



Colter Ellis is a PhD student in

Sociology at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Over the past few years, he has studied human-animal relationships in cattle production. Colter's specific research interests concern the relationship among nonhuman animals, the environment, and discourses of inequality. As a graduate student instructor, he has incorporated human-animal studies into his classes on social problems and sex, gender, and society. In addition to human-animal studies, his interests include social psychology, gender, environmental sociology, and ethnography.

Colter describes his ASI project: Today's agricultural practices are more abusive of nonhuman animals than those in use at any other time in human history. Scholars of animals and society clearly note the connection between animal exploitation and the oppression of human groups. My research seeks to provide support for this thesis by studying the beef industry sociologically. To date, my research has shown that gender is a critical organizing principle in animal agriculture and that gendered frameworks help people negotiate their contradictory relationships with animals. Given this finding, I am also interested in understanding how people are socialized to work in animal agriculture. This project builds on two sets of qualitative data. The first focuses on the socialization of young people involved with 4H, an education program sponsored by the USDA. The second set of data focuses on perceptions of men and women who work on cattle ranches, also known as cow/calf operations. Using this data, I have looked at how people in the beef industry understand the human-animal boundary and how they make sense of their occupation and their relationships with animals. This data has allowed me to look at the gendered meaning of "stewardship" and how it relates to animals and the environment. Through this analysis, I have found that the structure of beef production creates a context in which gender permeates interactions among humans and animals. Continuing this work, I hope to explore the connections among animals, inequality, and the environment. I have four goals for this larger research project that I intend to work toward during the ASI fellowship. First, I will further develop my analysis of the way human-animal relationships shape ranchers' gendered identities. Second, I will describe how these gendered identities inform ranchers' interactions with cattle. Third, I will examine how these identities and interactions are shaped by the institutional practices of the larger beef industry. Finally, I hope to integrate these findings to advance the under-theorized connection among nonhuman animals, inequality, and the environment.