary Education: No

Completed the SGU Pre-Veterinary programme: No

Current Academic Term: Six

Academic Record: Very Good

Biodata for Anne

Age: 27 years

Nationality: American

Ethnicity: Caucasian (identifies herself as an Italian)

Family Income Level: High

Sibling History: Two Brothers

Family History of Veterinary Medicine: No

Veterinary Education Funding: Private/Family

Educational Background: Private

Pet Ownership: Yes

Veterinary Work Experience: No

Decision on Veterinary Medical Education: Early childhood (5 years old)

Period of time between Undergraduate Education and Veterinary School: Four years

St. George's University as First Choice for Veterinary Education: No

Completed the SGU Pre-Veterinary programme: Yes

Current Academic Term: One

Academic Record: Average

## Appendix 7: Interview Transcript Example (Mary)

Mary

Satesh: Can you trace your life experiences going back to when you can recall to the present time. And, identify any particular events over the time that you believe were of particular significance to you being a vet student currently.

Mary: The period of time when I can recall in my life is around the age of around 4 years old. This period in my life was one that is still vague as I can only recall patches of experiences. When I think back in my life, my first recall from my history was the time of my pet dog Bruno. Bruno was a gorgeous brown male Labrador who I spent all my days with. Bruno at night would also sleep on the floor of my bed. Each day, I would go for a walk with my nanny and Bruno to the park where Bruno and I would play with other dogs.

Satesh: Can you share what was the role of Bruno in your daily life?

Mary: My entire day at that time involved Bruno. Bruno was always with me whether I was learning to read and write or swimming and painting and he being there was the best part of being at home. Of course, it would be difficult to have Bruno everywhere but he was certainly the main highlight of my life during that period of time.

Satesh: Do you recall any specific memory that was special with Bruno?

Mary: Interesting, Bruno was connected to several landmark events in my life so I have associated memory with these events.

Satesh: Such as

Mary: Well, Christmas was a big deal for my family and Bruno was certainly a main feature of Christmas growing up. Bruno's birthday coincided with Christmas as Bruno was a Christmas gift for me when I was little.

Satesh: What particular activities surrounding Bruno's birthday and Christmas can you recall the most.

Mary: Together with my nanny, we would take him to the veterinarian which was a nice place to visit. There were always beautiful animals to see and it was like going to the zoo. The vet also always took great care of Bruno and it was nice to see how Bruno interacted with the other dogs. Whenever we visited the vet's office, we would also visit the pet shop which was in the same shopping mall as the vet's office. The pet shop also had animals to see and many treats and toys which we would buy for Bruno. Even during the year, we would take Bruno to the pet shop to get his coat groomed and also to purchase a bed as he always ripped his bed.

Satesh: share with me your experiences in the veterinary clinic

Mary: I remembered the first time I walked into the veterinary clinic with Bruno. He was nervous and I think I was as nervous as him. However, the veterinarians took such great care of him and allowed me to be there for all of the examinations they conducted on him. It actually became fun for me to visit the veterinarian with Bruno. Of course, there was the time with Bruno when he died but I was angry at that time and looking back, I recognize the type of injuries he would have sustained which led to his demise. I am saying these things now although at that time, I was in a different mindset. What is interesting was that when the various parents were speaking about their careers during the career day when I was in school, there was no veterinarians present. My contribution when I indicated that I wanted to become a veterinarian was completed based on my experiences with caring for my pets and attending the neighborhood veterinary clinic.

Satesh: in terms of school, what are some of your memories around the time you are referring to

Mary: School was not particularly enjoyable for me. I did not feel particularly comfortable while at school. At school, I found myself missing home and always being around Bruno. The other students also seemed to know each other and I felt left out in the class. I note the period in middle school around 11 to 12 years old when I was asked about my career option and I reported veterinary medicine at school. This period of time was a career guidance session in school where all parents including my parents spoke about their respective careers. I guess no parents were veterinarians as there was no presentation on veterinary medicine but that was what I chose as my career choice. I never thought of any career that I can recall before choosing veterinary medicine. After not gaining acceptance to a veterinary school after my undergraduate degree program, I decided to consider alternate options but I still only considered working as a veterinary technician so that I can remain in a field that worked with animals.

Satesh: What are some other memories you have of school. Are there any fond memories

Mary: Well my fond memories are not specific to school itself. The best part of being in school was the times when my parents would visit in the evenings to see swim as I was on the school's swim team. Having learned to swim at home, swimming was a sport that I enjoyed and was good at. I received several medals over the years in school which my parents were very proud of. They would always speak about my swimming to their friends and displayed my awards at home.

Satesh: Let's go back to tracking the different life experiences in your life history. What is next in terms of your recall.

Mary: I did get another dog and that I can clearly remember as I was a bit older. It was for my eight birthday that I received a gift of a daschund puppy from my parents. I named the puppy Maddy as she as a female and very tiny as well. With Bruno being male, Maddy was nice to have as a female dog. I remembered her as I saw her in the pet shop while waiting from Bruno to be groomed. When I held Maddy in the pet shop, she felt soft to touch and I told my nanny that I wanted her as my pet. When I was in the pet shop, I was fascinated with the various types of dogs and learned more about breeds from books we bought at the pet shop. We also bought

clothing for Maddy in particular as she was a girl and Bruno would always rip apart anything thing we put on him.

Satesh: Do you have any other pet related experiences growing up

Mary: Yes, after one year of having Maddy, I did see another dog that I wanted. There was a black short hair male daschund which I saw in the pet shop and I wanted him as I thought that he and Maddy would make a great pair. I played with the puppy who I named Trevor and did not want anyone to buy him. I told the people in the store that my parents would but Trevor for me for my birthday and I told my nanny to let my parents know about Trevor. It was my ninth birthday. I woke up for my birthday and there was no gift for me. I also did not see my parents around the house and when I enquired from my nanny, she noted that they went out. I sat near the window and looked out form when my parents returned. It seemed like I was waiting forever as there were no cars passing by but eventually I saw my parents van approached the front yard and parked in the garage. I waited for them to come into the house and there I saw my father holding a carryon cage with Trevor inside. I was very happy as now I had Bruno, Maddy and Trevor and while I would have wanted more pets I felt contented with my three little ones. I also recalled my mother telling me that there was no more room for any further dogs and that I should not ask for any other pets in the future. I was ok with that as I thought three dogs was a lot for me to handle. I was just excited about getting Trevor as I had known him before. I was so happy about Trevor and I agreed with them and we all took Trevor to the pet store to him a bed.

Satesh: what other life experiences can you recall from that time coming forward

Mary: There was a really sad part as I lost Bruno in an accident wish was very difficulty for me.

Satesh: Tell me more about it

Mary: Well, it is hard for me to think about it even now. We were approaching a road intersection when Bruno who was on a leash and being held by my nanny overpowered my

nanny and entered onto the street where he was hit by a passing car. Bruno made a sound of pain and lay on his side on the road. His breathing was heavy and his abdomen was bruised and began to swell. The driver of the car stopped and I remembered constantly crying while holding onto Maddy and Trevor tightly. The driver of the car held Bruno in his arms and placed him in his car and together with my nanny and Maddy and Trevor, we all went to a veterinary hospital. The veterinary hospital was not our veterinary office where we took my pets and I did not know any of the vets working there. I wished there was someone that I know and could have spoken to about Bruno. The vet who examined Bruno told us that he sustained internal injuries, was bleeding internally and there was a need for Bruno to have surgery

[Mary became emotional in the interview]

After some time when apparently Bruno had surgery, the vet came out after surgery, the vet who saw Bruno told us that he died.

Satesh: how did you feel at that time about losing Bruno

Mary: It was a very difficult time for me as I felt that I had lost who I had known for my entire life. I was angry with the veterinarian at the hospital as they did not save Bruno after he was hit by the car. I was angry that we did not take Bruno to our regular veterinarian who knew Bruno. I did not understand why we had to go to that vet hospital. I was also sad to lose Bruno as he was my first dog and I grew up with him and also thought about how Maddy and Trevor would deal with this and during this ordeal, I thought to myself that I wanted to be a veterinarian as I would have saved Bruno and I told this to everyone. I shared with my teacher and my class that I wanted to be a veterinarian when I grow up to save animals from suffering and dying.

Satesh: do you have any other school related memories you would like to share

Mary: School was really not my favorite place. I certainly was not the top student or anywhere near the top performers in my class. If anything, I would pass my classes and that was sufficient for me. All through middle and high school, I looked forward to attending college as I wanted to



explore further how to become a veterinarian. Whenever we took Maddy and Trevor to the veterinary clinic, I would speak to the attending veterinarians about my interest to become a veterinarian and what were their schooling pathways they each took and I learned about the need to maintain good grades and pursue undergraduate education in a field that is relevant to veterinary medicine.

Satesh: Please continue to share any other life experiences from that time going forward

Mary: I got involved with the vet clinic that I am used to because I really wanted then to be a veterinarian. At least every Saturday, I would go to the clinic to assist the veterinarians. At first, I would be involved in feeding the animals who were in-patients as well as cleaning their cages and taking them for walks. After some time, I would be involved in observing veterinarians attend to animals in the clinic examination room. All of these opportunities I fully enjoyed as it showed me how veterinarians did their work and confirmed for me that I wanted to become a veterinarian as well. I also worked in the clinic during summer vacations and school breaks and would even visit the clinic during school in the week days to follow up on patients whose care and rehabilitation I participated in. My nanny would drive me around to drop me off and pick me up from the clinic whenever I needed.

Satesh: What other experiences can you recall and share with me

Mary: Going to college was another landmark event which was fairly recent. It was a very nervous time and at the same time exciting period for me. I only knew my home and the immediate community that we lived in including the private school system where I had my education. I was now away from my nanny who I grew up with and who cared and looked after me for all my life up to this point. However, it was also very exciting as I was beginning my specific training towards becoming a veterinarian as that was what I wanted to do plus with Maddy and Trevor with me, I had company.

Satesh: are there any college related memories that you can recall

Mary: College was not a very productive time for me. I got caught up in all the bad things about college and with no one there to check on me, I partied, did not take my classes seriously and even dropped out of courses to take other courses to follow friends in other programs. I struggled academically and was not focused towards my goal of gaining admission into a veterinary school which in retrospect I really regret however I am fortunate that I am in vet school now. It was during a meeting with my academic advisor that I learned about my lack of satisfactory progress in the pre-veterinary program and had to switch to a biology program to complete my degree.

Satesh: and what about after college

Mary: College ended quickly and as it passed by fast, it further seemed that I did not make best use of the time. When I returned home from college, I knew that my nanny who I grew up with was no longer employed but it was different for many other reasons. Maddy and Trevor returned home with me but they were also getting older and had much less activity. My parents still worked long hours. I returned to the vet clinic where I worked as a high school student and was able to get a job as a veterinary technician. For this, I had to undergo training which I did and once again enjoyed working in the vet clinic and with veterinarians.

Satesh: What were your memories of the veterinary clinic

Mary: Working in the vet clinic was almost like a divine intervention for me. I met my fiancé there and also led to me being here today.

Satesh: tell me more about this

Mary: Looking back, that period which was no long ago was probably the most important experience for me being in vet school today. When I first saw him as a new veterinarian in the clinic, I was jealous as he was what I wanted to become a veterinarian just like him. Over some time I guess I became attracted to him and then we worked together and I learnt a lot from him about being a veterinarian from observing his clinical practice. Also, we were of similar age

range, we identified with each other and over time, fell in love which was probably the first for me in my life. Interestingly and what further related me to him is it was also refreshing to learn about his veterinary training as I did not know anything about Grenada or even the existence of a veterinary school there as I never considered veterinary training outside the US. After learning more about SGU, we even took a trip to Grenada as a vacation together and he showed me the beautiful island and campus and I immediately wanted to apply. I collected all the application packages and forms and I applied to SGU and was given a path of a one year pre-veterinary program that once I was successful in would gain admission into the veterinary school. That was in 2011 and before I left to travel here, my boyfriend and I got engaged as we plan to become married after vet school.

Satesh: tell me about your thoughts regarding your experiences with veterinarians

Mary: I have both personal and professional experiences with veterinarians. My view of veterinarians today, well, I am engaged to one and I intend to marry him after I graduate. I remembered after completing my undergraduate program and realizing that becoming a veterinarian was more than just choosing to become one but also qualifying to become one, I view veterinary medicine as a privilege and a fortune to work and care for animals. However, even as a veterinary technician for a couple of years while working and caring for animals, I still did not feel the complete capabilities that veterinarians have. A veterinarian has the science and medicine to back the care and love for animals which is very powerful and why I wanted to become a veterinarian. There is this awesome privilege to be a veterinarian specifically and to share that skills set with animals. I am not a veterinarian yet but I have seen it time and time again from veterinarians.

Satesh: what are your views particularly of female veterinarians

Mary: Female veterinarians are very prominent in veterinary medicine.

Satesh: And what about female veterinarians in your own life experience

Mary: As a child and throughout my years of attending the vet clinic in my neighborhood with my pet dogs, I engaged with several veterinarians both male and females. I have always admired veterinarians that were both males and females. Obviously, my relationship with my fiancé as a male is more personal and affectionate but I also admired and still admire him as a veterinarian. Interestingly, and I only thought about this right now since you asked but the veterinarians that were involved with Bruno when he was hit by the car at the vet hospital were all females and those were the vets that I was angry at. Particularly, in terms of me being in SGU, female veterinarians are the majority of faculty here. Today, the majority of my professors here at SGU are females and I have the utmost respect and admiration for females. I for one know how difficult it is to gain entry into a veterinary school and become a veterinarian so I respect them completely. But, to say that there are any female veterinarians that I admire, I cannot say that specifically. My view is that more females are getting more involved in veterinary medicine because more people are engaging veterinarians for the care of their animals. Previously, persons may have attempted home based remedies or not pursue veterinary services so more people so with more people interested in veterinary care for their animals, more females are also interested in becoming veterinarians. There are also more ads with women veterinarians and from SGU, more female faculty and students which can be an influence for female students but it was not my experience.

Satesh: what are your views regarding female students in terms of academic performance

Mary: For me, I was never really a good student before coming to SGU. I always did what I needed to do to pass and nothing more. Throughout my school years, the female students were ahead in the class but I was not one of them and in fact I was probably more in the end of the academic rung of performance. For me to say that I outperformed male students, I cannot. With regards to female students and their specific performance, I would definitely say that in my experiences, female students outperformed male students. Even here at SGU, while there are more females in the class, the male students are performing at a lower standard than the female students ... I even outperformed my male counterparts from the pre-veterinary program prior gaining admission into the veterinary program. I also continued my high level of academic success as a veterinary student thus far. As a mature student compared to my other classmates, I spent more time seeking admission into a veterinary program. After completing my undergraduate degree, I sought admission into any veterinary school but all my attempts were unsuccessful ... I can recall a period where I gave up seeking admission into a veterinary school ... however, the opportunity that SGU provided was one that I took up and made maximum use of it ... the admissions experience was generally a pleasant one as I was given the task to

complete 32 credits of coursework over two academic terms with a minimum cumulative GPA requirement of 3.5. This specific guideline I worked with which I met at the end of the one year pre-veterinary program and was given an automatic admission into the vet school here at SGU

Satesh: did you encounter any challenges towards your veterinary education

Mary: With regards to challenges, the only barrier that I had was gaining admission into a veterinary school. After several attempts and applications, I was unsuccessful in gaining admission and this was very frustrating for me. And, the admission barrier was overcome through the pathway provided by SGU

Satesh: How did your experience with Bruno early in your life impact your choice of veterinary medicine

Mary: The choice of veterinary medicine for me as we had discussed was a very early one. I would agree that my experiences with Bruno was a deciding factor where I thought if I was a veterinarian, I would have made a difference and Bruno would have survived. Working with the veterinary clinic was just another opportunity for me to begin to become a veterinarian even before I had a chance to.

Satesh: how do you place the role of your fiancé in terms of your veterinary pathway

Mary: This is probably the single most critical factor that have me here today. As a female, I would have to admit that my fiancé was and is the main reason that I am here today. If he was not in my life, I would not have known about the existence of SGU and to even apply and enrol into a veterinary school. Also, I would say that the opportunity to work at the veterinary clinic during my middle and high school years was related to my ability to care and comfort animals in the clinic. I cannot say the same for males as even male veterinarians who are great at surgery and veterinary practice; it usually is a female who does the grooming and caring of the patients that come into the clinic.

Satesh: How did your experience with veterinary medicine with your pets, working at the clinic and interacting with veterinarians play out in terms of your choice of veterinary medicine

Mary: My decision was made early. When I made my decision to become a veterinarian, the only knowledge I had about veterinary practice was the care of my pets at the vet clinic. During those times, I saw the care of veterinarians and the comfort of my pets at the vet clinic which attracted me to the profession. The time I spent working at the vet clinic highlighted for me the work that veterinarians do. I was able to observe how veterinarians heal animals and the work which involved managing animals with their medications, nutrition, housing etc. I got an opportunity to also see how people admire veterinarians for the work they do and it all reaffirmed for me that I wanted to be a veterinarian.

Satesh: can you reflect on your family experiences and any role in terms of you becoming a veterinarian

Mary: Well I know that I did not want to be in the same career as my parents. I had always disliked my parent's careers in medicine and finance and I knew that I never wanted to become a doctor or a business person. Mary further commented "I would observe who the senior veterinarian at the clinic treated me like a daughter and I felt very comfortable around him. I also saw the wonderful family life he had as I knew the family and I wanted that for myself as well. Maybe that is why I was so attracted to my fiancé as well.