

May 2007

From Rachel Maines: If you're a reader of the *Chronicle*, take a look in the Review section of next Monday's edition (May 25, 2007). I've got a little opinion piece in it about how women are stampeding into veterinary medicine and not into engineering and physics. Why is this? Nobody knows.

From Amy Foster: My gut would say that veterinary medicine--as a more touchy-feely field than engineering and physics--has been touted within the medical discipline as a more feminine pursuit. (If you doubt whether veterinary medicine is touchy-feely, I'll send you a picture of my adorable cat!) I remember a number of my childhood female friends wanting to pursue veterinary medicine. I'm sure if we looked at the breakdown of veterinarians, we would find that men dominate in the analytical/laboratory and large animal practices, while women have a growing presence in clinical work. Ironically, with only 27 vet schools in the United States, this field happens to be one of the most competitive graduate programs out there. Maybe we are seeing a "Madame Curie" phenomenon where the best and brightest women are somehow attracted to veterinary medicine because it is so competitive, and achievement in the field would be the greatest feather in a woman's cap.

From Jonathan Coopersmith: Other possibilities:

- more control over hours while still doing real medicine (as opposed to dermatology and body scans)
- better quality of patients - don't complain, patronize, insult
 - patients may also be cuter
 - better institutional setting -- no large HMOs or hospitals. My assumption is most vets are small enterprises.

From Carolyn Cooper: Has anyone asked the women vets why they took it up? Short of or including that, do schools of veterinary medicine ask their incoming students why they want to be veterinarians? If so, that would supply a way to find out any gender differences of motivation.

From Autumn Stanley: You ask why women are choosing veterinary medicine over physics and engineering. I can't explain it exactly, either, but it fits with my observation about women's patents from my research for *Mothers and ters of Invention*: the largest single cluster of them, when I looked at numbers and percentages for the most recent years I studied for that 1990s book, was in medical, and especially pharmaceutical, areas. Perhaps women would still rather feel they are helping people (or animals) as opposed to manipulating abstract concepts and/or machinery or electronics--even though they are certainly capable of the latter as well, if they choose.

From Martha Trescott: I meant to respond earlier that I had recently been talking to a woman vet, the first one at this clinic since our family started going there in 1947. She and I were talking about the growing numbers of women in veterinary medicine today and about the growing animal rights movement and how women have always played key roles in that. (I helped to establish Animal Advocates in Dallas in the early-mid-1970s in

Dallas and had always thought I might want to be a vet, but women were just practically non-existent in vet schools at that time.) Maybe there is some connection between these two phenomena? Just more speculation, but I think she thought it was plausible.