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Teacher Job Satisfaction and Burnout Viewed through Social Comparisons

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Understanding job satisfaction, stress, and burnout within agricultural education has the potential to impact the profession's future. Studying these factors through the theoretical lens of social comparison takes a cultural approach by investigating how agriculture teachers interact with and compare themselves to others. The purpose of this study was to determine if relationships existed between social comparison and job satisfaction and/or burnout among secondary agriculture teachers representing six states. Findings indicated that teachers were satisfied with their jobs and tended to engage most frequently in upward assimilative (UA) comparisons, leading to inspiration emotional outcomes. According to the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI–E), teachers experienced low levels of burnout related to personal accomplishment (PA) and depersonalization (DE), and moderate levels related to emotional exhaustion (EE). Seven moderate relationships were found between dimensions of social comparison and either burnout and/or job satisfaction.

Keywords: social comparison; agriculture teachers; job satisfaction; teacher burnout

Introduction

Teaching is a demanding occupation, at any level, within any content area. This is partially a result of high expectations in relation to state and national standards, and deadlines imposed to increase student learning (Strauss, 2002). However, some would argue that teaching agriculture is even more demanding given that the roles of an agricultural educator are multi–faceted (Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Additionally, the workload of an agricultural educator extends well beyond a typical teacher work–week (Torres, Lambert, & Tummons, 2009). As a result, research and professional development initiatives in agricultural education have addressed the retention and development of school–based agriculture teachers who are committed to and adept in managing a unique compilation of work–place demands (Mundt & Connors, 1999; Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005). Certainly, by understanding job satisfaction, stress, and burnout within agricultural education better, teacher educators

may be able to prepare future teachers more appropriately and assist those who are currently in the profession.

To ensure retention of a highly qualified group of professionals within agricultural education, job satisfaction must be addressed. Within other areas of social science research, job satisfaction has been studied widely, often in relation to qualities such as "productivity, performance, absenteeism, and job turnover" (Jewell, Beavers III, Malpiedi, & Flowers, 1990, p. 52). In general, job satisfaction is described as an individual's feelings about his or her job and is dependent on individual attitudes and levels of motivation toward performing tasks associated with a job (Gilmer & Deci, 1977). A satisfied worker is more effective and productive than an unsatisfied worker (Martin, 2002). And, satisfied workers tend to be more committed to their careers (Robinson & Garton, 2006).

Subsequently, job satisfaction can impact career longevity and tenure. Job tenure, on average, has decreased from seven to four years (Gregg & Wadsworth, 1995 as cited in Morley, 2001). In fact, employees are "job hopping" more now than ever before (Boverie & Kroth, 2000). To more fully understand career commitment and potential job tenure among secondary agriculture teachers, research should examine teacher satisfaction with their chosen careers.

Although numerous scales for measuring job satisfaction exist, the Brayfield–Rothe (1951) job satisfaction instrument, as modified by Warner (1973) is one of the most commonly used in agricultural education research. Specifically, this instrument has been used by researchers in agricultural education to study faculty at higher education institutions (Bowen & Radhakrishna, 1991; Castillo & Cano, 2004), secondary agricultural education instructors (Bruening & Hoover, 1991; Cano & Miller, 1992a; Cano, & Miller, 1992b; Castillo & Cano, 1999; Castillo, Conklin, & Cano, 1999; Newcomb, Betts, & Cano, 1986; Walker, Garton, & Kitchel, 2004), agricultural education graduates (Garton & Robinson, 2006; Robinson & Garton, 2008), and supervisors of agricultural employees (Barrick, 1989).

Although personal and professional characteristics data (i.e. demographics) are not good predictors of job satisfaction (Bruening & Radhakrishna, 1991; Cano & Miller, 1992a; Cano & Miller; 1992b; Castillo & Cano, 1999), it is possible that discrepancies might exist among faculty members across the country; as such, Bowen and Radhakrishna (1991) recommended that comparisons should be made. The same recommendation could be made for secondary agriculture teachers. How does job satisfaction differ among teachers in various states? Cano and Miller (1992b) opined that teachers who leave the profession likely do so because of their lack of job satisfaction. Therefore, studying job satisfaction among a wide range of teachers across multiple states could have implications for understanding how to retain teachers in the profession longer (Walker et al., 2004).

Discrepancy exists in the literature regarding job satisfaction of secondary teachers in agriculture. Cano and Miller (1992a) found that, when considering each facet of their job, agriculture teachers were *undecided* on their level of overall job satisfaction. In contrast, Walker et al. (2004) determined that teachers were satisfied generally with their jobs regardless of whether they stayed, moved within, or left the profession for another career. The authors found that teachers who left the profession were just as satisfied as those who stayed, but the reasons they left were due to a perceived "lack of administrative support" (p. 35) and issues involving their family, which could have led to high levels of stress for these teachers.

An important emotional precursor to job satisfaction, documented in the literature widely, is the level of stress associated with a job. Specifically, agriculture teachers experience challenges that form particular job stressors (Greiman, Walker, & Birkenholz, 2005; Walker et al., 2004). Symptoms of stress in teachers can include anxiety and frustration, impaired performance, and damaged interpersonal relationships at work and at home (Kyriacou, 2001). Teachers who experience stress over long periods of time may then experience burnout (Troman & Woods, 2001). Working long hours, usually beyond a 40–hour work–week (Straquadine, 1990; Vaughn, 1990), contributes to the stress level of agriculture teachers, and leads ultimately to burnout in many cases. Indicators of burnout are a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for work (Matheny, Gfoerer, & Harris, 2000). Burnout has also

been characterized as an extreme type of role–specific alienation with a focus on feelings of meaninglessness, especially as this applies to an individual's ability to reach students successfully (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

Those who experience burnout may struggle with finding the desire and motivation to continue in their current profession. Research by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) has highlighted three important reasons to study teacher burnout citing, (a) teaching is an extremely visible profession; (b) teachers are expected to teach beyond academics into moral development to correct social problems; and (c) meeting diverse needs and expectations of students requires numerous human and financial resources. To that end, Maslach et al. (1996) developed an educator version of their burnout inventory to measures dimensions of *emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment* among teachers. The results of research in agricultural education indicated that agriculture teachers, overall, are not stressed and are satisfied with their jobs (Chenevey, Ewing, & Whittington, 2009; Torres, Lawver, & Lambert, 2009). Yet, there are agriculture teachers who are reaching the tipping point of job burnout due to the job pressures and demands (Torres et al., 2009). The requirements of the job and the resources available to do the job are often mismatched, leading to stressful situations and burnout. In addition, teachers with higher levels of emotional exhaustion are those who are more likely to experience burnout (Chenevey, et al., 2009).

Most of the studies associated with job satisfaction and burnout in agricultural education are associated with personal or demographic variables. Another approach may be to assess cultural or contextual variables. In discussing a related topic — teacher quality — Kennedy (2010) argued that education has "succumbed to the fundamental attribution error" (p. 591) by overlooking situational or contextual factors that may also continue to affect teacher quality. If this argument is true for job satisfaction and teacher burnout, then a different approach is warranted. One approach is to assess how teachers interact within the profession of agricultural education.

Agriculture teachers have numerous opportunities (i.e., at local, regional, state, and national meetings, competitions, and conferences) to interact (and thus compare) themselves to other agriculture teachers on a more individual level. This presents a unique context in which to study social comparison, and implications that such an environment might have on retaining and developing agriculture teachers who are more satisfied in their professions, less stressed, and less likely to experience the phenomenon of burnout.

The social comparison theory is a theoretical framework that could be used to explain how agriculture teachers act because, according to Festinger (1954), social comparison can be used within a professional culture. According to the theory, certain emotional outcomes may result in either positive or negative satisfaction and stress that could lead to burnout. Festinger hypothesized that people have the desire to evaluate their own opinions and abilities in relation to the opinions and abilities of others. "For example, a person's evaluation of his ability to write poetry will depend to a large extent on the opinions which others have of his ability to write poetry" (p. 118). Consequently, individuals who make frequent social comparisons should be happy if they believe they are better off than those with whom they compare themselves (Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985).

Social comparison has been intertwined with self–evaluation and has affected individuals' self–esteem, even functioning as a coping mechanism (Wills, 1981). Social comparison has been used to manage negative affect (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1983) and to affiliate upward (Collins, 1996). Under stress, people are more likely to compare themselves to those who are in worse situations (Taylor & Lobel, 1989).

To understand the theory, it is essential to recognize that social comparisons can be directional. People can make *upward* and *downward* comparisons. Individuals engage in upward comparison when comparing themselves to peers whom they perceive are performing more competently or adequately than they are. Individuals engage in downward comparison with peers when they compare themselves to those whom they perceive are performing in a less competent or inadequate ways (Carmona et al., 2006).

In addition, social comparisons can be contextually set as either assimilative or

contrastive in nature (Smith, 2000). Social judgments are based strongly on some context and the values or standards associated with that context (Wedell, 1994). According to Wedell, "*contrast* refers to the displacement of judgments away from the values of contextual stimuli. . . *assimilation*, on the other hand, refers to the displacement of judgment toward the contextual standard" (1994, p. 1007). For example, when someone makes a comparison to another whom they perceive as better than they are (an upward comparison), then the comparison can lead to either assimilative, emotional responses of inspiration and optimism or it can lead to contrastive, emotional outcomes of envy and resentment (Smith, 2000).

All types of social comparisons may have emotional consequences. People feel relieved when they see that others are doing *worse*, and feel envious when they see that others are doing *better* than them (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). When comparing upward, individuals may be inspired because they feel like they have become the comparison target. In contrast, when comparing downward, individuals may lose their good feeling about themselves because they fear ending up in a similar situation (Buunk & Ybema, 2004).

Recognizing that teachers compare themselves frequently to others in the profession, research has been conducted relating social comparison to teacher burnout (Caromona et al., 2006). The findings indicated that when teachers compare themselves with others whom they feel are performing at a lower level, and they feel that this comparison is a negative experience, they are more likely to experience job burnout. Further research has been conducted to determine if practicing teachers responded differently to upward and downward social comparison in terms of affect and the intent to work harder (Van Yperen, Brenninkmeijer, & Buunk, 2006). The findings indicated that practicing teachers respond differently to upward and downward social comparison information. The personal belief of exerting effort to do a job well was correlated to positive affect after upward, social comparison.

With consideration given to the cultural structure of the agricultural education profession, and the close–knit, collegial nature of those within the profession, the social comparison theory seems particularly applicable. Social comparison could be programmatic in nature, occurring through multiple venues such as competition in FFA, at conferences, or conventions. As described earlier, emotional outcomes could ensue based on how social comparison manifests. It is important to assess the culture of the agricultural education profession through the lens of social comparison as such a lens may provide rationale for the positive and/or negative emotional results that represents the unique context of the agricultural education profession.

Purpose and Methods

The purpose of this descriptive–relational study was to determine if relationships existed between social comparison and job satisfaction and between social comparison and teacher burnout. The following objectives were developed to guide the study:

1. Determine the degree of social comparison in which agriculture teachers engage.
2. Determine the level of job satisfaction of agriculture teachers.
3. Determine the degree of teacher burnout experienced by agriculture teachers.
4. Determine the relationship between social comparison and job satisfaction.
5. Determine the relationship between social comparison and teacher burnout.

The population of the study was high school agriculture teachers from six states (Kentucky, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah). For each respective state, a frame was identified, which provided contact information for all current high school agriculture teachers. Each frame was then scrutinized for errors, omissions, and duplications to address potential frame error and to ensure accuracy.

A random sample was selected from the frames of two states with agriculture teacher populations larger than 300 (Missouri and Oklahoma). For the remaining states, all teachers were invited to participate in the study because the difference between the size of those states' populations and the size required for a representative sample was small. In addition, the geographic spread of the states involved was considered a beneficial factor. One state was located in the southern region of the United

States (Kentucky), one from the east (New York), two from the Midwest (Missouri and South Dakota), one from the southwest (Oklahoma) and another from the west (Utah). As such, readers are cautioned on inferring the results beyond the scope of this study as findings can only be generalized to the high school agriculture teachers from the six states who participated.

An online instrument was utilized to collect data and was distributed via email using HostedSurvey™, a web–hosted software application. The instrument consisted of three key sections, as well as a demographic section. The three sections (Social Comparison, Job Satisfaction, and Teacher Burnout) are outlined below.

Social Comparison

To measure social comparison and the dimensions of upward/downward and contrastive/assimilative, the Social Comparison Style Questionnaire (SCSQ) instrument developed by Leach et al. (n.d.) was utilized. There were four constructs to this section of the instrument: downward assimilation (DA), downward contrast (DC), upward contrast (UC), and upward assimilation (UA). DA was aligned with the emotion *worry*. An example item in this construct was, *learning that another agriculture teacher is worse off than I suggests that my situation might get worse in the future as well*. UA was aligned with the emotion *inspiration*. An example item in this construct was, *agriculture teachers who are more successful than I excite and/or challenge me to do better*. DC was aligned with the emotion *gratitude*. An example item in this construct was, *seeing agriculture teachers with difficult working conditions really helps me appreciate my own life*. UC was aligned with *inferiority*. An example item in this construct was, *I often feel angry that I'm not as competent of an agriculture teacher as others.* Because of the context–specific nature of social comparison, items were revised from the original instrument (Leach et al., n.d.) to provide focus to a person comparing him/herself to other agricultural education teachers and/or their program. SCSQ uses summated rating scales, consisting of seven questions for UC, five for UA, four for DA, and three for DC.

A panel of experts, consisting of faculty and individuals familiar with the agriculture teacher role, reviewed the instrument for face and content validity. Further, the instrument was pilot–tested using 19 agriculture teachers from a state not utilized in this study. Calculations using Cronbach's alpha indicated coefficients of .75 (DA), .76 (DC), .89 (UC), and .91 (UA). Because coefficients were above .70, the instrument was deemed reliable (Nunnally, 1967).

Job Satisfaction

Castillo and Cano (2004) sought to determine if a one–item measure of job satisfaction was as valid as a multi–item measure. The researchers "standardized and compared" (p. 71) the one–item instrument to the multi–item instrument and found no differences existed in scores. As such, they concluded that a one–item instrument could assess an individual's level of job satisfaction adequately. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, job satisfaction was assessed by asking teachers to respond with their level of agreement to the question, "How satisfied are you with your job?" The single–item question required a response on a rating scale with seven descriptors ranging from *strongly dissatisfied* to *strongly satisfied*.

Burnout

The Maslach's Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI–E) was utilized to measure burnout. The MBI–E was selected because of its specific application to teachers and measurement of multiple dimensions of burnout. In particular, the MBI–E measured three burnout subscales including Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Emotional exhaustion is described as "the tired and fatigued feeling that develops as emotional energies are drained," while depersonalization refers to the act of portraying negative or indifferent attitudes towards ones' students (Maslach et al., 1996, p. 28). The third subscale measures personal accomplishment which may indicate a teacher's feelings regarding the contributions they are making to student growth and achievement (Maslach et al., 1996). A total of 22 items comprised the commercially available instrument, which has been assessed for validity

and reliability. Two factor analysis studies, conducted between 1981 and 1984 supported the use of three subscales (Gold, 1984; Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981). With regard to reliability, researchers reported Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates ranging from .72 to .90.

Data Collection

Using features offered by HostedSurvey™, a modified version of the Dillman's (2007) *Tailored Design Method* guided data collection. Typically, this method is utilized for mailed instruments and includes five contacts (Dillman, 2007). However, because this instrument was delivered via email, the contacts were modified slightly. Immediately prior to the first email invitation, a key contact from each respective state sent a personalized message to the teachers within their state. This was done to introduce the idea of the study to the teachers, prior to receipt of the first email, in effort to increase the overall response rate. One day after this pre–notice was sent, teachers received the first invitation to participate. Two additional contacts were made with those teachers who had not completed the instrument; these were sent at one–week intervals. As a result, 383 out of the invited 944 participated in the study, providing a response rate of 40.57%.

Data Analysis

Objectives 1–3 were analyzed using means and standard deviations for the scaled items. Objectives 4–5 were analyzed using the Pearson product–moment correlation using social comparison as the variable of interest. Davis' (1971) conventions were used to interpret correlation coefficients. For all analyses, only descriptive statistics were reported because the sample was not inferential.

Findings

With objective one, the researchers sought to determine the degree of social comparison in which agriculture teachers engage. Agriculture teachers engage in upward assimilation (M = 4.58; SD = 0.75) predominantly, meaning as they compare themselves to someone perceived as better, they engage in emotions relating to inspiration (Table 1). Teachers engaged in DC *gratitude*, UC *inferiority*, and DA *worry* in order of declining succession.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Social Comparison Dimensions (n = 383)

Variable or Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Comparison Construct		
Upward Assimilation (UA) *Inspiration* [1]	4.58	0.75
Downward Contrast (DC) *Gratitude* [1]	3.94	0.92
Upward Contrast (UC) *Inferiority* [1]	2.42	0.95
Downward Assimilation (DA) *Worry* [1]	2.12	0.84

Note. [1] Based on a scale from 1 to 6, with 1 as *strongly disagree* and 6 as *strongly agree*

With objective two, the researchers sought to determine the level of job satisfaction of agriculture teachers. Agriculture teachers were satisfied with their job (M = 6.04; SD = 1.06), measured on a single item scaled 1 to 7, with 1 being *strongly dissatisfied* and 7 being *strongly satisfied*. To determine the degree of teacher burnout experienced by agriculture teachers (Objective 3), researchers found that they experience "low" levels of burnout on the depersonalization construct and "low" levels on the personal accomplishment construct according to the MBI–E (Figure 1). However, agriculture teachers experienced "moderate" levels of burnout on the emotional exhaustion construct.

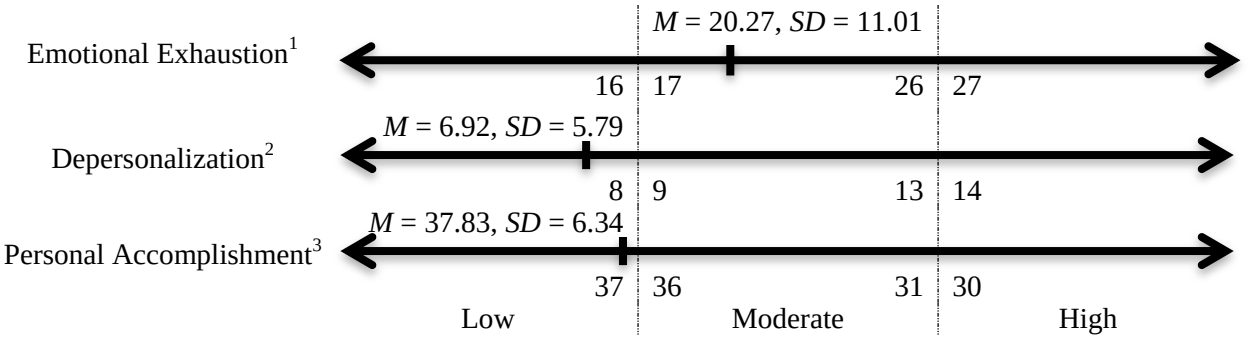

Figure 1. Teacher burnout scale measured by the MBI–E. Interpretations: [1]EE = high (27 or over), moderate (17–26) and low (0–16). [2]DP = high (14 or over), moderate (9–13) and low (0–8). [3]PA (interpreted in reverse of EE/DP) = low (37 or over), moderate (31–36) and high (0–30).

With objective four, researchers sought to determine the relationship between social comparison and job satisfaction, and with objective five, they sought to determine the relationship between social comparison and teacher burnout. Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine these relationships. Note that when interpreting the burnout construct of personal accomplishment (PA), higher mean scores indicated lower levels of burnout; therefore a negative relationship using PA indicates that the more one engaged in social comparison the more burnout (on this scale) that tended to exist. The strongest relationships existed with upward contrastive (Table 2).

Table 2
Correlation Coefficients for Social Comparison with Job Satisfaction and Teacher Burnout

Social Comparison Construct	Job Satis. (JS)	Burnout: PA[1]	Burnout: EE[2]	Burnout: DP[3]
Upward Contrast (UC)	-0.40	-0.29	0.44	0.40
Upward Assimilation (UA)	0.35	0.29	-0.17	-0.12
Downward Contrast (DC)	-0.37	-0.27	0.39	0.30
Downward Assimilation (DA)	0.16	0.16	-0.13	-0.05

Note. [1]PA = Personal Accomplishment; [2]EE = Emotional Exhaustion; [3]DP = Depersonalization

As such, the more that agriculture teachers tended to engage in comparisons of other, more effective agriculture teachers, and when those comparisons led to feelings of inferiority, the more their satisfaction decreased (r = -0.40) and their burnout levels increased (r_{PA} = -0.29; r_{EE} = 0.44; r_{DP} = 0.40). Note that Personal Accomplishment (PA) is interpreted in reverse as compared to the other two scales. Downward assimilation elicited the lowest strength of correlation.

Discussion

Although the study included a large sample representing six states in all geographic regions of the country, the results should be interpreted with caution. The study is limited by a 40% response rate, and not every state was represented. Thus, findings should not be generalized beyond teachers in the states studied.

For research objective one, it was concluded that agriculture teachers engaged mostly in the social comparison of upward assimilation. Thus, agriculture teachers in this study make

upward comparisons of themselves to other teachers whom they admire, look up to, or are inspired by. This finding supports the assertion by Smith (2000) who found that teachers make upward comparisons with those whom they perceive that they might be able to achieve similar accomplishments (Smith, 2000). This finding could imply that agriculture teachers are in a positive, emotional state as they compare themselves with others. It would stand to reason that agriculture teachers who engage in upward assimilation as a form of social comparison want positive outcomes for their colleagues and for themselves through their admiration of other successful teachers. Also, they could be engaged positively by others' successes. This implication would be consistent with research that suggests that teachers who engage in upward, social comparison believe that, with effort, they too will improve and grow in productive professional directions (Van Yperen, Brenninkmeijer, & Buunk, 2006). Further research is needed to investigate influences of social comparison on motivation, teaching self–efficacy, and measures of teacher success in the classroom.

It was also concluded that some agriculture teachers in this study engaged in downward, contrastive social comparison toward their colleagues. Thus, some teachers, when making social comparisons, look down on others and experience feelings of contempt, scorn, and pride (Smith, 2002). This finding implies that agriculture teachers might scorn and have negative attitudes about their colleagues whom they feel are not doing as good of a job as them. The notion of agriculture teachers engaging in downward, contrastive emotions toward their colleagues poses interesting questions. Does the professional culture in agricultural education create a situation where teachers wear their jobs as a *badge of honor* and scorn others whom they feel are not performing to the same level?

Because comparisons are perception–based, each person's comparison of "worse off" (downward comparison) is different. Based on this premise, *worse off* could be merely a question of being different. Thus, does the professional culture allow for teachers who perform the job in different ways, or do professionals scorn others who are perceived as being different? The results of this study certainly do not point social comparison in any cause–effect direction. However, further research is needed in social comparison regarding the types of individuals teachers make social comparisons toward and specific situations in which they compare themselves socially with others. Of primary interest in future research is how teachers frame upward (better off) and downward (worse off) comparisons.

It was concluded in this study that agriculture teachers are satisfied with their job, which is consistent with previous literature (Walker at al., 2004). This finding could imply that individuals who took the time to complete the questionnaire were likely those who would be more satisfied with their job in the first place. Although teachers are satisfied generally, further research is needed to investigate the specific sources of their satisfaction, conditions, or factors of their jobs that are the most and least satisfying. Agricultural education researchers should also be interested in motivators and barriers for individuals who are *least* satisfied with their jobs. It is recommended that professional development programs designed to recruit and retain agriculture teachers utilize this finding as a means to communicate to the public that many teachers report that they are satisfied with teaching agriculture.

It was concluded that teachers are experiencing low levels of burnout as it pertains to depersonalization and personal accomplishment; however, teachers are experiencing moderate levels of burnout as it pertains to emotional exhaustion. This finding could imply that while teachers in this study might not be feeling alienated toward their profession or their ability to perform well as teachers (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991), they could be feeling the emotional implications of a complex and multifaceted career. Further research is needed regarding the specific sources of emotional exhaustion for agriculture teachers. Further research is also needed regarding the specific factors that help combat emotional exhaustion in agriculture teachers. Professional development programs for agriculture teachers should keep indicators of emotional exhaustion in mind and design uplifting programs that empower teachers emotionally.

In regard to the relationship between social comparison and job satisfaction, it was concluded that teachers who compared

themselves to others and felt feelings of inferiority as a result were less likely to experience feelings of satisfaction with their jobs. Further, teachers who compared themselves to others and felt inspired by others' accomplishments were more likely to experience feelings of satisfaction with their jobs. Finally, teachers who compared themselves to others whom they looked down on with appreciation that they were not in that same place were less likely to experience feelings of satisfaction with their jobs. Findings regarding the relationships between social comparison and job satisfaction pose interesting implications. For example, the findings could imply that positive emotions of others (social comparison) and positive outlook for the self (job satisfaction) vary together.

One question for further research, and hence a limitation of correlational studies, is that from this study it cannot be determined which emotional outcome (if any) serves as the cause or the precursor to the other. Do people who like their jobs tend to feel positive about others in a profession, or do feelings of connection and positivity within a profession lead to higher job satisfaction? Further, it was concluded that negativity in terms of social comparison and job satisfaction varied together as well. Again, further research is needed regarding the specific causes of and precursors to the negative, emotional outcomes of contrastive, social comparison and job dissatisfaction. Further research is needed regarding the social and emotional climate of agricultural education as a profession. Do local and statewide teacher associations in agricultural education foster a climate of sameness, and what effect does the climate have on teachers? Professional development programs for agriculture teachers should take emotional concerns of satisfaction, social comparison and burnout into consideration. Programs should be designed with those who are less satisfied emotionally in mind.

Regarding social comparison and teacher burnout, it was concluded that teachers who experienced upward, assimilative emotions of social comparison felt more personal accomplishment, less emotional exhaustion, and fewer feelings of depersonalization. Further, teachers who felt a sense of envy or depression when thinking about more successful colleagues also felt fewer feelings of personal satisfaction, more feelings of emotional exhaustion, and more feelings of depersonalization toward their career. Finally, teachers who look down on colleagues they deemed worse off with scorn also felt less personal satisfaction toward their careers, more emotional exhaustion, and experienced more feelings of depersonalization toward their careers. These findings are consistent with the Carmona et al. (2006) investigation of the relationships between social comparison and burnout. Again, these findings point toward the notion of positivity and its potential implications. Although it might be no surprise those positive, social feelings and positive outcomes (lack of burnout or greater satisfaction) would increase together, again, the question regarding causation remains. Are people who are drawn naturally to a profession, more successful, positive, and satisfied about it, and less burned out? Conversely, is *ignorance bliss*? Meaning, are those who are blissfully satisfied, less burned out and happier with others socially? Regardless, further research is warranted regarding both positive and negative emotions in agriculture teachers and the effects of teacher affect on teacher success and student outcomes. Finally, teacher professional development programs should be based on the notion of positive psychology and emotional outcomes and seek to foster feelings of positive emotions in teachers at all levels.

In looking strictly at future directions for this line of inquiry, one of the dimensions this study did not address was frequency of comparison. This study focused on the nature of the comparisons only (upward/downward and assimilative/contrastive). It is a dimension that both this study and most of the literature in the field do not address. In addition, layering the dimensions of frequency and nature could bring about more specific information regarding job satisfaction and burnout. Another aspect this study did not address was potential pre–cursor variables to social comparison. Perhaps identifying other variables, characteristics, or behaviors could enlighten the field on this phenomenon.

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