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The Paw Project

Animals and Critical Education in the Public Sphere

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Abstract

The practice of cat declawing is intertwined with how both veterinarians and the public are educated and socialized to make sense of non-human animals and the relationship between humans and non-human animals. In this article, I first discuss critical education in the public sphere and then review the history of the veterinary profession and how its hidden curriculum has intersected with three different ways of valuing animals through the lenses of animal health, animal welfare and animal rights. In recent years, successful critical public education efforts are changing the way that people think about non-human animals and their use (and abuse) for human ends. I then describe the history of cat declawing in the United States and how The Paw Project is reshaping the public conversation around this controversial practice, examining how it can be understood as an important critical education project in the public sphere.



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Perhaps you live with a cat, or a few cats. There may even be a cat curled up nearby as you read this. Does your cat have claws in the front? What about in the back? These simple questions about your cat's anatomy (or your neighbor's cat, or the stray cat who wanders through your backyard occasionally) may seem, at first, to have little to do with critical education. Yet as I suggest in this article, the practice of cat declawing is intertwined with the way that we are socialized to make sense of non-human animals and the relationship between humans and non-human animals, which is an issue that is increasingly central to critical education scholars (DeLeon, 2010; Pedersen, 2010; Rowe, 2011; Wright-Maley, 2011).¹

In contemporary society, veterinarians are our primary educators about animals: they are entrusted with knowing the most about animals and protecting them (Dolby and Litster, 2015). Because most people believe that veterinarians “love” animals, they also trust that veterinarians would never harm an animal. For example, if a veterinarian recommends a particular procedure or medication, most people would assume—without question—that it must be in the animal's best interest. However, the reality of the veterinary profession is considerably more complicated: veterinarians do not act *only* in the best interest of animals. Instead, there is an overarching hidden curriculum (Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Jackson, 1968) of veterinary education which has played a key role in shaping public perceptions of the role of animals in human lives and how animals should and should not be valued (Jones, 2003). In recent years, the practice of routinely declawing cats (onychectomy) has become controversial within the veterinary profession itself, and has also attracted a considerable amount of attention in the public sphere, including in the media and popular culture. Thus, cat declawing has become an important site for thinking about how we are socialized to understand human relationships with non-human animals, and how critical educators might use educational issues beyond the realm of formal schooling to expand and deepen these important conversations.

In the balance of this article, I first discuss why it is important to examine critical education projects in the public sphere at a moment where opportunities and spaces for critical pedagogy are severely limited. I then review the history of the veterinary profession, its intrinsic “hidden curriculum,” and how the profession has intersected with three different ways of valuing animals (Jones, 2003) through the lenses of animal health, animal welfare, and animal rights. In the final section, I describe the history of cat declawing and then discuss *The Paw Project* (2013), which is both a film and a non-project organization, and how it can be understood as an important critical education project in the public sphere.

Critical Education in the Public Sphere

Given the limits on critical education in schools today in an era of neoliberalism, excessive and obsessive testing, and corporate privatization (Porfilio & Carr, 2011; Ravitch, 2013; Watkins, 2012), it is vital that critical educators pay attention to public spaces outside of schools where progressive change is happening. One of the most important public spheres to examine is that of animal welfare and animal rights, where successful and widespread critical education campaigns are changing the way that people think about animals and their use (and

¹ While I strongly prefer the term “non-human” animals (or “other than human” animals), it can become both cumbersome and confusing to use the term repeatedly, as the literature cited in this article generally uses the term “animal.” Thus I use “non-human” animal when possible and also attempt to avoid using “it” to refer to non-human animals.

abuse) for human ends. For example, issues of animal welfare and animal rights have been highlighted in recent campaigns to change practices surrounding the use of gestation crates for pigs and calf crates (Humane Society International/Canada, 2014; Pacelle, 2014); carriage horses in New York and other cities (Grynbaum, 2014); circus animals and zoos (Halberstadt, 2014; Pérez-Peña, 2015); puppy mills (Dardick & Street, 2014); battery cages for laying hens (Friedrich, 2014); abuse of dairy cows (Georgantopoulos, 2014); animals used for research (Simmons, 2014); and the continuing captivity of orcas and other mammals at tourist attractions such as SeaWorld (Kristof, 2013). As Giroux (2004) argues, it is vital that critical educators pay attention to these public spaces where important, effective change can occur,

...the project(s) of critical pedagogy need to be taken up both within and outside of public and higher education. Pedagogy is a public practice largely defined within a range of cultural apparatuses extending from television networks, to print media, to the Internet. As a central element of a broad based cultural politics, critical pedagogy, in its various forms, when linked to the ongoing project of democratization can provide opportunities for educators and other cultural workers to redefine and transform the connections among language, desire, meaning, everyday life, and material relations of power as part of a broader social movement to reclaim the promise and possibilities of a democratic public life (p. 46, see also Tristán, 2014).

Veterinary Medicine, the Hidden Curriculum and Valuing Animals

While children's books emphasize that loving animals is the most important aspect of becoming a veterinarian (Ames, 2010; Macken, 2011; Murray, 2013; Thomas, 2009), the actual reality of the profession and its relationship to animals is decidedly more complex. For example, while the public image of veterinarians is centered on the kindly, trained person who knows how to take care of their companion animal (usually a cat or a dog), veterinarians also care for animals who are raised and slaughtered for human consumption and used in zoos, aquariums, circuses, and laboratory research.

Thus, veterinary students are socialized to develop particular values, attitudes, and beliefs about animals and about the relationship of animals and humans. Akin to Jackson's analysis of what children learn from the "daily grind" (1968, p. 1.) of school, the practices of veterinary education—from the grueling admission process to the overwhelming and all-consuming nature of daily life as a veterinary student—create a potent and pervasive hidden curriculum. In the field of educational research, there were ongoing debates in the 1970s and 1980s as to whether the "hidden curriculum" was deliberately intended or simply an unintended byproduct of the way that schooling was organized (Giroux & Purpel, 1983). Martin (1983) insists that it is actually both and that the hidden curriculum "consists of those learning states which are either unintended or intended but not openly acknowledged to the learners in the setting unless the learners are aware of them" (p. 131).

While analysis of educational practices using the lenses of the "hidden curriculum" has waned in educational research (for one recent example, see Smith, 2013), it has flourished in the field of medical education, where research using the "hidden curriculum" has drawn attention to the underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes of medical students (Gaufberg, Batalden, Sands, & Bell, 2010; Karnieli-Miller, Vu, Holtman, Clyman, & Inui, 2010; Newton, Barber, Clardy,

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Cleveland, & O’Sullivan, 2008). In the professional socialization embedded in veterinary education, learners are rarely—or sometimes vaguely—aware that the hidden curriculum of veterinary education teaches them to understand animals through only two lenses: animal health and animal welfare (Jones, 2003). Thus, as Martin suggests in her foundational scholarship in this area, the curriculum is “hidden” as the “learning states” (or available pedagogical positions) are not openly discussed nor evident to most students—they are simply accepted without question and thus naturalized. A third lens—animal rights—is almost never discussed positively in formal veterinary education, given the organized profession’s long-standing reluctance to consider animal rights positions (Blackwell and Rollin, 2008). However, as evidenced by the current debate over cat declawing there are indications that this more critical lens is increasing in influence.

*The First Lens: Animal Health and the Beginnings of the Veterinary Profession*²

Before the establishment of veterinary schools, licensure, and the beginning of state regulation in the United States in the late 1800s, anyone who wished could proclaim himself (and it was exclusively men at that time) a “veterinarian” and treat animals, though most made their living by treating horses whose health was critical to the growth of the U.S. economy in an era before automobiles. As veterinary schools became established and dominant in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, “veterinarians” needed to be a credentialed and licensed. Most veterinarians still focused their practices on equines, though some diversified into other animals used for food, particularly beef cattle, sheep, and pigs, both in rural areas and in the vast stockyards of cities such as Chicago. Controlling and maintaining animal health and preventing the spread of disease was crucial and “animal health” became, and is still, the most significant way that veterinarians understand the value of animals. It is important to underscore that the emphasis on “animal health” is not for the primary benefit of the animal him or herself—instead, “animal health” is critical because of the value of the animal to her or his human owners. Thus, this is the foundation of the “hidden curriculum” of veterinary medicine. “Animal health” overtly implies that it is the health of the animal that is prioritized and most veterinary students accept this premise without question. However, the reality, as Jones (2003) argues, is that the paradigm of “animal health” is considerably more complex and its actuality “animal health” does not prioritize the animal him or herself, but the human owner. While early veterinarians (and owners) understood the “value” of an animal in economic terms only, more recently “value” has also been understood as the sentimental or emotional “value” of an animal to his/her owners, which is the foundation of the expansion of small, companion animal veterinary practices after World War II. This primary focus on animal health is reflected in the U.S. veterinarian’s oath, which until a change in 2011 that inserted “animal welfare” read in part,

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge (Nolen, 2011).

² Jones (2003) is the only existing comprehensive, authoritative history of the veterinary profession in the United States. Thus this section draws extensively on her scholarship in this area.

While the traditional “horse doctor” practiced a form of medicine that saw each animal as an individual, the growth first of urban stockyards and then confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in the post WWII era began to shift the emphasis to “herd” medicine, where animals were primarily understood as representative of their species instead of as a unique individual. “Animal health” thus became the predominant frame for the curriculum of the veterinary profession, and “animal health” was significantly tied to both human health and the smooth functioning of the U.S. economy. For example, a city could be crippled by an outbreak because of the sheer number of animals, their close proximity to humans, and the essential role that productive (horses) and food (cattle, sheep and pigs) animals played in the economy. Thus, veterinarians treated animals because of their monetary value to individual owners and to society at large given the large scale health and economic devastation that could result from the uncontrolled spread of disease.

This narrow emphasis on animal health as the defining attribute of the veterinary profession was solidified in 1884, when the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) was established by the U.S. government with an explicit mission to investigate, control, treat, and prevent disease outbreaks that periodically decimated livestock herds and threatened the safety of the food supply. Again, veterinarians were positioned as animal scientist professionals whose primary function and purpose was to protect economic interests, in this case, of the United States as a whole.

In the first decades of the 20th century, automobiles began to replace horses, and the profession faced a crisis because of lack of demand for their services. Applications and enrollments to veterinary schools fell over 75% between 1914 and 1924 (Jones, 2003, p. 49). Because of this sharp decline in the need for “horse doctors,” the BAI began to assert increased control over the veterinary profession as it offered one of the only secure options of employment. In the decades that followed the veterinary curriculum began to reflect the public health mandate of the BAI, focusing on bacteriology, immunology, pathology, and physiology (Jones, 2003, p. 54). In addition, the veterinary profession began to create vaccines, antibiotics, and procedures that allowed animals to be raised in increasingly confined quarters that just decades previously would have been impossible because of the constant threat of disease outbreak and widespread animal death. When producers encountered behavioral problems--such as chickens attacking each other in confined, inhumane conditions--veterinary medicine devised solutions: in this case, the practice of debeaking, which protected animal health, in that it allowed chickens to survive (if not thrive) to be slaughtered for human consumption.

The Second Lens: The Emergence of Animal Welfare

The concept of animal welfare dates back thousands of years, though its contemporary manifestation rests in what is commonly referred to as the “Brambell Report.” Commissioned by the United Kingdom in 1965, an investigation led by Professor Roger Brambell examined the conditions of animals raised for food in what they referred to as “intensively farmed” (equivalent to Confined Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs) circumstances (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 1965). The investigations and deliberations of that commission resulted in the widely used and accepted principles of the “Five Freedoms,” which were finally codified and adopted in 1979. Though originally created to apply to animals kept in intensive farming situations only, the “Five Freedoms” have been widely applied to animals kept in confinement

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for many different reasons, from animals used in research to companion animals awaiting adoption in animal shelters:

1. Freedom from hunger or thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease
4. Freedom to express (most) normal behavior
5. Freedom from fear and distress

While the roots of the veterinary profession are clearly in the economic value of non-human animals with an emphasis on animal health, the U.S. Veterinarian's Oath was revised in 2011 to include a commitment to animal welfare (Nolen, 2011, see also Bones & Yeates, 2012). This change, which was fiercely debated within the profession before adoption, will require that veterinary schools begin to adopt curriculum that specifically includes animal welfare, though four years later there is no clear policy, guidelines, or curriculum available. The revised and adopted U.S. Veterinarian's oath adds "welfare" and the "prevention" of animal suffering, not simply its relief. Thus, the wording of the following segment of the oath was revised (changes in italics) "the protection of animal health *and welfare*, the *prevention and relief* of animal suffering..." Though animal welfare is a wide-ranging and contested area, the American Veterinary Medical Association's (hereafter referred to as the AVMA) use of the term in reference to veterinary medicine is narrow and is defined (in part) as, "The responsible use of animals for human purposes, such as companionship, food, fiber, recreation, work, education, exhibition, and research conducted for the benefit of both humans and animals" (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2014). The central guiding principle of the concept of animal welfare, fully adopted by the AVMA is that it is acceptable to use animals for human purposes, as long as that use is responsible (as they define it) and animals do not suffer (and thus the five freedoms are used as guidelines for care). Following their accepted principle of animal welfare, the AVMA refuses to challenge fundamental industry and entertainment practices ranging from debeaking of poultry, to confinement of veal calves, gestation cages for pigs, the continuing captivity of marine mammals, and animal use and display in rodeos and zoos, to give just a few examples. While undoubtedly troubling to some individual veterinarians, as a whole these industries provide significant sources of employment for veterinarians and markets for pharmaceuticals, including of course antibiotics.

The Third Lens: Animal Rights and New Approaches to Understanding Non-human Animals

Animal rights is not an entirely new approach to rethinking the relationship between humans and non-human animals. Peter Singer's landmark book, *Animal Liberation* (1975) provided a framework for the explosion of a range of activism and politics around the evolving

understanding of animal sentience.³ As Bekoff (2010) suggests, it is possible to understand the space between animal welfare and animal rights as a spectrum, and he identifies (at least) seven possible positions on the spectrum: the animal exploiters' animal welfare, commonsense animal welfare, humane animal welfare, animal welfare as a misnomer for animal ill-fare, utilitarian animal welfare, new welfarism, and animal welfare/animal rights (p. 50-51). However, it is important to note that some theorists understand animal welfare and animal rights positions as wholly contradictory philosophies that cannot co-exist, because the ameliorative approach of animal welfare blocks efforts to secure animal rights and liberation (see e.g., Greenebaum, 2009). While acknowledging the variety of positions and perspectives that are subsumed under the umbrellas of "animal welfare" and "animal rights," generally "animal welfare" takes as its premise that it is acceptable to use animals for human purposes (food, clothing, research, etc.) as long as they are treated humanely. In contrast, "animal rights" positions assert that animals exist for their own purposes, and humans cannot and should not use animals for human ends.

Since the publication of *Animal Liberation* in the mid-1970s, animal rights has become an increasingly visible aspect of mainstream culture and popular media, bolstered by scientific research beginning in the 1990s that continues to demonstrate the sentience, cognition, and emotional lives of animals (Bekoff, 2013; King, 2013; Langford et al., 2006; Masson & McCarthy, 2008; Morell, 2013). More recently, this growing body of scientific research has begun to influence how the legal system views animals. Animal rights are receiving increasing attention with efforts to grant non-human animals "personhood" through the legal system (Siebert, 2014) and non-human animals receiving court-appointed representation during custody disputes (Grimm, 2014). Additionally, under provisions of the Uniform Trust Code, non-human animals can now inherit money in at least 25 states (Grimm, 2014).

For the veterinary profession, the most worrisome recent animal rights verdict is a 2004 California case, *Bluestone*. Marc Bluestone adopted a puppy (Shane) in 1996, who began to suffer from seizures. Bluestone re-arranged his life to care for Shane, entrusting her care to a veterinarian claiming to be board-certified in neurology and spending over \$24,000 on Shane's medical treatment. Despite receiving radiation, blood transfusions, and many different drugs, Shane died and Bluestone sued the veterinary hospital for mistreatment, misdiagnosis, and misrepresentation: in essence, malpractice (p.229). In February 2004, a jury agreed and awarded Bluestone \$9,000 for medical bills, and an additional \$30,000 for the "special and unique value" of the dog (Grimm, 2014). This, despite the fact that Bluestone had paid \$100 for Shane-thus the jury award was \$29,900 over the supposed "market value" of the dog.

Veterinarians, perhaps not surprisingly, found this development extremely alarming, as the specter of an explosion of malpractice lawsuits threatens a profession already saddled with extremely high student debt (often upwards of \$200,000) and low starting salaries (\$45,575 in 2012) (Segal, 2013). Since the beginning of the profession, "animal health" had been the predominant lens with which veterinarians understood their role and relationship to animals and more recently "animal welfare" had added additional obligations to animals. Yet, both "animal health" and "animal welfare" prioritize the role of humans as owners, the philosophical understanding that it is acceptable to use animals for human purposes, and the belief that animal

³ As Bekoff (2010) has noted, Singer actually identifies himself as a utilitarian philosopher, thus Bekoff positions Singer as a supporter of "new welfarism" instead of animal rights, a position held most clearly by philosophers such as Tom Regan (2004). Both animal welfare and animal rights are substantial fields in and of themselves, and a full discussion of the range of philosophies and positions is beyond the scope of this article.

value is consistent only with what the market allows. The animal rights perspective, in contrast, suggests that animals—by virtue of their existence, sentience, and capacity for both cognition and emotion—have rights that are intrinsic to them and stand outside of and separate from their relationship to humans. Thus, animal rights positions raise deep challenges not only to small animal veterinarians concerned with malpractice suits, but the larger veterinary profession and its support and involvement with multiple practices that could be threatened and potentially dismantled, from biomedical research, to zoos, to Confined Animal Farming Operations (CAFOs) (Fischman, 2014). Cat declawing, as I discuss in the following section, is one example of how a challenge to a common veterinary practice has become a site of fiery clashes between individuals and veterinarians espousing different lenses on the relationship between animals and humans. Perhaps inadvertently, these conflicts have revealed the hidden curriculum of the veterinary profession and how and why it is absolutely vital to question the public perception of veterinarians as individuals who “love” animals.⁴

Cat Declawing in the United States: An Overview

While cat declawing (the medical term is “onychectomy”) is banned in at least 22 countries around the world, it is widely available in the United States and is prohibited by law in only a few municipalities, primarily in California (as of April 2015 there was legislation pending in New York and Hawaii). Cat declawing grew in popularity after World War II. As the veterinary profession developed new preventative medicines that could be used to control fleas and mites, cats (and dogs) moved indoors, living with their human families. Cats’ natural need and instinct to scratch drew them (and their claws) to furniture and couches, which became a nuisance for people. Estimates suggest that approximately 25% of cats in the United States are front declawed (a much smaller number are front and back declawed) and are usually declawed to protect furniture (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2009; Patronek, 2001). Yet the reality of what cat declawing actually entails has been largely suppressed by the veterinary profession. As Best Friends Animal Society (2014) explains,

Declawing is the amputation of each toe at the first joint. In humans, it would be equivalent to cutting off the tip of every finger at the first knuckle — very painful, indeed. If performed on a human, this operation would be considered a mutilation.

While there is regional variation in costs, the general range for the front declaw procedure is \$300-\$500. For veterinarians struggling to pay back loans and make a living cat declawing can be a lucrative elective procedure, generating income from healthy cats who would otherwise require little more than yearly visits and vaccines. It has been common, until very recently, for veterinarians to suggest declawing at the time that a kitten is spayed or neutered. The veterinary medical literature still persists in supporting claims that there is no effect on “animal health” from the declawing procedure (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2009). As historically the “animal health” perspective is focused solely on the health of the animal for the benefit of the owner (economic value, or in this case, sentimental value), there is no reason to prohibit declawing. In other words, if there was proof that declawing had negative effects on animal

⁴ There are, of course, some veterinarians engaged with and supportive of animal rights. For example, in 2008, the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights joined with the Humane Society of the United States to create a new organization, The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association.

health that might diminish the value (Jones, 2003) of the animal to the human, then it would be logical to limit or prohibit declawing. While such research does exist (see Paw Project, 2013), the AVMA to date does not fully accept its legitimacy. Using the “animal welfare” lenses, declawing is still an acceptable practice, because of the potential benefits to the animal from the procedure. For example, owners who are unhappy with their cat’s behavior may relinquish them to shelters where they are likely to be euthanized or force them to live outdoors, where they are more likely to be injured, contract diseases such as feline leukemia (FeLV), or be killed by a car or another animal. Thus, using the historic lenses of “animal health” and “animal welfare” veterinarians continue to perform this procedure. In contrast, the “animal rights” perspectives values the intrinsic and natural rights of the non-human animal over those of the human owner (or guardian). Thus, the health of the non-human animal is understood within a frame that is unconcerned with the value (economic or sentimental) of the animal to the human, and unlike the animal welfare perspective, there is no balancing or weighing of the needs of human and non-human animals. Instead, the animal rights perspective insists that the non-human animal must come first—and it is the human who must adjust.

Despite heated debate and some opposition, in July 2014, the AVMA reclassified cat declawing as an “amputation.” While the AVMA has not prohibited its members from performing the procedure, the organization is certainly moving in the direction of making it much less common and creating greater pressure on veterinarians to either stop performing declaws entirely or to educate owners about alternatives before proceeding with declawing. In making this historic change in its position on declawing, the AVMA was, in large part, responding to considerable public pressure generated by the non-profit organization and film, *The Paw Project*, which I discuss in the following section.

***The Paw Project as Critical Education: Exposing the Hidden Curriculum*⁵**

In 2002, Dr. Jennifer Conrad, a veterinarian working in Hollywood, began to treat patients, including tigers, servals, bobcats, lions, cougars and lynx who worked in the film industries and/or were kept as “exotic” pets, and had been either front or front and back declawed. While initially unaware of the effects of declawing, she began to become horrified as she realized that these animals were living in agony and in many cases were crippled and unable to walk more than a few steps at a time. Using her own money at first, Conrad started to perform reconstructive surgeries, restoring what functionality she could and relieving persistent suffering. Conrad was thrilled when the surgeries worked: animals both recovered and thrived. Bolstered by this progress, she began campaigns to call on the AVMA to take a position against declawing wild or exotic animals (2003) and to prohibit the declawing of wild and exotic animals in

⁵ Because of the way that social media dominates how we interact with and shape the world, there are now multiple ways to interpret exactly what constitutes “*The Paw Project*.” While it began as a non-profit organization and a documentary, it now also includes a Facebook page, Twitter feeds, and there are multiple, state-level Paw Projects, which maintain their own social media sites. Of course, on social media, for example, supporters (and others) can comment, shape, and redirect conversation (as I have, on occasion), thus complicating the text of *The Paw Project*. While I would certainly encourage research that accounts for the full scope and breadth of these conversations (including the fascinating debates that emerge in the comments on the Facebook page), this type of textual analysis is beyond the parameters of this essay, which is specifically concerned with how *The Paw Project* has started to challenge the hidden curriculum of the veterinary profession, and has thus emerged as a space for public, critical education about non-human animals.

California (2005). Both of these initiatives were successful, with no organized opposition. As Conrad and *The Paw Project* moved into promoting legislation that would ban the declawing of *domestic* cats in a municipality (West Hollywood), they suddenly faced strong resistance from the California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) which lobbied and testified against the ban, joined by both the AVMA and the Association of Feline Practitioners. In a significant victory, *The Paw Project* and its supporters were successful in passing bans in West Hollywood and seven additional California cities (including San Francisco and Los Angeles) in 2009. However, on January 1, 2010, a new California law took effect, which prohibited towns and cities from making laws to regulate procedures performed by professions licensed by the California Department of Consumer Affairs. While the law appears (on the surface) to be general and unrelated to the controversy generated by *The Paw Project*, the bill was sponsored by the CVMA, and it was specifically proposed to prevent additional California cities from passing bans on cat declawing.

Despite these setbacks, *The Paw Project* is currently actively involved in publicly supporting veterinarians who pledge to stop declawing, mobilizing supporters to campaign for an end to the practice, and raising funds to finance reconstructive surgeries for cats who have suffered from the procedure. *The Paw Project's* (2013) self-described mission is to “educate the public about the painful and crippling effects of cat declawing, to promote animal welfare through the abolition of the practice of declaw surgery, and to rehabilitate big cats that have been declawed.” Their public educational campaign has also clearly exposed the hidden curriculum of veterinary medicine, the socialization of future veterinarians in veterinary colleges, and the myopic way that veterinarians have understood (and thus treated) animals. Even the paradigm of “animal welfare”—which theoretically should place the welfare of the animal *first*, is complicated by the needs, wants, and desires of the (paying) human/client, who (too) often takes priority, particularly in regards to cat declawing.

The Paw Project functions on multiple levels as an example of critical education. First, it has exposed the hidden curriculum of veterinary education, drawing much-needed (and overdue) attention to the professional socialization of veterinarians, and publicly questioning how veterinarians have historically “valued” animals and how those ways of thinking must change. Thus, it forces the public to ask probing, critical questions about who controls the curriculum of veterinary colleges and schools and whose values, interests, and priorities are reflected in those choices. This is a very important intervention in the public conversation and perception of veterinarians, as it punctures the myth that the veterinary profession is united in its “love” for animals. While certainly many individual veterinarians may “love” animals, the profession as a whole is deeply influenced and shaped by its economic interests and financial ties to multiple industries that benefit from animal exploitation and abuse (Larson, 2002). Second, while *The Paw Project* does not explicitly endorse an animal rights philosophy, its position implicitly suggests that animal rights is an important and valid perspective, as an “animal welfare” lens alone cannot fully justify an end to declawing. Thus, *The Paw Project* forces the viewer or reader (of its website) to momentarily step into the place of a cat who has been declawed, and to see and experience the world from a non-human perspective, which may also be a vital step in critical education (Dolby, 2015). Third, it provides an important public space for awareness, challenging accepting beliefs about cats and declawing, and promoting critical public education about domestic cats in a way that is respectful of cats’ nature. Thus, *The Paw Project* asks people to rethink what they think they “know” about cats, cats’ behavior, and how they understand the

human-animal relationship. For example, many people do not realize how important cats' claws are to their overall well-being, as *The Paw Project* explains on its website,

A cat's natural instinct to scratch serves both physical and psychological needs. Their claws are their primary, instinctive tools for defending themselves and capturing prey. They scratch to keep their nails in condition and to mark territory. Before domestication, cats satisfied these needs by clawing tree trunks....

Cats stretch their bodies and tone their muscles by digging their claws into something and pulling back against their own clawhold. Declawed cats are deprived of the means to defend themselves or flee from danger. Declawed cats have been injured or killed by other animals when they could not climb out of harm's way or had impaired ability to protect themselves.

The Paw Project is actively working to eliminate an accepted practice in the veterinary field, and in the process, changing cats' lives for the better. Thus, their website and Facebook pages include numerous (and growing) public testimonials from veterinarians who refuse to declaw, veterinary technicians who have left practices that refuse to stop declawing, and human owners who declawed their cats (often upon the advice of a veterinarian) without understanding the full consequences of that decision and are now trying to stop the practice. And finally, at a very fundamental and important level, *The Paw Project* helps individual cats who have been suffering for years. One of those cats is Rudi. Rudi is an 11 year Maine Coon, who was surrendered to a veterinary clinic in Indianapolis. Rudi had multiple health issues, and as is so common, the owners brought him to the clinic to be euthanized. But the staff fell in love with him and with the owners' consent, kept Rudi, hoping to heal him and find him a new forever home. Sadly, a thorough medical exam revealed that in addition to dental, eye, liver, and skin issues, Rudi had been front declawed many years before and was suffering from eight bone fragments that had been left behind in his feet. Front declaw procedures that are done correctly often cause cats pain, but when mistakes are made and bone fragments are left, the resulting suffering is enormous. With financial support from the *Indiana Paw Project*, Rudi recently had reconstructive surgery on his paws and the bone fragments were removed. At a time when many critical and progressive educators are both dismayed and disheartened by the realities of neoliberalism, corporatization of schooling, and other conservative trends, Rudi's story (and his sweet and loving face) reminds us that critical, public education can make a difference, both to our lives and to those of the non-human animals with whom we share the planet.

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