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The Internalized Sexism of Eight Women in School-Based Agricultural Education

Kaley Mumma[1]
Michael J. Martin[2]
Katherine Hartmann[3]

Abstract

Women have always been included in agriculture in some capacity, but the power they hold in these agricultural settings has altered over time. Women have had an increased presence in agricultural education preparation programs since the 1990s, and their presence within agricultural classrooms has been increasing since then. The shifting numbers of women in agricultural education over time have given rise to questions concerning gender bias and how it may be present for women in agricultural education. Much of the existing research on women in agricultural education focused on changing demographics and the barriers women face when entering the field. Examining the impact that internalized sexism has on women agricultural educators' oppression of the self is necessary to understand the full extent of agricultural education's existing oppressive structures. The purpose of this study is to address the current gap in research on internalized sexism in agricultural education through the analysis of interviews from eight women agricultural educators. Four of the seven dialogs of internalized sexism—powerlessness, incompetence, invalidation, and derogation—are utilized to examine how internalized sexism manifests in the interviews of eight women agricultural educators. While data has been presented in specific categories, the process of data analysis revealed that the distinction of dialogs was not as clean-cut as anticipated as the coding process revealed an incredible amount of thematic crossover. Recommendations and implications are provided to encourage moving forward with more equitable research for marginalized and diverse populations.

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Introduction

Women have always been included in agriculture in some capacity, but the power they hold in these settings has shifted over time. The intersectionality of women beyond their gender identity impacts their historical and contemporary relationship with agriculture, where systemic oppression and non-Western cultural traits have generated a longstanding, turbulent relationship with agricultural work (Leibovich, 2021; Pilgeram et al., 2022). Historically, educationally, primarily White women focused on home

[1]Kaley Mumma is a doctoral student of Agricultural Education in the Department of Agricultural Sciences Education and Communication at the Purdue University, 915 Mitch Daniels Blvd., West Lafayette, IN, 47907, mumma@purdue.edu. ORCID# 0009-0007-2295-3215.
[2]Michael J. Martin is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education in the Department of Agricultural and Natural Resources at the University of Minnesota Crookston, 105 Hill Hall, 2900 University Avenue, Crookston MN, 56716, mart6864@crk.umn.edu. https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7191-036X
[3]Katherine Hartmann is an Assistant Professor and 4H STEM Extension Specialist in the Department of Math, Science, and Technology at the University of Minnesota Crookston, 249 Dowell Hall Annex, 2900 University Avenue, Crookston MN, 56716, hartm783@umn.edu. ORCID# 0009-0000-0502-1271

economics after the World Wars, solidifying expectations associated with current gender roles. This often-limited women's agricultural involvement as they were expected to support men's endeavors rather than actively participate (Shisler & Sbicca, 2019; Trauger et al., 2008). Despite this history, the presence of women in agricultural education (AGED) has increased significantly since the 1990s (Retallick & Martin, 2008). While the field was once dominated by males with a 2:1 ratio (Kantrovich, 2010), the most recent National Agricultural Education Supply & Demand Study reported that females comprised 79% of respondents (Smith et al., 2024). This shifting demographic warrants more research on gender relations and gender bias in the discipline, which is typically parceled off into three forms: institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression.

Documentation of institutional oppression in agricultural education has focused on consistent barriers to entry, including male dominance, lack of community acceptance, high stress, work-life balance issues, and a historic lack of role models (Enns & Martin, 2015; Foster, 2001; Foster, 2003; Kelsey, 2006b; Seevers & Foster, 2003). Documentation of interpersonal oppression has also increased, revealing subtle and direct forms of gender bias (Donaldson, 2022), such as not being interviewed for a job due to gender or having explicit expectations placed on teaching topics (Baxter et al., 2011; Kelsey, 2006a). These barriers, whether institutional or interpersonal, can push women from the career (Kelsey, 2007). Absent is research aimed at the systemic structures of gender-based oppression existing within agricultural education. Specifically, little research has been done to analyze the internalized elements of gender-based oppression. Examining the role internalized sexism plays into women agricultural educators' oppression of the self is necessary to understand the full extent of agricultural education's existing oppressive structures. The purpose of this study is to address the current gap in research of internalized sexism in agricultural education through the analysis of interviews from eight women agricultural educators.

Theoretical & Conceptual Perspective

This study is guided by the work of feminist researchers, employing feminist theory as the primary theoretical framework. Feminist theory posits that the patriarchy dominates all aspects of society, including agricultural spaces, often excluding marginalized genders from positions of power (Lerner, 2014; Murphy & Venet, 1997). A core tenet of feminist research is its initiation through questioning and critiquing androcentric bias within disciplines, challenging traditional researchers to integrate gender as a category of analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2011). While feminist methodology is diverse, three primary goals distinguish it and guide this study:

1. Centralize women's experiences: This approach seeks to explore the perspectives of all women by emphasizing the importance of lived experiences in unearthing subjugated knowledge (DeVault, 1996; Hesse-Biber, 2011). The use of specific interviewing methods and the prominent inclusion of participant voice in this study directly align with this goal.

2. Minimize harm and control: A fundamental ethical goal is to reduce harm and control over participants (DeVault, 1996). In the methods section, we detail the measures taken, such as ensuring participant anonymity and explicitly stating participants' right to decline any question. We also acknowledge the inherent power dynamics between the researcher and the participant (Riessman, 2008; Seidman, 2019), which is mitigated by using quotations to prevent the researcher from controlling or shaping participant narratives.

3. Ensure data benefits women: The research aims for findings that benefit women in some capacity (DeVault, 1996). With women increasingly comprising agricultural education's bachelor's graduates in recent years (Smith et al., 2024), uncovering instances of internalized sexism among women in the discipline becomes increasingly crucial and is a key contribution of this study.

It is essential to highlight the importance of language when discussing gender-based issues. The wording used to describe 'sex' and 'gender,' while not synonymous, are often used interchangeably. Gender is a socially constructed concept while sex refers to the biological distinctions between males and females (Short, Yang, & Jenkins, 2013). The term 'woman' is used to describe the participants as this study is specifically focused on gender. When the term 'female' is applied throughout the study, it is within the context of wording used in former studies or participant quotations.

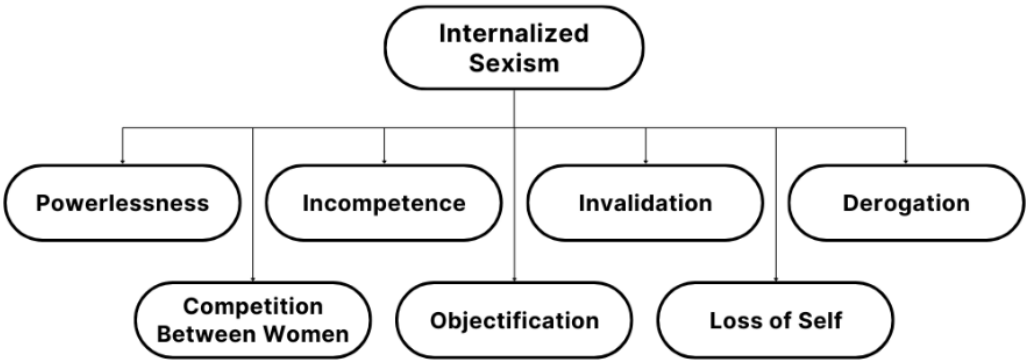
In its most simplistic form, oppression can be represented by the formula 'sexism = prejudice + power' (Bidol, 1970), illustrating that the marginalization of groups results from prejudice from high-power groups combined with unequal group access to power and privilege (David & Derthick, 2014). Oppression rises in complexity as more intersections are added, introducing unique ways in which multiple forms of marginalization are experienced simultaneously (Carr et al., 2014). Three common levels of oppression are typically identified: institutional, interpersonal, and internalized. Institutional oppression manifests itself as laws, policies, physical environments, and social norms that are ingrained into a given culture. It is reflected in the institutions and all spheres of everyday life, such as the longstanding colonialist attitudes associated with agricultural settings (Gil, 2013; Graddy-Lovelace, 2017). It is the behaviors learned from these systems that give rise to interpersonal oppression, which occurs between individuals or groups. Interpersonal oppression can be either direct (e.g., violent acts or harassment) or passive (e.g., unconscious stereotypes or expectations) (David & Derthick, 2014). However, a hyperfocus on the interpersonal level risks distracting from the larger systemic issues that perpetuate oppression (Davis, 2016).

The context of this study focuses on the internalized oppression of the oppressed, which manifests itself even when the oppressor group is not present. Oppression is internalized through unconscious or conscious instilling of institutional messaging and through experiences of interpersonal oppression. Based on postcolonial theory, experiencing oppression over lifetimes can lead individuals to internalize messages of inferiority they receive about their group membership (David & Derthick, 2014). This can manifest as self-fulfilling prophecies, group fragmentation, or attempts at emulating oppressors (David & Okazaki, 2006). The term 'internalized oppression' offers an umbrella term for other forms, with internalized sexism being the specific focus of this study. Those who are exposed to sexist attitudes throughout their lives are subject to internalizing sexism and thus threatening a woman's authenticity of self, leading to many ways in which internalized sexism appears in women's day-to-day lives (Bozkur & Sahin, 2022).

Internalized sexism has been broken down into dialogic portions to best understand how it manifests itself in the lives of women (Bearman et al., 2009). These dialogic portions are as follows: feelings of powerlessness and incompetence; competition between women; objectification; invalidation and derogation; and loss of self. These dialogs can be seen as displayed in Figure 1 below. This study, however, emerged from a pre-existing dataset where the original research design was not specifically focused on internalized sexism. Consequently, the dialogs explored in this study (powerlessness, incompetence, invalidation, and derogation) were those that organically emerged from the existing data. The remaining dialogs, (competition between women, objectification, and loss of self) were not included in the theoretical framework or analysis as the original data set was not designed to elicit or fully capture these specific manifestations, thereby placing them outside the scope of this emergent study.

Figure 1

The Dialogs of Internalized Sexism



Note. Adapted from Bearman et al. (2009)

Powerlessness - The dialog of powerlessness is grounded in the oppressor's need to make the oppressed feel powerless to the extent in which they internalize it. Powerlessness can be instilled when there is an absence of role models as marginalized people can feel discouraged about their own potential within their career. "In this dimension, there are items on avoidance of women to announce their power, decisions, and ideas, their tendencies to act as if they are powerless…" (Bozkur, 2020, p. 1998). When sexism is internalized, it can often manifest itself into women lowering their expectations about what they feel they deserve. In the absence of internalized sexism, women feel more at liberty to do what they want as they have no feelings that they are powerless or incapable.

Incompetence - Internalized sexism can manifest itself through women consciously or unconsciously projecting a persona of incompetence to the world around themselves. The phrase 'I don't know' along with similar phrases are ideal examples of the dialogic of incompetence. Women often use phrases like 'I don't know' to fill space, change the subject, weaken a statement, or contradict their own claims of knowledge (David & Derthick, 2014). Some research has pointed towards the possibility of women using the guise of incompetence to avoid seeming arrogant, positional, or argumentative (Caffi, 1999; Diani, 2004; Holtgraves, 1997). Women who internalized the sexism they experienced also have been reported to have lower levels of perceived self-competence (Bain, 2020). Incompetence does not inherently mean these women *are* incompetent, rather they are trying to appear incompetent to fit within internalized patriarchal norms.

Invalidation - Invalidation of experience is a common experience among oppressed individuals where "…thoughts, opinions, beliefs, preferences, feelings, desires, and choices" (Bearman et al., 2009, p. 17) are invalidated. Internalized sexism can appear as women invalidating their own experiences with misogyny. Cherry found that "… internalized misogyny may alter one's perception of sexist microaggressions…" (2019, p. 59). When women are unaware to the presence of microaggressions in their daily life, they can internalize the sexism they face, generating a 'blindness' to the sexism around them. This blindness, in combination with high internalized sexism, can cause women to attribute blame onto themselves for the sexism they experience (Bain, 2020).

Derogation - First it is important to recognize derogation and degradation are terms often used interchangeably within the derogation dialog as their definitions often coincide. Self-degradation has been found to be an unconscious response due to a manifestation of the participants' internalized sexism (Magee & Upenieks, 2019). Internal and external degradation is used to create the social stigma (Major & O'Brian,

2005; Nabors, 2012). Degradation remains pervasive as women are confined within social limitations of what women should and should not do (Becker, 2010; Bozkur, 2020). Social expectations are perpetuated not only by men, but the women who have internalized the sexism they have experienced. "Girls and women who enforce these expectations have normalized the behavior and replicate the patriarchal messages to others" (Rahmani, 2020, p. 33). Women who display the dialogic degradation due to internalized sexism are critical of not only themselves but others as well.

Purpose of the Study

While existing scholarship has documented the changing demographics of women in agricultural education and explored interpersonal and institutional forms of gender bias, a critical gap remains in understanding the systemic structures of gender-based oppression. This gap being the role of internalized sexism. A comprehensive understanding of challenges faced by women in agricultural education and dismantling barriers those challenges create is hindered by the lack of understanding around internalized sexism. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how internalized sexism manifests in the lived experiences of women agricultural educators. This exploration is guided by the following research question: How does internalized sexism manifest in the lived experiences of women agricultural educators? This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the subtle and pervasive ways in which internalized sexism can impact women in their field, informing strategies for promoting greater equity and inclusion within agricultural education.

Methods

This study utilized feminist epistemologies that emphasize the need for cooperation among a variety of perspectives to create holistic knowledge. Feminist theory was derived from philosophers addressing gaps within social and political philosophy and ethics (Longino, 1999). "…feminist epistemologies do not separate epistemology from ethics or politics: inquiries about knowledge are considered in relation to inquiries into right and wrong, and power and oppression" (Poole, 2021). Within feminist epistemology, knowledge is situated, knowledge comes through lived experiences, knowledge is shaped by power, knowledge comes with responsibility, and collaboration is necessary to generate knowledge (Poole, 2021). Feminist epistemology suggests gender influences our conceptions of knowledge and knowing as well as our methods of inquiry and justification.

The initial data collection was completed through a summer undergraduate scholars' program, and data analysis was completed during my master's programming. University of Wisconsin – Platteville's IRB approved the project via an expedited review. To ensure the protection of participants, several measures were implemented. All participants received a preliminary email informing them of the study's purpose and were sent an electronic consent form detailing their rights. This form was required to be electronically signed and returned before the interview took place. Participants were also asked a second time if an audio recording could be made before the interview started. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to subjects and altering any identifying traits during transcription. All collected data, including interview transcripts and demographic information, were stored on a password-protected personal computer and a secure university account protected by two-factor authentication. Data was handled exclusively over secure networks. The study involved minimal anticipated risks, primarily the potential for stress when discussing experiences of gender-based bias. Participants were informed that they would be able to reflect on their experiences in agricultural education and would receive the results of the paper.

For the interview portion of the study, an initial group of five women were located by looking up local directories in two midwestern states. A snowball technique of participant recruitment was employed, resulting in a total of eight cisgender women agreeing to be interviewed. The eight participants are all agricultural educators in two midwestern states. The inclusion criteria included: identifying as a cisgender

woman, currently working as an agricultural educator, and located within the two midwestern states involved. Women of varying levels of teaching experience were included to ensure a range of experiences was included within the study. Cisgender men, women not working as agricultural educators, and those located outside of the two midwestern states were not included as they were outside of the study's scope. Interviews were originally planned for in-person collection but were conducted via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 features participant demographics including participant pseudonyms, age range, and years of experience as an agricultural educator. Age range was utilized as opposed to displaying specific ages to ensure anonymity for participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age Range	Years Taught
Clara	30-40	9
Jenna	20-30	9
Carla	50-60	14
Shannon	20-30	8
Shelby	20-30	8
Rebecca	20-30	6
Bailey	30-40	8
Lisa	30-40	16

Interviews were scheduled for an hour (taking on average 37 minutes with a range of 23-60 minutes) over Zoom and the recordings were then transcribed utilizing the Zoom transcription service. All interview transcripts were then edited to match the interview recordings. Interviews consisted of four sections of questions: background information, career information, career influencers, and gender bias. This format was selected to ensure rapport was built as the participants talked about themselves and connected with the interviewer (Tisdell et al, 2025). The sensitive questions regarding gender bias were left for the end of the interview to ensure a safe interview environment was established prior (Seidman, 2019). Examples of interview questions from each section of the semi-structured interview protocol can be found below:

- Background Information
    - Can you describe the city or town where you were born? Is it an agriculturally based community? What agriculture industries are big here?
    - What did/do your parents or guardians do for a living?
- Career Information
    - What school district currently employs you? Would this be considered a rural or urban setting?
    - What agriculture classes do you teach?
- Career Influencers
    - Who or what initiated their interest in being an agriculture teacher?
    - Has your career always been agriculture education? If not, what other career(s) have you had and for how long did you work in that field?
- Gender Bias
    - At the beginning of your career, did you ever feel like you were treated differently for being a *female* agriculture educator?
    - Have students/agriculture professionals/coworkers challenged your knowledge of agricultural topics on the basis of you being a woman?

A narrative methodology was employed to meaningfully understand events and experiences, focusing on generating detailed accounts of the participants' construction of reality (Riessman, 2008). Through the analysis of narrative experiences, this work aims to examine the role internalized sexism plays into women agricultural educators' interpretation of themselves as agricultural educators. Coding was completed through Dedoose software, which protects data through an initial login and unique passwords for each dataset. The coding process consisted of three rounds; the first round focused on emerging ideas; the second round was completed with the primary goal of seeking out themes; and the final round of coding was to determine how excerpts fell into certain themes.

The origins for this specific study are rooted in a year and a half of wrestling with "self-doubt" (what would later be identified as the dialog of 'invalidation') being a consistent theme across the interviews. In many of the interviews, participants seemed unsure of their experiences 'counted' as gender bias. After a thoughtful discussion with a colleague and reviewing literature, specifically Bearman et al.'s (2009) article identifying the seven dialogs of internalized sexism, internalized sexism emerged as a potential explanation for the phenomena. The emergence of internalized sexism in a study framed around gender bias warrants the exclusion of three dialogs of internalized sexism (competition between women, objectification, and loss of self), as they had not emerged due to the original framing. A priori thematic coding was utilized due to the post hoc application of theory to ensure alignment with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used (Bingham, 2023).

Throughout the research process, a commitment to rigorous qualitative practices guided data collection and analysis to ensure trustworthiness and transparency. Trustworthiness was established through multiple strategies guided by Shenton's (2004) framework for Guba's four criteria: dependability, transferability, confirmability, and credibility. A comprehensive audit trail documented all research decisions, supporting dependability by demonstrating a consistent research process. Transferability was ensured through transcripts and field notes, which captured observational data, logistical details, and immediate thoughts from the interview settings, allowing readers to assess applicability through thick, rich description. Confirmability was reached by ensuring interpretations are grounded in data, not researcher bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994), reinforced by weekly meetings with a mentor experienced in conducting feminist research and implementing reflexive practice during these meetings (Baldwin, 2021). In alignment with feminist research principles, the intentional use of expansive quotations from interview transcripts maintains credibility by reflecting participants' realities and giving them a visible, authentic presence in the final analysis, rather than reducing them to isolated quotes.

To justify the sample adequacy, we rely on information power (Malterud et al., 2021) arguing that the highly specific sample (experienced agricultural educators reporting gender bias) and the richness and depth of the existing interview transcripts provide sufficient data. Furthermore, during our in-depth thematic analysis, we reached a point where code saturation was achieved, meaning no new substantive themes emerged in the later data segments, indicating the existing data captures the main dimensions (Hennick & Kaiser, 2021) of the phenomenon within this specific group.

In this qualitative study, I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Patton, 1990). My positionality stems from being a feminist cisgender woman in a related academic discipline with experience in agricultural classrooms but without a career in school-based agricultural education. This dual perspective allows for empathetic understanding of participants' experiences while maintaining the necessary distance for objective analysis. I acknowledge potential biases from a personal awareness of gender-based challenges and the inherent assumption that internalized sexism exists (David & Derthick, 2017). I operated with the expectation that participants shared their experiences candidly after rapport was established (Bergen & Labonté, 2019).

Results

The following findings detail the four dialogs that emerged from the interviews (powerlessness, incompetence, invalidation, and derogation) and are analyzed to establish the patterns of internalized sexism present in the data. The participant quotations are used to support these findings, aligning with the core tenet of feminist methodology to center women's experiences while providing the necessary analytical rigor.

Powerlessness

The dialog of Powerlessness was a pervasive pattern, frequently demonstrated through the inability or perceived pointlessness of confronting gender bias. This powerlessness most often manifested in two distinct ways: the rationalization of sexism and the resignation to hierarchical structures. When sexism has been internalized, it can often manifest itself into women lowering expectations about what they feel they deserve.

Participants displayed their powerlessness by creating excuses for those who reinforce oppressive ideals and systems. Within Lisa's interview, she stated men she worked with would utilize "... small little offhand comments... like the 'honeys' or the 'sweethearts' and I'm like, 'Would you call that guy sweetheart? Probably not, but you're my elder and I know that it's just kind of ingrained in you,' you know?" While Lisa recognizes the sexist nature of the pet names used towards her, she rationalizes the sexism as an ingrained generational issue by the perpetrator. She is powerless against the sexism she faces and thereby must accept the sexism as 'that is the way things are.'

A variation of this type of powerlessness can be seen in Shannon's interview as she reflects on sexism she has received from her students: "You know, I would never tell them [students], like just ignore it. But I think you know with students that's one of those things like it's a little bit different, like sometimes you have to ignore it…" Shannon displays a sense of powerlessness at her student's behavior when she says that she must ignore it. Women teachers are placed in a precarious position when they encounter gender bias from their students. Powerlessness arises from situations like Shannon describes as she feels unable to combat the gender bias she faces from her students.

Powerlessness can be seen in moments of self-reflection. After being asked if she has been challenged by coworkers based on her being a woman, Rebecca hesitates to confirm the reasoning behind challenges from her coworkers. She then shares the following, "I questioned some days that if I were a man, like would I be able to push my way around a little bit more like in our science department…" There is powerlessness in Rebecca's evaluation of the power structures in place as she understands there is a possibility she is restricted in her job due to her gender.

The dialogic of powerlessness manifests in the tendency of some women to act as if they are powerless. Carla recommended for other women agriculture teachers to utilize powerlessness to have the 'upper hand.' Carla said, "You are a female so work it. I don't know if you should put that in there, but sometimes, being a female gives you an upper hand by playing the damsel in distress..." Advocating for other women to play 'the damsel in distress' directly relates to the dialogic of powerlessness. Carla describes a potential situation where powerlessness can be used on a woman's behalf. While this example of powerlessness may seem to work in a woman's favor, it only perpetuates the internalization and employment of powerlessness in women's lives.

Incompetence

The dialogic of incompetence is found in the phrases or wording where women try to weaken their statements, change the subject, or attempt to fill space to avoid seeming arrogant or positional. Primary

examples of this can be found in the moments where women use the phrase 'I don't know.' After discussing sexist 'jokes' she receives from her students, Rebecca reflects on how the jokes have less to do with her agricultural knowledge and more to do with her gender. She begins, "It- They never- They never challenged me on what I knew. I don't know. Like they'll give me like a 'get in the kitchen joke'…" Rebecca continues elaborating on how she perceives others' view of her agricultural knowledge, ending her statement with an additional 'I don't know.' Incompetence is used here to avoid sounding positional. Rather than claiming to receive gender bias from her students, Rebecca chose to weaken her statement.

Incompetence can also be found in the preamble to a statement to soften the words to come. After being asked if she had encountered gender bias from her peers, Bailey responded with: "I don't think so. No, um, maybe again a little bit by my peers like when we are taking certain classes like, 'Oh, here just let me do it for you.'…" Bailey softens her claim of gender bias by using the phrases 'I don't think so' and 'maybe.' Her usage of incompetent wording could be an attempt to avoid sounding positional, indicating internalized sexism. The same softening of responses to sound less positional can be found in the interview with Clara: "Um, but I always just felt more- Like [I encountered] no bias ever really in more urban settings but more bias in rural settings, I think." Finishing her sentence with the words, 'I think' is Clara's way of softening a statement. If one were to read the same quotes from above without 'soft' words, their statements would come across more confident and positional which is in direct opposition to internalized patriarchal values.

The usage of 'soft' wording is not the only way incompetence manifests itself. Tone and sentence structure can also offer indications of the moments when women may be trying to project a persona of incompetence to the world around themselves. After being relaxed and casual throughout the interview, Rebecca's cadence and wording changed to indicate hesitation to soften how she discusses experiences of gender bias with peers.

> [Long pause] My peers. Like- [pause] I'm not totally like- [pause] Not kids. I've had some parents that haven't I mean I've had scuffles with. My alumni, like older people supporters of the program, I really don't think so- pretty respect- [respectful] like to be an ag teacher in the community, seems to be a pretty respectable career…

She then goes on to confirm having experienced gender bias from peers. In this quote, Rebecca falters while giving her response which could be an unconscious attempt to weaken her statement. Long pauses or hesitancies can be indicators of participants trying to convey a veil of incompetence. Incompetence, in this quote, is veiled and can be challenging to see. Specific words, wording, or within the sentence structure were all ways in which participants displayed the internalized sexism dialogic of incompetence.

Invalidation

No definition of gender bias was given to participants as to not limit the responses they might provide. Clara begins telling a story where she encountered gender bias in her workplace, but then cuts herself off to ask the interviewer if they would consider the instance to be gender bias: "Um, I don't- Would you consider that sexist aspect, would you consider that gender bias? Or is that a different thing?" Instead of generating a response to the question based on her own definition of gender bias, she questioned the validity of her own experiences. Elements of invalidation are found within this interaction as Clara questions and invalidates her own experiences with gender bias.

This invalidation of experiences with gender bias can be found in other interviews. Bailey used invalidation multiple times throughout her interview to downplay and invalidate her own experiences with gender bias. When discussing gender bias from her students, she explained how difficult it is for students

to see her as an authority figure. Bailey says, "I guess even um, so I would say yes… Not- not awful. I mean we're, we're in a small enough community everybody kind of knows everyone, but I would say, [pause] maybe at least questioned, like skeptical." The invalidation in this quote is found when Bailey admits having faced gender bias from students and follows it up with 'not awful' to then downplay the severity of gender bias. Bailey later uses invalidation when discussing gender bias she had experienced from coworkers, saying "Yeah, but it's just little stuff." She goes on to describe how she rarely experiences overt sexism, and because of this she does not consider her gender bias experiences to be valid.

Much like how Bailey invalidates her lived experiences of gender bias, Shannon does the same after admitting having experienced gender bias from community members as they can be surprised at her abilities and knowledge given, she is a woman. She then attempts to invalidate these experiences by saying, "Um, but again, nothing like, like I've never had somebody like come up to me and tell me like 'You can't do that.'" The invalidation dialogic is present as Shannon discounts her experiences as the gender bias she faces is not overt. Shannon and Bailey both have experienced more covert and hidden forms of sexism that are internalized and normalized to a degree where they have both began to 'write off' those experiences.

Derogation

Derogation can be found throughout these interviews in diverse ways – derogation of self, derogation of others, and perpetuation of degradative ideas. The first quotation presented is an example of how internalized sexism can cause one to derogate themselves. As Rebecca reflected on gender bias she experienced in her teacher preparation program, she explained what it was like for her to be in automotive and woodworking courses. Rebecca states, "I felt like I played into the stereotype of 'I'm a dumb girl.' Even though *I was* a dumb girl in those classes." In this quote, Rebecca derogates her younger self's lack of knowledge. As she continues, she exposes stereotype threat as a concern for her younger self, "I felt like I was perpetuating the stereotype of being someone that wasn't competent enough to be in those areas." While stereotype threat was a concern for Rebecca at the time, she perpetuates the dialogic of derogation as she is deeply critical of her younger self. This self-derogation, when shared through conversation, can be internalized by others which further perpetuates social expectations for how women should view themselves.

The derogation of one's gender can also be found in how advice is given. Carla explains that some women may be trying to 'over-prove' themselves before sharing her own example of a woman trying to 'over-prove' herself. Derogation was found in Carla's interview as she shared advice to women about working in fields historically dominated by men. "Know your limits…I again, I think the worst thing that we can do is try to overcompensate for our gender by things that we actually don't know." Earlier in the interview, Carla has mentioned instances where she found some women in agricultural education and agricultural careers could be overconfident about their abilities. Derogation of one's own gender is present as the advice is only geared toward women - who have often been faced with only two paths when faced with gender bias in spheres dominated by men: overperform and prove yourself to be highly capable of a career or adhere to traditional gender roles and careers for women.

Derogation in women is perpetuated as patriarchal ideas and messages are shared between women. Derogation of others was found in Jenna's interview as she discussed how she believes it is more challenging to be a man in agricultural education than a woman. She describes the process she goes through in mentoring men student teachers to ensure they are conducting themselves properly around the young women in the classroom. Specifically stating, "…this is where you sit in the classroom so you are inside of a camera because those female students may try to take advantage of you and they're trying to play you." Derogation of one's own gender is used in describing the high school students Jenna believes men in agricultural education could come across. Insisting students who identify as women may attempt to 'take advantage' or 'play' men teachers derogates the experiences of young women who encounter men make

take advantage of the patriarchal systems in place. This same quote aids in derogation of other women's experiences as it perpetuates a common narrative used to remove responsibility from adults onto minors.

Discussion

While analyzing the previous quotations, it is essential to remember the insidious nature of the patriarchy and the internalized sexism it can instill. Each of these women internalizes sexism differently due to their own firsthand experiences with the patriarchy, thus it will manifest differently in each of these women's lives. Differences between generations, political identity, or upbringing are all examples of individual factors that could impact how internalized sexism manifests in the lives of participants. Because of this, each participant may not display each dialog within the interviews (or even within their everyday lives).

Data demonstrated powerlessness and invalidation appeared more frequently within the participant group, both manifesting in six of the eight participants. Derogation and incompetence appeared in three of the eight participants. The heightened amount of powerlessness and invalidation is contributed to the line of questioning being centered around discussions of gender bias they have experienced within their careers, either causing them to invalidate their experiences or feel powerless to the sexism they had faced. In a study designed to explicitly study the phenomena of internalized sexism, this theme imbalance can potentially be rendered obsolete by an appropriate interview protocol.

Powerlessness

For oppressive systems to remain in place, it is essential to the oppressors that marginalized individuals are made to feel powerless and therefore act powerless as well (Freire, 1970). The dialog of powerlessness was demonstrated through quotations from four different participants and could be found in varying scenarios and contexts. Two participants rationalize the sexist remarks as generational traits or statements to be ignored. This is an ideal example of the reinforcement of powerlessness as they are unable to confront the perpetrator of the gender bias – one participant unable to address her elders while the other cannot address gender bias due to the power structures that exist between teachers and students. The participants were made to feel powerless via their inability to truly address the misogyny they encountered. This maintaining of the status quo only acts to further reinforce the dialog of powerlessness in the participant's lives.

Powerlessness can also be found in moments of interactions with students and reflection as participants evaluate the power structures in place that could be preventing them from obtaining resources for their program. The way advice is offered can be impacted by powerlessness as well. One interview perpetuated the dialogic of powerlessness as the participant recommended powerlessness can be utilized on a woman's behalf. The excerpts described reinforce the idea by Bozkur (2020) that powerlessness presents itself in the moments where women act as if they are powerless as it is present in their interactions with gender bias, self-reflection, and advice giving. A participant may be able to recognize the patriarchal systems in place but, it does not eliminate internalized sexism from her life.

Incompetence

Internalized sexism manifesting itself as women projecting an appearance of incompetence could be found within the wording and hesitation found within portions of the interviews. While using words and phrases such as 'maybe' or 'I don't know' are verbal indicators of internalized incompetence (David & Derthick, 2014), changes in cadence and hesitation can also be evidence of incompetence as well. Multiple participants displayed the characteristic manifestation of incompetence through wording choices that showed a preference of avoiding sounding arrogant or positional in their claims of gender bias. This study

also observed incompetence demonstrated within the sentence structure and tone of the participant responses. Extensive use of pauses and buffers in the participant response is an alternative example of how women may try to appear incompetent during conversations.

Softening words or changing how one speaks are both examples of how participants try to weaken their statements, change the subject, or attempt to fill space. These findings support alternative studies (Caffi, 1999; Diani, 2004; Holtgraves, 1997) which concluded women may use the guise of incompetence to avoid seeming arrogant, positional, or argumentative. Participants trying to appear incompetent within these interviews are a manifestation of them trying to fit within internalized patriarchal norms. Feelings of incompetence are further reinforced through experiences of subtle sexism (Dardeene et al., 2013), so as women encounter gender bias in their day-to-day lives, their own self-perceptions alter as they perceive themselves as incompetent and internalized sexism is further ingrained.

Invalidation

The dialogic of invalidation occurs as beliefs, experiences, or opinions are invalidated due to an altered perception of sexist microaggressions. The interviews were formulated to allow the participants to define gender bias on their own terms rather than the interviewer providing a definition. When one participant paused her recounting of an experience of gender bias to ask for the interviewer's definition of gender bias before continuing, she displayed the dialog of invalidation as she questioned if her experience counted as gender bias. Stringent lines of 'what counts' as gender bias versus 'what does not count' can be attributed to further internalization of the invalidation dialog. The findings found within the invalidation dialog are supported by the definitions generated by other studies (Bearman et al., 2009; Cherry, 2019).

Participants explain that while they have faced gender bias as none of it was extremely overt, they feel the need to then invalidate their claim of gender bias. Because the participants may not be familiar with what gender based microaggressions are, describing experiences of gender bias through statements such as 'not awful' or 'yeah, but it's just the little stuff' exemplify what it means for women to invalidate their experiences. Participants tried to avoid claiming gender bias and this could be attributed to multiple reasons. First, these findings are in support of a study which concluded "personally claiming victimization is not socially desirable, although it apparently is not objectionable to perceive some amount of discrimination against women in general" (Kobrynowicz & Brandscombe, 1997, p. 358). Participants may have been trying to maintain social desirability. An alternative reason for their hesitation to claim gender bias could be found in that covert and hidden sexist microaggressions are normalized where participants have both began to 'write off' or question their own experiences.

Derogation

Both internal and external derogation were found within this data set, aligning this data with findings from Major & O'Brian (2005) and Nabors (2012). Internal derogation, or self-derogation, could be adopted when individuals anticipate stigmatization due to marginalization (Magee & Upenieks, 2019). Internalized derogation was found within a participant's interview as she recalled herself being 'a dumb girl' in a class from her undergraduate degree as an attempt to share her inexperience prior to her coursework. The danger of internalized derogation being verbalized is it can be internalized by others which further perpetuates social expectations for how women should view themselves. The propagation of derogation in women can also be furthered as they share patriarchal messages to others (Rahmani, 2020).

Further external derogation, or derogation of one's gender, was found in an additional interview as the participant advised women to not be too overconfident in their abilities rather than criticizing how people, regardless of gender, should not be overconfident in their abilities. The specificity of women's overconfidence delineates what derogation of women may look like. Derogation of women's experiences

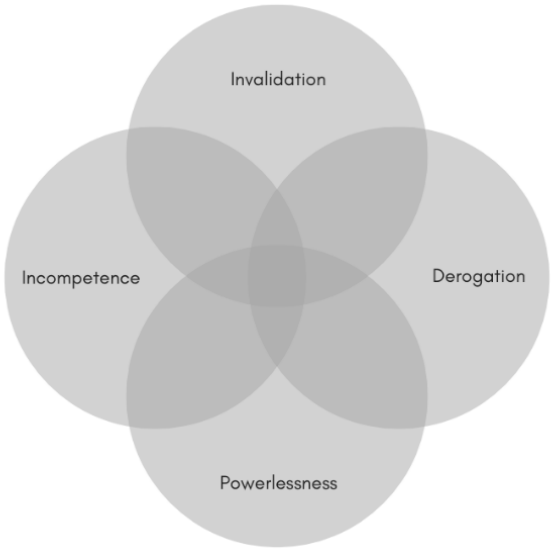
of sexual harassment and violence was found in one interview as the participant perpetuated dangerous narratives utilized to remove blame from those who benefit from the patriarchy. Messages of derogation, whether reproduced intentionally or unintentionally, keep women confined within social limitations of what they should or should not do (Becker, 2010; Bozkur, 2020). While each of the dialogs of internalized sexism contains its own dangers, the externalization of derogation is insidious as it can directly result in furthering internalized sexism in both men and women.

Thematic Crossover

While data has been presented in specific categories, the process of data analysis revealed dialogs were not as discernable as anticipated. The coding process revealed an incredible amount of crossover as themes would blend regarding the context, subject matter, tone, and cadence of how the participants spoke. Quotes can contain multiple dialogs, revealing a more complex theoretical framework for internalized sexism. Rather than separating out each of the themes entirely, it is critical to view the dialogs not just individually, but as an interconnected system that reinforces the overall structure of oppression. To address the thematic crossover found within the study, the following figure has been created to display its complexity. The visual display of the dialogs overlapping represents how easily dialogs can be simultaneously present or even reinforce one another. Examples of thematic crossovers have been procured to describe how it appears during the coding process and how internalized sexism is reinforced in others.

Figure 2

Interconnected Dialogs of Internalized Sexism



The dialog of invalidation was seen to have a crossover with both incompetence and derogation. A major thematic crossover seen within this study was with the dialog of invalidation. Within the invalidation section, the way participants invalidate their experiences of gender bias could also be seen as the participants feigning incompetence rather than making absolute statements about the bias they encounter. The invalidation dialog can also be seen in how women derogate their own experiences and those of others. A specific instance of this within the study can be seen in Jenna's interviews as she derogates students and generalizes about fictional false claims young women can make about their men teachers. This derogation works to invalidate other women's claims which only work to reinforce Jenna's own internalized dialogs of invalidation and derogation. Figure 3, which demonstrates the interconnected dialogs of internalized

sexism, displays invalidations connections to incompetence and derogation mentioned above.

Dialogs, when internalized and verbalized to others, can then further reinforce other dialogs within those who are nearby. For example, externalized derogation can cause women to deepen their own internalized sexism while men may hear women saying derogating statements that further entrench their own patriarchal ideas. The sexism internalized by other women could result in reinforced ideas of what women should or should not do, leading to women derogating themselves and others; women feeling powerless against external forces of sexism; and/or causing women to invalidate their own experiences to avoid further derogation from others. Figure 3 demonstrates the dialog of derogation's immediate connections to invalidation and powerlessness.

Conclusion

The demographics have been shifting within agricultural education. Women and men have found equality in their numbers, but true equity has not been achieved. The historical barriers to entry for women in agricultural education are well-documented: male dominance, lack of community acceptance, high stress, issues with work-life balance, and a historic lack of role models (Foster, 2001; Foster et al., 1991; Kelsey, 2006b; Murray et al., 2011; Seevers & Foster, 2003). This study adds to the body of knowledge within agricultural education by identifying internalized sexism as an additional, internal barrier for women. While previous barriers were external, the behaviors identified here (powerlessness, invalidation, feigned incompetence, and derogation) demonstrate how the patriarchy impacts a participant's view of themselves and their peers.

The findings of this critical qualitative study must be interpreted within several key limitations inherent to its design. First, as a critical qualitative inquiry, this study utilized a small, purposive sample of eight cisgender women agricultural educators from a restricted, two-state geographic region. Consequently, the findings are not intended to be generalized to the broader population of agricultural educators but rather provide a rich, context-specific understanding of internalized sexism within this group. Second, due to the study's emergence post-hoc from an existing dataset, the theoretical framework was necessarily constrained. The analysis was limited to four of the seven established dialogs of internalized sexism, meaning this study does not offer a comprehensive account of the full theoretical construct. The presence or manifestation of the three excluded dialogs (competition between women, objectification, and loss of self) remains outside the scope of this investigation.

Recommendations

The internal barriers documented in this study (dialogs of powerlessness, incompetence, invalidation, and derogation) are the systemic effects of patriarchy at work. To achieve true equity in AGED, recommendations must move from addressing individual bias and awareness to dismantling the institutional structures that organize and reproduce this sexism. The phenomenon of internalized sexism is a manifestation of institutional ruling relations (Smith, 2005). Therefore, it is recommended that institutions supporting agricultural education employ an Institutional Ethnography (IE)-Informed audit of their coordinating texts. This investigation should specifically analyze how institutional documents (such as faculty workload policies, promotion and tenure criteria, and mentorship guidelines) perpetuate the gendered experiences of marginalization. This structural focus requires revising criteria to acknowledge and reward the "invisible labor" disproportionately performed by women and faculty of color (e.g., mentorship, advising diverse students, DEI work), preventing the documented dialogs of invalidation and powerlessness when this labor goes uncredited.

To fully advance feminism in the field, intersectional principles must be integrated into the core knowledge base and professional practice. This begins with mandating an audit of core agricultural

education program curricula to address the androcentric and Eurocentric bias in courses, revising content to include the contributions and perspectives of marginalized individuals. Furthermore, developing required professional development for all faculty and staff that focuses on critical literacy is essential to equip individuals with analytic tools to move beyond personal reflection and identify the institutional texts that reproduce oppression, enabling them to move from individual self-derogation to collective analysis of the ruling relations.

The pervasive nature of internalized sexism among women in School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) requires interventions at both the preparatory and in-service levels. While addressing institutional ruling relations is paramount, women in the field require concrete strategies to challenge patriarchal structures and foster professional agency today. Based on the documented experiences of gender bias, the following strategies derived from prior research (Mumma et al., 2024) are proposed to help women in AGED advance feminism and professional agency. Teacher preparation programs are the primary opportunity for systemic change. Programs should integrate feminist pedagogy by including training on gender bias and internalized sexism for all students, moving beyond acknowledging historical barriers to actively critique the androcentric bias prevalent in agricultural institutions and curricula. Furthermore, future teachers must be prepared with explicit strategies for managing and eliminating gender bias from students, which includes questioning of expertise, retaliation, and disrespect. Crucially, programs should actively combat the gendered differences in self-efficacy by providing support structures that affirm women's professional capabilities across all domains of SBAE (classroom, FFA, and SAE).

Implications

Education and purposeful reflection are essential in deconstructing one's relationship with oppressive structures, and even those who have put in the work to deconstruct still may struggle with internalized oppression. "Addressing internalized sexism can be a powerful tool for dismantling oppression, in that it encourages women's solidarity and consequently serves as a prerequisite for social justice" (Han & Lee, 2023, p. 227). The women involved in this study all hold a deeply personal relationship to the patriarchy which was not explicitly explored during these interviews. This shortcoming of the research provides an opportunity for further growth and development within gender bias research in agricultural education. Future research should pivot from diagnosing oppression to investigating agency by gathering data on how women agricultural educators resist and cope with internalized sexism to identify tools for self-empowerment. Additionally, studies are needed to explore how these women disrupt oppressive structures and empower their women students, providing essential strategies for generational change in the field.

Additional attention should be given to internalized sexism within both feminist and agricultural education research. The presence of thematic crossover within this study is an important development in the theory of internalized sexism. Conducting additional research on internalized sexism is paramount, and it is for essential thematic crossover to be included and analyzed within future studies to ensure the thematic crossover found within this is a valid addition to the theory of internalized sexism. Within this study there were three dialogs not explored. While it is anticipated these three dialogs would not be exempt from the thematic crossover, additional research should be completed to guarantee this claim.

In the search for increased understanding of gender bias, increased variety in epistemological and theoretical approaches is paramount. The absence of gender-focused research utilizing a critical feminist lens is a current shortcoming in agricultural education. "In its critique of hierarchy, feminist theory helps us expand the application of our moral system of meaning to the analysis of diverse manifestations of power relations" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010). Without a critical look at oppression, we cannot expect to have a holistic understanding of the power structures in place working against marginalized groups. Future research should not only work to employ critical feminist theory, but additional epistemological and

theoretical perspectives.

Dismantling systems of oppression is a long, arduous path, requiring dedication and thought. Intentional reflection and self-evaluation are meaningful starting points for dismantling internalized oppression, as the deconstruction of internalized homophobia, sexism, racism, and other forms of bias through critical reflection or interventions is invaluable for personal growth and positive change (Arges et al., 2009; Case et al., 2014; Hunt, 2020; etc.). Dismantling the patriarchy is an invaluable recommendation based on the findings of this study, but it must be viewed through an intersectional lens that acknowledges countless other forms of marginalization. Recognizing one's own privileges is a deeply uncomfortable but necessary step, requiring the acceptance of uncomfortable emotions (Irving, 2016).

Researchers, students, and all others involved in knowledge creation are urged to engage in this process to recognize and dismantle normalized, oppressive structures. Furthermore, it is essential for agricultural education (AGED) to recognize the barriers and marginalization that exist within the field. As Seevers & Foster (2001) stated, "Perception is reality.... Awareness and communication are essential... As educators we may need to educate ourselves about the perceived barriers and collaboratively develop strategies to overcome" (p. 37). While the demographics of agricultural education have shifted, the patriarchy is ever present through continued gender bias and the internalized sexism women hold. Agricultural education's inclusivity must extend to accept the thoughts and experiences of marginalized individuals, or it runs the risk of not finding impactful solutions to existing oppression.

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