

Women Faculty in Postsecondary Agricultural and Extension Education: A Fifteen Year Update

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Abstract

Women faculty membership in the American Association for Agricultural Education was 14.6% in 2003 and is now 21.9%. With strategic goals to build a more inclusive and collaborative culture within the association, the need to recruit and retain diverse faculty remains in agricultural and extension education (AEE). The purpose of this critical inquiry study was to provide an updated profile of women faculty in postsecondary AEE by describing the current organizational climate and mentoring experiences. Following the basic interpretive qualitative methodology, a census of women faculty in AEE was conducted. Four emergent themes described women faculty's perceptions of the unique challenges, opportunities, and mentoring experiences in AEE: (a) contributors to a positive work environment, (b) contributors to a toxic work environment, (c) mentoring experiences in the profession, and (d) work-life integration. Women faculty valued encouragement, collaboration, transparency, and mentorship within the profession. Sexism, marginalization, and unhealthy competition were identified as barriers. Women faculty held three conflicting perceptions of work-life integration. Opportunities to create a more inclusive organizational culture with intentional mentorship for women faculty in AEE should be considered. Continued critical research to promote the inclusion of diverse faculty in AEE is recommended.

Keywords: women; women faculty; women in agriculture; organizational climate; women in agricultural leadership

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Introduction

According to the United States Department of Labor (2014), a traditional, or female-dominated job, is defined as an occupation in which women represent 75% or more of the total employment. Traditionally, females have been majority status as educators. In 2013, women comprised 81% of all elementary and middle school teachers, 57% of secondary school teachers, and 50% of post-secondary teachers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). In examining the prevalence of women in the professorial ranks, researchers have found that women faculty tend to be concentrated in the assistant and associate professor ranks and only comprise 26.5% of tenured faculty at research

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institutions (Bilen-Green, Froelich, & Jacobson, 2008). Representation is even lower for women faculty at land-grant institutions; 23.7% of female faculty are tenured and only 16.7% have achieved the rank of full professor (Bilen-Green et al., 2008).

Women within the agricultural education discipline, a historically male-dominated realm of education (Enns & Martin, 2015), have been significantly under-represented, particularly at the secondary and postsecondary education levels (Foster & Seevers, 2003; Kelsey, 2006b; Seevers & Foster, 2003). In 2003, Seevers and Foster reported 14.6% of the total membership in the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) were women faculty. When examining the membership roster for AAAE in 2017, the percentage of female postsecondary agricultural and extension education (AEE) instructors was 21.9%.

Females represented the majority of newly qualified agricultural teachers in 2009, yet the number of active teachers of agricultural education that same year was dominated by males in a 2:1 ratio (Kantrovich, 2010). In Oklahoma, Kelsey (2006b) found that while female preservice agricultural education students were “well prepared to teach and had contextually rich experiences in [agricultural education],” (p. 117), only 3% of women represented the agricultural education teaching force in the state. This discrepancy in the number of females graduating as newly qualified agricultural teachers versus the number of females actually teaching within the profession is cause for concern.

The inclusion of females into the predominantly male-oriented realm of agricultural education has uncovered multiple barriers related to gender (Enns & Martin, 2015), not unlike the experiences of women pursuing careers in other traditionally male-dominated fields (Baxter, Stephens, & Thayer-Bacon, 2011). Eagly and Carli (2004) cited four general types of explanations for women’s lesser occupancy of high-level leadership positions, which include: (a) lesser investments in education and work experience (i.e., human capital); (b) differing leadership styles of men and women; (c) the inherent nature of men to be motivated to lead and dominate others; and (d) prejudice and discrimination. Foster (2001b, 2003) identified challenges or barriers experienced by female secondary agricultural education instructors related to acceptance by peers and other males within the agricultural industry, acceptance by administrators, and balancing family and career. Additionally, many female agricultural education teachers have faced criticisms from colleagues and administrators, sexual discrimination and bias, and inequity in terms of professional status and benefits (Baxter et al., 2011; Kelsey, 2006b, 2007; Seevers & Foster, 2003). Many women also believe they must work harder than their male counterparts in order to prove their competence in agriculturally-related subject matter and have often been overlooked as the point of authority (Seevers & Foster, 2003).

An additional factor attributed to women’s late entrance into the field of agricultural education is a lack of strong female role models to advocate for advancement to higher educational levels (Enns & Martin, 2015; Seevers & Foster, 2003). Many women pursuing studies in a more male-dominated major are likely to face difficulties, owing to a lack of female teachers to serve as role models, as well as having professors who may be less accustomed to having female students in their classes (Hall & Sandler, 1982). Foster and Seevers (2003) reported that while women in AEE appear happy and committed to their role within the profession when properly encouraged, the presence of mentoring and/or support networks is too few. Baxter et al. (2011) echo this sentiment by calling for the implementation of a mentoring system in order to help females overcome real or perceived barriers in agricultural education. Research has indicated that successful mentoring relationships consist of a combination of personality (e.g., compatibility and similar values) (Eastman & Williams, 1993); community and access (e.g., belongingness, access to

mentors); and trust and communication (e.g., delegating responsibility, accurate feedback) (Jones, Kelsey, & Brown, 2014).

Recent studies focused on the factors attributing to success for female leaders and tenured faculty in AEE (Kleihauer, Stephens, Hart, & Stripling, 2013; Murphrey, Odom, McKee, & Wilkens, 2016). However, a complete profile of all women faculty in postsecondary AEE has not been updated for over fifteen years (Foster & Seevers, 2003; Seevers & Foster, 2003). Although the profession has seen a slight increase in gender diversity, the experiences of women faculty currently in AEE at the university level need to be considered to ensure retention and inclusion.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to update the profile of women faculty in postsecondary agricultural and extension education (AEE) by describing the current organizational climate and mentoring experiences for women in the profession. The study was conducted as a follow-up to two studies focused on women faculty in AEE published fifteen years previously (Foster & Seevers, 2003; Seevers & Foster, 2003). Two research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of women faculty regarding the unique challenges and opportunities in agricultural and extension education?
2. How do women faculty in agricultural and extension education describe their mentoring experiences?

Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective

This study was conducted from the epistemological perspective of constructionism, which views “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Meaning as it relates to our research questions was created through the collective experiences of the individual participants. Women experiences in secondary and postsecondary AEE have been studied from a variety of perspectives (Baxter et al., 2011; Foster, 2011a; Kelsey, 2006a; Kleihauer et al., 2013; Murphrey et al., 2016; Stephens, Brawner, Dean, Stripling, & Sanok, 2017), suggesting ideological forces of power among genders as influential. Critical inquiry as a theoretical perspective aims to identify power dynamics and critique and transform predominate social beliefs, practices, and institutions (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, & Monzó, 2018; Patton, 2015). This study was approached from a critical inquiry theoretical perspective to critically evaluate the lived experiences of women faculty in agricultural and extension education (Patton, 2015). The interpretations of women faculty in AEE were essential to the problem being studied.

Methods

To provide an updated profile of women faculty in AEE, an attempt was made to follow the original survey research protocol outlined by the studies of Foster and Seevers (2003; Seevers & Foster, 2003). The original questionnaire was obtained and adapted for electronic administration through the Qualtrics survey platform. Five sections related to (a) educational and professional background, (b) current professional status, (c) mentoring, (e) professional treatment, and (f) demographics comprised the questionnaire. Each section included Likert-type and open-ended questions. Face and content validity were assessed by a panel of experts, which included female

and male faculty members in AEE from multiple universities. Minor changes to the wording of some questions were made to increase relevancy and meaningfulness (e.g., adding agricultural communication as a possible course type for selection although it was not included in the original instrument). This study centers on the responses to 10 open-ended questions in the mentoring and professional treatment sections using qualitative analysis; therefore, instrument reliability is not addressed.

Basic interpretive qualitative methodology (Merriam, 2002) was followed to identify the common themes and patterns to describe the perceptions of women faculty. 726 responses to the open-ended questions were compiled and analyzed independently by the researchers. Concept codes were used as the first cycle coding method to reflect the broader social constructs in the data and are considered of value to studies in critical theory (Saldaña, 2016). To prepare for second cycle coding, the researchers used code mapping to compare initial concept codes, enabling categories to emerge by “comparing and sorting . . . to determine which ones seem to go together . . . and potentially transform your codes first into organized categories, and then into higher-level concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 220-222). Analysis of the emerging five main categories and 11 sub-categories from the first and transitional coding cycles resulted in four axial codes with 16 properties and dimensions. Saldaña (2016) describes the axial coding method as an aim to show the relationship between categories and subcategories by specifying the “properties (i.e., characteristics or attributes) and dimensions (the location of a property along a continuum or range) of a category” (p. 244). Analytic memos were kept during interpretation and reflected upon by the researchers to guide the systematic linking of categories, properties, and dimensions (Saldaña, 2016). Trustworthiness was maintained in this critical inquiry study by analyzing the positionality of truth and maintaining the member’s voice. Recognizing one participant’s truth may not represent the truth of another (Lincoln, 1995), we made sure to feature differing views among the women faculty.

Participants

The population for this study consisted of all women faculty members in agricultural and extension education programs. An initial list of 125 women faculty was obtained from the 2017 American Association of Agricultural Education (AAAE) member directory (21.9% of the total membership). A search of university websites listed by AAAE as having an agricultural education, communication, extension, leadership or similar program identified an additional 66 women faculty in agricultural education, extension, communications, and leadership not included in the AAAE membership. Inclusion of AAAE and non-AAAE members from agricultural education, extension, communications, and leadership as participants were deemed important in order to conduct a census ($N = 191$) of women faculty representing the breadth of agricultural education programs in higher education (Barrick, 1993; Mannebach, 1990; Newcomb, 1993). Six women (3.1%) chose not to participate in the study. It was determined *a priori* to remove questionnaires less than 50% completed, resulting in nine (4.7%) women’s responses removed from the study. An initial response rate of 55.5% ($n = 106$) was achieved. Non-respondents were contacted by phone to solicit completion of the questionnaire. An additional eight women (11.4% of the non-respondents) completed the questionnaire. Differences between early and late respondents were not detected (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). An overall response rate of 59.7% ($n = 114$) was reached.

In describing the study’s participants, most women were assistant (31.6%, $n = 36$), associate (19.3%, $n = 22$), or full (14.9%, $n = 17$) tenure-track faculty. Twelve percent of the women ($n = 14$) were Extension educators or specialists. The remaining women identified their current university position as instructor or lecturer (18.4%, $n = 21$). Ninety-two participants self-identified as members of AAAE, representing 73.6% of the women membership for the year 2017.

Statement of Subjectivity

Qualitative inquiry implies subjectivity during the research process (Peshkin, 1988). Through the exercise of reflexivity, we wish to acknowledge and consider the influence of our biases in the research process to “escape the thwarting biases that subjectivity engenders, while attaining the singular perspective its special persuasions promise” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 21). As female faculty and instructors in agricultural leadership, we all have personal experience in AEE at the university level. It is because of our personal experiences and commitment to inclusion in the profession that this line of inquiry was pursued. Collectively, we have experienced both positive and toxic workplace cultures, gender-based microaggressions, and mentorship relationships of varying quality within our profession. Additionally, we acknowledge the *#MeToo* and *Time’s Up* women empowerment movements that have arose in society since early 2017. We recognize these experiences influence the lens through which we approach the interpretation of the data in this study. As such, steps were taken to mitigate biases before, during, and after data collection and interpretation. Biases were noted, discussed, and challenged to ensure data interpretation was conducted from as neutral of a standpoint as possible. We believe the findings for this study fully reflect the perceptions and experiences of the AEE women faculty participants.

Limitations

Qualitative research does not permit replication or generalization of findings (Patton, 2015). Although this study replicated the data collection methods of previous studies (Foster & Seevers, 2003; Seevers & Foster, 2003) responses to the open-ended questions do not provide enough contextual information to form generalities. The lack of contextual understanding behind the reported data in Foster and Seevers (2003), and Seevers and Foster (2003) did not permit a cross-comparison with the findings of our study. A limitation to this study is the ability to only describe and interpret the current perceptions of women faculty, rather than identify change and progression in perceptions through a cross-comparative analysis. A constraint in resources and the desire to include as many women faculty viewpoints in the study as possible prevented us from conducting one-on-one interviews or focus groups on the study’s topic. It is also noted that while the questionnaire was administered as a census among women faculty in AEE, the entire population did not respond. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of women faculty members in AEE. Readers are encouraged to assess the findings to determine transferability within their context.

Findings

Analysis of the emerging main categories and subcategories from the first and transitional data coding cycles resulted in four axial codes with 16 properties and dimensions to describe perceptions of the unique challenges, opportunities, and mentoring experiences of women faculty in agricultural extension education. Figure 1 represents the four axial codes and relative properties and dimensions. Direct quotes from the data are provided to support the emergent themes, with participant names and potentially identifiable information omitted to maintain confidentiality.

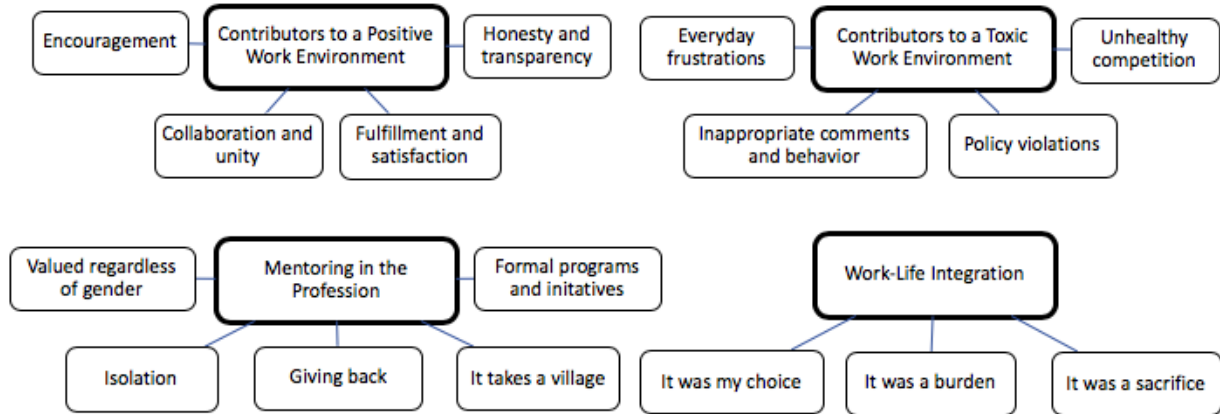


Figure 1. Four emergent axial codes and their related categories describe the unique challenges, opportunities, and mentoring experiences of women faculty in AEE as contributors to a positive work environment, contributors to a toxic work environment, mentoring in the profession, and work-life integration.

Contributors to a Positive Work Environment

A major theme to emerge from the participant’s experiences as a female faculty member in AEE were a variety of contributing factors that supported a positive work environment and profession. Four related categories described as *encouragement*, *collaboration and unity*, *fulfillment and satisfaction*, and *honesty and transparency* distinguished positive work environments.

The women in this study spoke frequently of the importance of encouragement toward other female faculty in AEE. Encouragement often came in many forms, such as “*congratulations emails and letters, call, texts and messages on social media.*” Encouragement was also sought and received for decisions related to their career, education, and personal life. For some women, “*daily encouragement needed as emotional support,*” “*affirmation that I was/am on the right path,*” “*being told to be who I am and stand up for what is right,*” and “*access to opportunities to learn about administrative openings that would allow me to advance in the organization*” contributed to their positive outlook toward the profession. The impact of past encouragement and need for continued encouragement for women faculty in AEE was summarized by one participant when they wrote,

I have encouraged women to be involved in the development of programs related to leadership and to mentor other women. Our conceptualization[s] of leadership have changed a great deal over the years and are more welcoming to women. However, in our field, change is slow. We need more female role models to show young women that we belong in the profession and that we have important contributions to make.

Collaboration and unity among faculty in the profession were also described as contributors to a positive work environment. One participant highlighted that “*most of my coworkers, whether male or female, have a sense of unity.*” “*If we are lifting others up, it creates a positive work environment and sense of community within the profession,*” another participant commented.

The pursuit of a career that provided fulfillment and satisfaction contributed to a positive work environment for women faculty in AEE as well. “*I get to do what I love; everyone should do*

that,” stated one participant. Another participant reflected, *“I love my job. Waking up and getting to come to work brings me so much joy. Working with students and helping them achieve their dreams and potential is all I could really ask for.”* Other participants referenced getting to do something in their career that made a positive difference while utilizing the best of their skill set. Another participant discussed their experience in AEE as *“the most rewarding work I’ve ever experienced.”*

Honesty and transparency were highly valued contributors to a positive work environment among the women faculty in AEE. Although honest and transparent encouragement could unintentionally discourage other women faculty, the participants felt a responsibility to represent the profession authentically. One participant’s statement summarized this sentiment well:

I would not say anyone has ever intentionally discouraged me in anything, but believe this is part of the give and take of working with others. There are times I need to be encouraged and discouraged - I want people to interact with me honestly in order to provide personal and professional improvement of myself or my work.

Contributors to a Toxic Work Environment

The second theme to emerge from the participants’ responses identified significant contributors to a toxic work environment for women faculty in AEE. *Everyday frustrations, unhealthy competition, inappropriate comments and behavior, and policy violations* were described. Some participants recalled sexist comments and behavior that created uncomfortable situations. Others referenced gender stereotypes and derogatory comments toward perceived career and family roles made by colleagues, such as, *“I was told by a male colleague that my real impact wouldn’t be at work with my students, but would be at home with my own kids, and that’s where I should be spending my time and effort.”*

Women faculty perceived being overlooked for leadership positions, questioned on the quality of their work, not listened to, excluded, and marginalized in the workplace. These events described a set of everyday frustrations experienced by some of the women. For one participant, she was discouraged by her perception of *“men’s indirect comments and disinterest in diversifying who is a part of the field.”* Another participant felt discouragement when attending AEE conferences because they *“see male faculty grouping together with other male faculty and (whether purposefully or not) excluding female faculty.”* Occurrences of subtle sexism in the workplace were mentioned as inevitable, but as one participant communicated, she tries *“not to worry about that and continue to do my best.”*

Discouraging behavior was attributed to both males and females in the workplace. As one participant explained,

There is conflict in any workplace, and higher education sometimes has a little more than the average. There have been times where some of my coworkers lose sight of the main goal . . . When they lose sight of the goal and are only in it for themselves, it is easier for them to discourage those around them.

Madeleine Albright’s (2006) quote, *“there’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other”* was referenced by multiple participants. Participants desired to create an inclusive work environment for all faculty members but felt the level of competition among colleagues was unhealthy.

I do not want to work in the same type of cut-throat environment I encountered during my PhD program where women tore each other down. Nor do I want to create that environment for women coming in behind me. We gain so much more when we work together, support each other, and build inclusive networks of professionals.

Recounted experiences of some participants revealed policy violations based on gender. “I was in the middle of interviewing for a tenure-track role and asked illegal questions. The fact a male superior to me asked them, I felt obligated to answer,” said one participant. “I have been asked illegal questions about pregnancy in university interviews and then been told those questions had nothing to do with the decision not to hire me for a particular role,” another participant responded. While not all participants described hostile workplace cultures, the following quotes evidence the visceral experiences of a significant portion of the women faculty:

As a first-semester graduate student, a faculty member in the agriculture program told me that I had ‘no business being in graduate school, that I would never get a job in the industry, and that I should be a nurse because it was an appropriate job for a woman.’ When I tried to argue, he told me to talk to his daughter, a nurse. He also expressed concern that I was not married already, saying it was his opinion that ‘women needed to be serviced at least twice per week in order to be able to think properly.’ That is a direct quote because I have never forgotten it. He used the word ‘serviced,’ like the service for a stallion or bull.

One male told me I needed to wear different clothing because my (he pointed to his chest) ‘these’ made him uncomfortable. I’ve been called beautiful more times than I was called smart more frequently than I cared to admit. It was always assumed I was a graduate student or the secretary rather than the professor, especially if a male was present. I’ve sat through countless meetings where I had an idea (that I voiced), which went ignored until a man voiced nearly the same idea and it was considered brilliant. The list goes on.

I experienced many issues with under-cutting and marginalization of women - by both male and female faculty members. I have yet to pinpoint why this occurs, but at times it was painful and counterproductive . . . The hard realities I experienced made it difficult for me to see myself in a faculty position. However, I found that this toxic type of environment is not the case everywhere and quite the opposite at my current institution.

Mentoring in the Profession

The third theme to emerge from the data described mentoring experiences in the profession for women faculty in AEE. Mentors were *valued regardless of gender*, with most universities providing *formal mentoring programs*. For a small group of women faculty, where formal mentoring opportunities were not present, a sense of *isolation* in AEE was perceived. The belief in the need to mentor, because *it takes a village* to achieve success and to *give back*, were common among the participants.

Mentorship was viewed as invaluable to women pursuing faculty positions in AEE. “I believe mentoring is extremely important to retaining women in the field of agriculture and by encouraging women to be engaged in the university is one way to keep them at the university,” a participant replied. Another participant included:

Colleagues of both sexes have provided direction, quality education, advisement, nurturance, support, mentorship, and modeled professional practices that have positively

influenced my professional attitudes, practices, and ongoing activities that do the same for colleagues, students, community leaders, volunteers, and youth.

The structure of mentoring relationships varied among the participants but was mostly formal in nature. University mentoring programs were described as professional development programs, interdepartmental initiatives, and mandatory new faculty programs. Some university programs strived to connect female faculty and staff with resources specifically designed for women. Where formal mentoring programs lacked, participants, described their experiences as an “*informal gathering of women to share experiences, concerns and professional needs.*” Yet, some participants still felt a sense of isolation and were unable to identify a mentor in AEE.

Success in AEE for women faculty was largely attributed to the quality of mentorship they had or had not received. For the majority of participants, the phrase *it takes a village* described the contribution of mentors to professional careers in AEE. A participant with established tenure proclaimed,

I have benefitted from a variety of mentors and friends. People had already walked the path I chose and people who walked by my side down this career path. I do not believe I would have survived, let alone achieved any success at all without their help . . . Truly this has not been a path I walked alone.

The desire to serve as mentors to other women faculty in AEE was seen as an opportunity to give back in the profession. One senior participant wished to invest in new AEE faculty as “*a means of giving back for all of the encouragement [they] received as an early career professional.*” Another senior participant explained, “*I have had the benefit of excellent mentors, both men, and women, who have provided direction and opportunities in my career. I highly believe in paying those experiences forward.*”

Work-Life Integration

The fourth significant theme to emerge in the study centered on work-life integration as a challenge for women faculty in AEE. Work-life integration discussions included the allocation of time and resources related to work responsibilities, family, recreation, well-being, and relationships. Three related categories, *it was my choice*, *it was a burden*, and *it was a sacrifice*, described the participants’ conflicting perceptions of work-life integration concerns.

For one group of participants, concerns associated with work-life integration were a non-issue. For this group, the goal to pursue a faculty track in AEE was a personal choice and worth the demands and perceived sacrifices of the career. “*I think we all sacrifice to move forward in our careers,*” said a participant. Attitudes like “*this is part of life!*” and “*I did what I wanted to do and I would do it again,*” were shared among this group. Any sacrifices as a result of their career were viewed as gifts to serve students and an example for young people to pursue their passions.

Though I am away from my child a few weeks each year, I am proud that he gets to hear about what I do as a professional woman. Those times away do make me miss my son, but it also recharges me professionally and nurtures that part of me. I think if I wasn’t as involved in my career I would not be as happy overall.

I’m sure I have made some choices that some would say were personal sacrifices (e.g., I put off having a family until after graduation and getting a job), but they were my choices and I never felt like I sacrificed anything that was really important to me. I have always

done what I thought was best for me, for my family, etc...no matter what mentors, society, or whoever else has tried to impose.

Feelings toward work-life integration led the second group of participants to describe their experience as women faculty in AEE as burdensome. Time away from family or work were heavy loads to balance and required a strong support system. One participant said,

I have worked on average at least 60-80 hours per week over the past 11 years in higher education. It has been incredibly hard to climb the administrative ladder and be a wife and mother . . . My husband is in higher education and his encouragement and support have led largely to the success I have felt.

The perceived expectation to be “twice as good” resulted in many participants forgoing their personal needs and well-being to spend more time at work and not neglect family or personal responsibilities. However, the burdens were giving way to balance. “*I do not feel I have been the mate, mother, and daughter I had hoped I would be. Travel, timelines and day-to-day demands have driven me too much. Maturity has brought balance to me,*” a participant stated. “*Everything is related to balance. In the end, you realize that the sacrifices are worth it and eventually you learn to balance work, family, organizations, etc.,*” explained another participant in this group.

The remaining group of participants perceived work-life integration as the greatest barrier for women faculty in AEE. Upon reflection, the participants felt the choices in their career required a sacrifice of personal and family lives. The demands of promotion and tenure led some women faculty to delay having a family, as told by one participant, “*I waited a LONG time to have a child and even then questioned if it was the ‘right’ time with tenure and promotion. I am now divorced and have to juggle a lot of roles as a single parent.*” Another participant explained her decision to forgo having children as a result of the tenure process by saying, “*I did not really want children that badly but made a decision either tenure or kids, and I chose tenure. Too hard to do both.*” Retrospectively, some participants questioned whether the sacrifices made for their career as an AEE faculty member were justified:

I am not married, nor do I have children. Those were decisions I made early on--but, by making those decisions, I could prioritize work over family and I did for many years. I now realize that I should have tried to achieve more of a balance. Both of my parents passed away and I realized I should have spent more time going home for holidays, etc., then doing more work.

My professional achievement is unquestionable. The long hours, evenings, weekends, and dedication to my career affected work-life balance and my ability to have much of a personal life. Divorced and no children. Is it because of my career? I can't say so unequivocally, but it was likely a significant factor.

When asked if they would make the same sacrifices again, one participant replied, “*Sometimes I think ‘Yes, I would do it all over.’ Other times the answer is ‘No, the price is too great.’*”

Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

In synthesizing the findings through a critical lens, the complexity of the participants’ experiences described in this study is acknowledged. No experience of any two participants was alike and perceptions varied in the degree contributors to a positive work environment, contributors to a toxic work environment, mentoring in the profession, and work-life integration were described.

Overall encouragement and satisfaction experienced in the profession by women faculty did not negate toxic workplace behavior and concerns for work-life integration in AEE. The concept of gendered organizations (Acker, 2012) helps us understand the complexity of women faculty's experiences in AEE. Acker (2012) identifies several substructures and subtexts of gender, "often-invisible processes in the ordinary lives of organizations" (p. 215) that influence assumptions about gender within organizations. *Organizational culture*, defined by Acker (2012) as "the sum of particular, often time and place specific, images, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and values" (p. 216), *interactions on the job*, or the person-to-person interactions contributing to perceived levels of power, and *gendered identities* assist in developing a complex analysis.

As outlined in the *2017-2020 Strategic Plan*, AAAE (2017) seeks to build a more inclusive and collaborative culture within the association. Encouragement, collaboration and unity, fulfillment and satisfaction, and honesty and transparency were indicators of positive work environment attitudes and organizational culture for some of the participants in this study. Not unlike the women faculty from Foster and Seevers' (2003) studies, women faculty in AEE appear to be happy and committed to their role within the profession when properly encouraged.

Yet, behaviors described as everyday frustrations, unhealthy competition, inappropriate interactions, and policy violations contributed to a toxic work environment for other AEE women faculty. "Whether it is exploitative or consensual, just joking or harassing, sexuality is a clear confirmation of gender difference that complicates efforts to achieve gender equality" (Acker, 2012, p. 216). Sexist interactions among colleagues and perceived gendered identities favoring masculine management styles were very real for some participants and were reflected in their responses. Society's current *#Me Too* and *Time's Up* movements addressing sexual misconduct, workplace safety, and equity, and the empowerment of women (Langone, 2018) were mentioned by participants, which may explain why these lived experiences were more readily shared in this study as compared to previous research (Baxter et al., 2011; Foster, 2001a; Kelsey, 2006a; Kleihauer et al., 2013; Murphrey et al., 2016; Stephens et al., 2017). The variability in the women faculty's description of the AEE work environment should challenge the profession to critically assess predominant attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. Training to help faculty recognize implicit gender bias and fair hiring practices will contribute to a more inclusive profession in the future.

The importance and need for mentoring among women faculty in AEE have not decreased. The AEE profession should continue to encourage formal mentoring programs, whether through AAAE or at the university/departmental levels. It is also valuable for a culture of informal mentoring to be fostered. Paralleling efforts to promote collaboration, participation in AAAE is an opportunity for women faculty in the profession to connect and learn from each other to build leadership capacity. With work-life integration emerging as a theme in this study, informal network supports among women faculty may help redefine the ideological domains of work and home (Acker, 2012) for the AEE profession, as others have alluded (Foster & Seevers, 2003; Kleihauer et al., 2013; Murphrey et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Future Research

The organizational culture and climate of the AEE profession should continue to be studied. This particular study was conducted by qualitatively analyzing women faculty's responses to open-ended questions through a web-based questionnaire, which limits the contextual understanding of our findings. In-depth interviews with women faculty members in AEE are suggested to provide a richer understanding of individual experiences in the profession. A review of literature involving women AEE faculty should be conducted and findings compared to consider the research's impact on organizational climate in the profession. With many women faculty

referencing experiences from their graduate work in this study, investigating the experiences of female graduate students in AEE may provide further insight into the underrepresentation of women faculty at the postsecondary level. It is also the sentiment of many participants in this study, and thus our research team as well, that some experiences in the AEE profession (i.e., work-life integration, contributors to toxic work environments, mentoring) may not differ among genders. Future studies should investigate the lived experiences of male faculty in AEE as well to provide both a comparative and holistic snapshot of the state of the profession.

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