

# Perceptions and Barriers of Four Female Agricultural Educators Across Generations: A Qualitative Study

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*The purpose of this descriptive study was to discover the perceptions and barriers of four female agriculture educators across generations in a non-traditional field of agriculture. The United States Department of Labor (2006b) defined a non-traditional job as any occupation where one gender comprises 25% or less of the total employment. Four female agriculture teachers across three generations were interviewed with the open-ended question: "What have been your personal and professional experiences in teaching agricultural education?" The teachers selected were from three generations: early Baby Boomer (Vietnam Generation), late Baby Boomer (Me Generation), Generation Xer, and Millennial. The themes revealed in the study were: qualifications to teach agricultural education, challenges in teaching agricultural education, stress in teaching agricultural education, and stereotyping of agricultural education teachers. Females teaching high school agricultural education expressed they needed to prove they were qualified; prove women can perform agricultural education duties; overcome resentment from students; balance family and work; and break the stereotype of a high school agricultural education teacher.*

Keywords: agricultural education, generational differences, feminism, teaching challenges

## Introduction

The United States Department of Labor (2006b) defines a non-traditional job as any occupation where one gender comprises 25% or less of the total employment. The United States Department of Labor (2006a) lists non-traditional jobs for women as detectives, architects, office machine repairers, construction and building inspectors, fire fighters, aircraft pilots, small engine mechanics, and agricultural education. Kantrovich (2007) reveals secondary female agriculture teachers comprise 27% of the agricultural education field. However, there is a 41% female student membership in high school FFA (National FFA, 2008). Why is there a discrepancy in the number of high school females taking agriculture and the low number of females in the teaching field? Recently, there was an increase of female secondary agriculture educators but the research shows women do not stay in the field of agricultural education for a

long period of time (Castillo & Cano, 1999). There are several perceptions of why this is occurring. One possible answer could be barriers secondary female agriculture educators' face as they pursue a teaching career in the field of agricultural education.

The problems women face in agricultural education are not unique. They are similar to problems facing women pursuing careers in other fields that are traditionally male dominated.

A national study conducted by Foster (2003) revealed three barriers or challenges experienced by women were acceptance by parents and community; acceptance by peers (male teachers); and acceptance by administration and business leaders. Many female agriculture teachers perceive they must prove to their fellow teachers, students, parents, and administrators that they are competent in their job skills (Foster, 2001; Kelsey, 2007). Many perceived barriers and perceptions of secondary female

agriculture teachers are from community members; criticisms from other teachers and administrators; sexual discrimination; sexual bias; job competency; and attitudes regarding a female agriculture teacher (Corn, 2000; Foster, 2001; Foster & Seevers, 2004; Kelsey, 2006; Kelsey, 2007). However, past research does not show us barriers faced by women agriculture educators across different generations. Given the study focus is on gender, we begin with the feminist theory that frames the research.

### Theoretical Framework

Western society views *human being* as a “...concept that claims to include *all people* but historically it has been an androcentric concept that represents a male perspective” (Thayer–Bacon, 2003, p. 16). Lather (1987) expands the feminist belief that “...the socially sanctioned power of men over women, operates in both the private and public spheres to perpetuate a social order that benefits men at the expense of women” (p. 243). Feminist research is constantly changing and challenged by Western society and the research on women should reflect a women’s situation in society (Olesen, 2005). Research cannot look at feminist research as only gender oriented; but class, race, and other social categories, must be intertwined in order to portray an honest picture of how power affects the hierarchy of Western society and what we claim to know (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Olesen, 2005).

Women have been marginalized in Western society for centuries (Tyack & Hansot, 1992). In the private sphere, the female may be dominant where her *voice* can be heard; but not in the public sphere, this is considered a male domain. The voice refers to the “empowering of people who have not had a chance to tell about their lives to speak out so as to bring about social change” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 214). Thayer–Bacon (2003) acknowledged female voices have been historically excluded from epistemological theory and not viewed as knowers. Society has a male perspective which thinks logically while trying to control and contain emotions. However, women are associated with emotions and intuition which has created a gender split where the logically thinking male holds a higher status than the emotional female. (Thayer–Bacon, 2003).

Thayer–Bacon revealed “...women still serve in the role of *other* defined in contrast to rational males” (p. 27).

Olesen (2005) pointed out there have been several studies in education regarding feminism. Many women in education struggle with the current political educational structures because of how the educational systems do not take into account the female voice. Lather (1987) revealed, historically, women teachers were an extension of their role in the home. They were to nurture and prepare children to go from the private to public sphere and “...to accept male leadership as natural and to provide services that reproduce males for jobs and careers, females for wives and mothers and a reserve labor force” (Lather, 1987, p. 245).

As Western society continued to grow and change during the twentieth century, women began to change and question their value and voice (Lather, 1987). With this change in the social structure, “...women teachers began to serve as transmitters of cultural norms rather than cultural transformers...” (Lather, 1987, p. 245) and were perpetuating the male hierarchy. Lather revealed women teachers are in a position of power and powerlessness. They have responsibility without power because the teaching system is based on male hierarchy. However, Western society expects women teachers to perform miracles with children and to overcome society’s intransigent problems (Lather, 1987).

During the 1960’s and 1970’s a change in social climate occurred. Tyack and Hansot (1992) revealed “...when feminists redefined women’s grievances as a public issue rather than as a personal problem... sexual discrimination in schools became one of their prime targets” (p. 245). The women’s movement in education sought to change the biased curriculum and a reduction of sex stereotyping educational courses (Tyack & Hansot, 1992).

With this movement underway in education, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment was passed. Title IX’s purpose is to eliminate discrimination of gender, race, and economic groups. Title IX “...outlawed separate–sex classes in health, physical education, and vocational subjects as well as banning sex–segregated vocational programs and schools” (Tyack & Hansot, 1992, p. 256). Before Title IX, females were allowed to only enroll in

traditional *female* vocational classes; such as, home economics and office-business training courses. Title IX allowed females to take the traditionally taught shop classes. Therefore, the face of vocational education had to change. With that change, women entered the agricultural education field.

Within the male hierarchy of teaching it was difficult for female teachers to teach in a non-traditional field such as agricultural education. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2002) noted if a female worked in a traditionally male oriented field then the skill or career became devalued. The male hierarchy in secondary agricultural education perceived females devaluing the integrity of their job and attempted to keep women from obtaining a career in agricultural education (Kelsey, 2007). Slowly, barriers blocking women from teaching positions have been decreased, but are not completely eliminated in the public education system (Kelsey, 2007; Tyack & Hansot, 1992).

#### *Definition of Generations.*

Currently, there are four distinct generations working together. The four groups are: Traditionalist (1900–1945), Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation Xer's (1965–1980), and Millennials (1981–1999) (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2000). The largest generation is the Baby Boomers. This group is approximately 80 million people and they are generally defined as the Vietnam Generation (early Baby Boomers) and the Me generation (late Baby Boomers) (Marston, 2006). Baby boomers focus on individuality, being a workaholic, competitive, and optimistic. They believe they have education and idealism to change things in the United States of America. In addition, they focus on avenues to pursue so they can advance and change the current management style. Their work ethic is measured in hours and not in productivity. Moreover, teamwork is critical to success; however, competitiveness within the group is prevalent (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

The Generation Xer's are a much smaller group of approximately 46 million people, but this group is extremely influential in society. One may describe individuals in this group as skeptical, reluctant, slacker, lethargic, sarcastic, and unmotivated. This particular group does not associate themselves with any heroes and they

are extremely suspicious of the Baby Boomers' values. It is important to note that the Generation Xer's were identified as the latch key kids and had to learn to fend for themselves because their parents were busy working (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Marston, 2006).

The Millennials are comprised of approximately 76 million people. This generational group is still in the process of showing itself to the world and what they will do in the work place (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Marston, 2006). Millennials insist on having open, constant communication and positive feedback from their employers. In addition, they seek mentorship so they can reach their goals in the work force.

When one considers being employed in agricultural education, many differences must be understood between males and females such as conflicting personalities, beliefs and generational differences. Generational differences include different values, belief systems, living standards and also school based standards for individuals in his or her particular generation. Working with individuals from different generations can produce different working challenges; therefore, understanding different generational characteristics becomes pertinent to one entering into the educational system.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this descriptive study is to discover the perception and barriers of four female agriculture educators across generations in the non-traditional field of teaching agricultural education. Participants were asked the open-ended question, "What have been your personal and professional experiences in teaching agricultural education?"

#### **Methods and Procedures**

The research tradition and methodology utilized in this study was descriptive. A descriptive qualitative study is one that includes quotations (instead of numbers) from the participants to explain or describe a particular situation or view of the world (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). Collecting descriptive data needs to be thorough and the assumption needs to be understood that "nothing is trivial and

everything has the potential to be a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 5)

The method of gathering data from the participants was through interviews utilizing open-ended questions. Follow up questions were asked after the interviews and were transcribed within one week of the interview. Follow up questions to the interview came from personal contact, phone interviews or through e-mail depending on the location of the participant and the research concluded when data saturation from each participant had been achieved (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007).

Each participant was given a pseudonym, each line transcribed and pages were numbered. The coding would then be used to identify key quotes by the participant. An example of the coding: K=1-14, the letter stands for the participant, first number represents the page, and the third number represents the quote. Analysis of the data provided the researcher with descriptive stories that can be coded into the coding scheme related to subjects’ ways of thinking about people and objects (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). Key themes were brought forth by the researchers by analyzing participant responses, placing responses into specific categories and then specific themes which were prevalent in each transcription were developed.

Validity and reliability in qualitative research can be met through six strategies (Merriam, 1998). *Triangulation* is achieved through using multiple methods to confirm themes or findings. Another researcher trained in qualitative methods reevaluated the findings and confirming themes found in the research. The participants did *member checks* throughout the research process. A transcript of the interview and a rough draft of themes and findings were sent to each member and asked if the findings are plausible. In addition, participants in the study were provided a copy of the manuscript to review. *Peer examination* and *feedback* were accomplished by having the participants read draft copies of the findings and to make corrections or additions to the findings. *Collaborative research* was achieved through the conceptualizing the study with other teacher educators. *Researcher’s biases* were established at the outset of the study; however, those biases can never fully be removed.

## Results and Findings

There are four participants in this study: early Baby Boomer (Vietnam Generation), late Baby Boomer (Me Generation), Generation Xer, and Millennial. Taylor, the early Baby Boomer, grew up on a working ranch and loved all aspects of agriculture. Taylor made the decision to take agriculture classes in high school; however, she was not allowed to take vocational agriculture classes. Taylor went on to college, graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and continued on to advance degrees in agricultural education.

Karen, the late Baby Boomer, never considered taking agriculture classes in high school. The classes were taught at her high school, but she chose not to take them. When it came time to enter college Karen decided on pre-veterinarian medicine with a minor in animal science. She worked in a veterinarian clinic and did some field experiences with local veterinarians while she attended college. She came to the conclusion that veterinary medicine was not for her. Karen did her student teaching in agricultural education and enjoyed the experience. Karen taught high school agriculture for 16 years and currently serves as Career and Technical Education Director.

Roxanne, the Generation Xer, grew up on a small family farm in a rural area. Roxanne graduated from college with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science with a double minor in biology and general education. She became certified to teach biology and agricultural education. Roxanne continued her education and obtained an advance degree in education. She taught high school agriculture for several years and is currently in administration.

Paige, the Millennial, participated in agricultural education classes in high school. Paige graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Agriculture and Extension Education. She began her teaching career after graduation and taught for two and one-half years. She is currently working in another field of agriculture.

### *Qualifications*

All four participants revealed they had to prove they were qualified to teach agricultural education during their teaching careers. Therefore, one of the major themes to emerge

was participants proving they are worthy to teach agricultural education.

*Proving women are qualified.* The participants felt they had to prove their ability to teach agriculture to students, other teachers, administration, parents, and community. Responses ranged from the Vietnam Generation (T=4-124) "...when you are one of the only women in a field teaching, you spend so much time trying to prove yourself you don't think a lot about things like diversity, equity, or even gender discrimination." The Me Generation individual stated, (K=5-73) "...he (Career and Technical Education Director) didn't think I was qualified for that job ... there are male and female students that just down right tell you. Their parents will tell you. They refuse female authority and like I said, it's not just males." The Generation Xer explained (R=4-75) "...I had a difficult time getting a job," and the Millennial added, (P=14-309) "...you have to prove to them (students) that you know about agriculture..."

Taylor indicated that she had to prove that she could teach agricultural education in high school and at the college level. Taylor realized when pursuing an agriculture teaching position (T=2-61) "...reality hit again and I realized there were very few jobs available for women in any field of agriculture in 1974." [While] Karen believed she had to prove herself through the quality of her agriculture program and if students were active in the FFA and the community was aware of the program's success, then it was considered a credible program.

Roxanne indicated that she had to prove herself and gain respect at the same time. She commented, (R=11-241) "...you can earn respect within your school...you can earn respect from your vocational director, principal... if you want to earn the respect of your fellow teachers and prove you can teach agricultural education, that comes from competition."

Paige believed she had to prove herself to students so they would respect her. She responded by saying, (P=14-313) "...the upper classmen, they wanted to see how far they could push me...see what they can get away with."

The process employed to accomplish proving themselves was working long hours, teaching science and pursuing a career in agricultural education. Taylor qualified this by

adding, (T=7-209) "Early on in my career...a friend told me that as a woman I would need to be everywhere (work, competitions, and meetings) earlier than anyone else, do everything better...Sadly, I believed that for years...first to arrive, the last to leave..." Others responded by saying (K=26-396) "You will have to work your tail off" to (R=11-245) "...an indication of work and that's an indication of putting in your time... that's an indication of equal."

Karen and Roxanne acknowledged how difficult it was to attain their first agriculture teaching position. Roxanne shared her story about not being hired because she was a young, unmarried female. Both participants had supervisors tell them (K=5-70) "...that I did not belong in that job...because I was a female." However, Paige did not have difficulty in obtaining her first teaching position in agriculture, but her frustration came from her co-worker. (P=2-40) "I was being told what to do a lot. I don't know if that was because I was young or I was female but that was hard."

### *Challenges*

Each teacher experienced challenges teaching agricultural education. Three prevailing sub-themes emerged: proving women can perform agricultural education duties, sexism, and resentment from students and community.

*Proving women can perform agricultural education duties.* Two of the participants revealed they had low number of students in their program; and they had to increase agricultural education enrollment to continue teaching the subject. Taylor explained she was (T=2-78) "...offered a part-time position at the local community college...had a total of six students in the agriculture program. Six years later...one hundred twenty (students) and still only one teacher." Roxanne realized her co-worker was going to retire and they had forty-two students in their agriculture program. She knew they would keep him with a low number, but not her. She explained, (R=6-133) "I was not going to be able to stay in a program and keep a job with forty-two kids. I went on a big recruitment drive." Roxanne was successful in her recruitment drive and her enrollment increased.

Other challenges participants faced were teaching students who were only a few years younger. Karen told of her experience, (K=4-49) "When I first started teaching, I was the first female agriculture teacher the school had ever had ... students were four years younger than I was...it was difficult." Karen also shared she did not have a lot of experience in FFA, (K=20-293) "I worked harder...I knew nothing and I've not had those experiences. I just (pause) I just had to work that much harder." Roxanne also stated, (R=12-265) "For some people it was a little bit threatening...I felt I had something to prove."

For Paige, it was challenging to be in the classroom, but more challenging to work with an older co-worker. She explained, (P=2-34) "...teaching with him as my co-worker (pause) felt like sometimes he was more my boss." She found it to be very difficult in this situation, (P=4-73) "It's hard, as a young teacher talking to someone that's been teaching for a long time and being told "no" I couldn't do things." Other challenges were the administrator's perceptions of what she could teach or not teach. (P=7-151) "...the male teacher teaches shop, power machinery...they never ask me to do it because they think I can't." However, participants expressed they had to prove themselves to their male co-workers. In fact, their co-workers were willing to help them learn to teach agriculture by spending extra time with the new teachers and showing them how to do things.

*Sexism.* Each encountered some form of sexism from the community, students, and colleagues. Some forms of sexism from the community were perceived conceptions of what is appropriate or not appropriate behavior for a female agriculture teacher to display. Roxanne commented on a field trip to a hog farm to castrate pigs. The field trip was cancelled when the farmer realized it was a female agriculture teacher who would be bringing agriculture students. Roxanne called to reschedule the trip and spoke with the hog farmer's wife. (R=25-652) "My husband didn't realize that you were a woman and he does not think that it is appropriate for you to be out here with boys doing that."

Taylor realized there were few jobs available to women in agriculture in the early seventies. (T=2-63) "I spent my first few years of marriage...working at random jobs in

agriculture – usually as a technician" explained Taylor. She realized there was gender discrimination in agricultural education by a comment a school board member made. He said, (T=6-186) "Taylor, you are doing a great job! However, I feel you should know that I voted not to re-new your contract. I just don't believe mothers should work outside the home."

Karen, Roxanne, and Paige experienced some form of sexism from students. For example, students asked them out on a date or made sexual comments. Paige acknowledged (P=13-298) "I've had kids say things which have offended me...you gotta have that line...you're the teacher." For example, Karen revealed statements made to her by students, (K=4-66) "Oh, ag teachers didn't look like this, you know, when I was in school." The sexual comments did not only come from students but from colleagues. For example, Roxanne shared her poignant story of how a colleague she respected and admired made a sexual overture to her. (R=12-267) "I was so shocked...hurt...I was insulted." Karen sums up her story of the statements made to her, (K=11-207) "I had teachers that made remarks and I see that same thing happening to young female teachers now...looking back twenty years ago and that same thing was going on with me and I hated it."

*Resentment from students.* Three of the participants had students resent them for various reasons. Karen felt resentment at two different schools where she worked. Both incidents involved a teacher retiring and students were devastated the male teacher left. Karen revealed in one program a student was so resentful of her being there and not his former male agriculture teacher, the student put a quote in the school yearbook, (K=10-181) "...'I would have the good sense to move on, or do something better in her teaching career.' You know that really hurt...just so resentful...had to spend their senior year with me."

Paige experienced resentment from students by creating tension between the two agriculture teachers and this caused a great deal of conflict. Paige commented students did not view a female as an appropriate agriculture teacher and consistently challenged her authority by causing conflict with her co-worker.

#### *Stress*

All four participants indicated teaching agriculture was a high stress job. Two sub-

themes were revealed and were interlinked together. Those themes were balancing family and work and the high burnout/low return rate of female agriculture teachers.

*Balancing family and work.* Participants revealed several stories and incidents of how balancing work and family together was difficult. Three of the participants explained how having children changed the dynamics of balancing work and family. All participants agreed the job was demanding and required a good relationship with their husbands. Three of the participants have had children and they never took much time off from their jobs. Taylor went back to work when her first child was eighteen months old. Karen and Roxanne claimed they never took any extra time off when their children were babies. Taylor reflected, (T=2-82) "I had a growing family and my job did not seem conducive to a healthy family life.... I was averaging seventy-five days a year on the road. I put my family through hell. Don't get me wrong, there were good times."

Karen and Roxanne found the agriculture community to be very open about bringing children to different FFA functions. Both told how their children grew up around FFA students/competitions and because of that, their children have had many good experiences. Taylor, on the other hand, did not take her children with her. She commented on how she missed several activities her sons' were in. Taylor's job was so time consuming one of her son's looked at her and said, (T=3-99) "Come back to see us sometime. It was like I was a traveling salesman or something." All three female agriculture teachers agreed that spending the amount of time on their job may not have been worth it to their family.

Besides trying to balance work and family life, participants realized their jobs were demanding and become more demanding if you so desire. Karen described her experience as, (K=21-304) "You get sucked into a big black hole if you're not very, very careful....it can be very, very overwhelming." Roxanne concurred by saying, (R=17-376) "I designed my life around my job... that was the focus from the beginning...once I made the comment that being an ag teacher, it's like riding a tiger...you can't get off because it'll bite you." For Paige, her first year teaching was overwhelming. She

discovered, (P=9-189) "...never enough time in the day to get everything done."

*High burnout / low return rate.* The participants acknowledged the retention rate of female agriculture teachers is low. They perceived the reasons to be because of the amount of paper work, commitment to Career Development Events (CDE's), and the classroom preparations. Karen also theorized why females do not return, (K=21-316) "...it gets most difficult for them (females teaching), probably during the transition of starting a family....they look pretty weary when [they're] draggin' in strollers...that's when it gets really hard...I think that's the maker or breaker point for a lot of females. You're torn at that time."

Coinciding with the low retention rate is high burnout amongst the agriculture teaching profession. In discussion, participants revealed there is a level of expectation from the students, community, and the administration. In addition, there is extreme pressure to maintain a high level of standard in the FFA and academically. Roxanne's explanation is, (R=17-380) "It has to do with expectations of others and people around you. I have often believed that is why there is a high burnout rate among agriculture teachers...you can make it as big of a monster as you want to make it." Whether the factors that contribute to stress are real or perceived, they have impacted participants and their families.

#### *Stereotyping of Agricultural Education Teachers*

All four women revealed they had people stereotyping them as a high school agricultural education teacher and questioned their credentials. Comments were made from others about their appearance and ability to teach agricultural education because they were female.

*Breaking the stereotyping of an agricultural education teacher.* As the four women's stories unfolded, each experience was different. Some people told the women they did not represent what a high school agricultural education teacher should look like. Taylor's first encounter was in high school. She was not allowed to take vocational agriculture classes and was directed to take the more traditional female classes such as home economics and business or typing classes. Taylor recalled what it was like to teach agricultural education in the 1980's, (T=7-199) "...it was like being a pioneer to another planet where no one spoke your language." She also

realized there were no other women to look to as a role model. Hence, Taylor became a role model for future female agricultural education teachers.

Karen and Roxanne recalled instances where they were at formal agricultural education functions and it would be announced, (K=12-227) "Would all the agriculture teachers and their wives please stand up." Both claimed it took several years for that particular announcement to change. Participants also noted people in the community and in the agricultural education field assumed they were someone's wife.

Karen described her first encounter of stereotyping, (K=5-70) "...a male in a supervisory position told me I did not belong in that job because I was a female." In addition, Roxanne recalled two incidents of stereotyping at the beginning of her teaching career. She went to a male agriculture teacher for help and his response was, (R=10-222) "Young lady, your biggest problem is you are a girl in a boy's club." However, when Roxanne sees him now, he claims agricultural education is turning into a sorority (more females are teaching agricultural education).

Karen, Roxanne, and Paige proclaimed administrators assumed they would have discipline problems due to their gender. Roxanne explained, (R=10-211) "...they (administrators) were anticipating that I would have discipline problems because I was a female." These women felt they were under a microscope and the administration, other teachers, and the communities were looking for them to make mistakes or fail at being an agriculture teacher. Taylor added, (T=6-168) "In the single teacher program, all success and failure falls on the shoulders of the teacher. You are responsible for getting and keeping the ball rolling...there is little room for error." Roxanne sums up her experience with stereotyping this way, (R=16-344) "...to keep from being stereotyped as the emotional one or somebody having female issues, I worked hard at my job."

### Conclusions

Although participants are from different generations, there does appear to be some of the same challenges faced. However, the severity of the challenges appeared to change. Similar to

Foster's (2003) study, each participant revealed having to prove they were capable of teaching high school agricultural education to different groups of people such as other teachers, students, administrators, and the community. Such things as the need to work hard, community establishment, and teaching *male* classes are a few areas where the women in this study felt they needed to prove themselves. However, participants believed they had made a difference in agricultural education and noticed an increase in female and male enrollment. In addition, these women believed they were a positive role model for all their students.

The challenges revealed in this study were proving women can teach agricultural education, dealing with sexism within the teaching system and community, and challenges students present. Within proving women can teach agricultural education, the participants had the challenge of increasing enrollment to retain their career. They knew the school system would keep the older male agriculture teacher with low numbers, but not them. Challenges expressed by female agricultural education teachers were similar to challenges expressed in Kincheloe and Steinberg's (2002) study. Some of those challenges were being the first female teacher in the school system and having to overcome many of the perceived barriers of what is appropriate and not appropriate for a female agriculture teacher. Since female agricultural teachers had to overcome perceived barriers, they also struggled to find their voice in the educational environment they were teaching in which is consistent with Lather's (1987) research.

Based on the women's stories, sexism had been experienced throughout their careers. Each encountered sexism from the community, students, and colleagues. Community members made comments to the women about their gender and appearance. In addition, students asked the teachers out on dates and would make inappropriate comments. Furthermore, participants revealed teaching agricultural education was a demanding and time consuming job. Creating and keeping a quality agriculture/FFA program demanded the teacher to be committed to the job and students. Each female recalled how difficult it was to balance a family life and how overwhelming teaching agricultural education was. However, they all

agreed having a supportive partner was extremely important in maintaining a balance of family life and career. Overall, participants realized their jobs were time consuming and demanding on many levels.

Because teaching agricultural education is demanding, there appears to be a high level of burnout/low retention rate of female teachers (Croom, 2003). Again, across the four generations it was revealed the amount of paper work, commitment to CDE's, and the classroom preparations all contributed to why teachers did not return to teaching agricultural education. Furthermore, the four women felt there was a level of expectation from the administration, students, and community and the teacher must maintain a high level of standards academically and in the FFA to meet those expectations. Whether the factors that contribute to stress are real or perceived, they have impacted the participants and their families.

The four women disclosed that they have been exposed to some form of stereotyping. The stereotyping ranged from employing females in agricultural education, the pre-conceived appearance of a high school agricultural education teacher, and discipline procedures utilized in the classroom. Many people believed the female agriculture teacher should not teach *farming* classes and would make comments such as, "Where is your agriculture teacher?" when the teacher was standing there.

### Implications/Recommendations

Understanding challenges women face in the field of agricultural education is crucial to assisting with the development of females in the profession. If we do not hear their voice (Thayer–Bacon, 2003), then we (as a profession) cannot retain female teachers nor can we assist in the making the experience better. As seen in the findings, females from different generations are experiencing some of the same issues but on a different difficulty level. For example, Karen grew up in a generation where agricultural education was a male dominated field until they allowed females into the teaching field in 1972. Therefore, her challenges may have been the same as the Generation Xer Paige, but Karen experienced challenges on a more profound level. What that implies is that women in the agricultural education profession, like Karen,

have paved the way for current female teachers. By acknowledging these issues, educational professionals can provide assistance to women in the field. In addition, other females in the profession can utilize the data to better understand barriers or issues one may face when entering the profession. Whatever the situation, understanding different individual perspectives can only make an organization stronger and develop better professionals: male or female.

Based on the results of this study, recommendations of helping females overcome real or perceived barriers in agricultural education are needed. One recommendation is to implement a mentoring system for all new teachers. From this study none of the participants had a formal mentoring program. The Vietnam Generation participant was a pioneer in agricultural education and received help through other male agriculture teachers. It is apparent that female agriculture teachers need a formal mentoring system to help them overcome the many challenges and barriers they face in teaching agricultural education.

For female agriculture teachers to overcome sexist and biased behavior in the public school system, they will need training. Kelsey (2006) concurred with the study's results that many women are faced with sexist and biased situations in the school system. In this study of four women across the generations, they identified sexist and biased behavior on many levels. It is recommended the university teacher preparation programs implement a program designed to make pre-service teachers aware of sexist and biased behavior and in-service training for new teachers, current teachers, and administrators. In addition, a course on gender challenges in the classroom needs to be taught at the university level.

In a time where three generations are working together, it is imperative that they are capable of working together in harmony. It has been documented by Lancaster and Stillman (2002) and Marston (2006) that the work place is changing with different ethics, style, and expectations in the work force. As educators, we need to change the work atmosphere and break down the real and perceived barriers in order to retain female agriculture teachers.

### Questions for Further Study

Further study is needed to determine if the perceived and real barriers across the four generations are prevalent in a larger group of female agriculture teachers. Researchers should examine the effects of the following issues in

teaching agricultural education and how it affects the retaining of teachers: What are the challenges of males teaching agricultural education? And, what methods should be employed for new teachers to become aware of the demands of teaching agricultural education?

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