

Examining Prejudice Exhibited by School Based Agricultural Teachers in the Midwestern U.S.

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Introduction

Increasingly over the past decade, the National FFA Organization (2019) has built efforts towards fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within agricultural education programs to strive for respect, connectedness, and affirmation for all people involved. Considering research in education, some effects of prejudice have been documented. First, sexism, has been examined through the generations and while bias has decreased in severity, participants across generations have experienced gender bias in their role as agriculture teachers (Baxter et al., 2008). Second, homophobia has been cited as a primary reason that many gay and lesbian teachers have taken on mental distress to protect themselves by living 'double lives' to separate their public and private selves (Bower-Phipps, 2017; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Gray, 2013; Griffin, 1992; Jackson, 2006; Mayo, Jr., 2008; Olson, 1987). Finally, race and racism has been examined in the context of FFA, with a critical view of its national convention where urban members cited that they had to reconcile with race and culture barriers in an event that seemed to cater to a white, rural majority (Martin & Kitchel, 2015).

These various findings of prejudice can be examined through the integrated threat theory of prejudice, which defines four different threats that interact to cause prejudices (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). These threats include realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). It's important to note that Stephan & Stephan (1993) define prejudice as negative affect, which in turn includes evaluations (disliking) and emotions (hatred) toward outgroups. In acknowledging this definition of prejudice as affective, we must also acknowledge that prejudice does not equate to outward behavior.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate the levels of prejudice held by SBAE teachers in NAAE Region IV, which includes seven states from the Midwest U.S. This study was guided by the following objectives: 1) describe the levels of Social Desirability in the population; 2) describe levels of prejudice exhibited by the population; and 3) examine if prejudice levels differ based on selected demographics.

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design and was distributed via Qualtrics software using the tailored design method (Dillman et al., 2014). Lists of population names and emails ($n = 2273$) were acquired from state staff or publicly available sources. The recommended sample size for a population this size was 331 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), so state proportions of the population were calculated to determine the size of the stratified random sample ($n = 333$) across the region. The instrument for this study was established by modifying existing summated rating scales measuring social desirability ($\alpha = .88$) (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972; Fischer & Fick, 1993), Neosexism ($\alpha = .76$) (Tougas et al., 1995), Modern Homophobia ($\alpha = .95$) (Raja & Stokes, 1998), and Attitudes Toward Diversity in Coworkers ($\alpha = .78$) (Montei et al., 1996). Validity was established by a panel of experts ($n = 6$), all but one of whom belonged to disenfranchised groups that face the prejudices measured in this study. An initial response rate of 21.6% ($n = 72$) was acquired, and after controlling for non-response error by resampling 20% of nonrespondents ($n = 53$), a final response rate of 37.5% ($n = 135$) was acquired (Lindner et al., 2001). All but one scale calculated desirable Cronbach's alphas larger than .8. Falling below this threshold, Social Desirability calculated an alpha of .6, indicating that caution should be used in interpreting results from this scale (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Independent-samples t -tests were conducted to compare nonrespondents and respondents. Only one difference was found, indicating a medium nonrespondent bias size in homophobia toward lesbians, $t_{121} = -2.06, p = .04, d = .37$. All other variables were considered generalizable to the population.

Results

Table 1
Demographic Information for Participants

	n	%
Gender		
Female	68	55.7
Male	54	44.3
Community Grew Up In		
Rural (< 2,500)	82	59.4
Not Rural (\geq 2,500)	34	23.2
Valid Listwise	108	80

Table 2
Properties for Study Scales and Age Demographics

	n	M	SD	α
Social Desirability	7	1.47	.24	.61
Neosexism	9	2.09	.57	.81
Modern Homophobia				
Toward Lesbians	5	2.14	.89	.90
Toward Gay Men	5	1.93	.89	.88
Racism Scale	8	1.93	.53	.81
Age		37.69	11.62	

Table 3
Multivariate Test Results

Effect	Wilks' Λ	F	df ₁	df ₂	p	η_p^2
Gender	.894	2.997	4	101	.022	.106
Community Raised	.887	3.201	4	101	.016	.113
Both Variables	.975	.643	4	101	.633	

Note: Significant results in bold

Table 4
Univariate Test Results

Source	Scale	F	p	η_p^2
Gender	Sexism	7.896	.006	.071
	Homophobia → Lesbians	7.91	.006	.071
	Homophobia → Gay Men	8.921	.004	.079
Community Raised	Sexism	1.835	.178	
	Homophobia → Lesbians	6.457	.013	.058
	Homophobia → Gay Men	12.052	.001	.104
Gender * Community Raised	Racism	4.817	.03	.044
	Sexism	.714	.4	.007
	Homophobia → Lesbians	.099	.753	.001
Community Raised	Homophobia → Gay Men	.000	.956	.000
	Racism	1.334	.251	.013

Note: Significant results in bold

Conclusions and Discussion

Social Desirability results show a normal distribution, and did not correlate with any prejudice variable, indicating that results were *not* biased by teachers wanting to exhibit desirable answers. Sample means (Table 2) indicate that the population exhibits slight prejudices against others who are women, or identify as lesbian, and low prejudices toward other who belong to racial minority or identify as gay. MANOVA results (Tables 3 and 4) show that prejudices can be found in higher levels in teachers who are male or those who grew up in rural communities, but without any significant interaction between these two variables.

Because new SBAE teachers from Region IV are overwhelmingly female (74%) and experiencing a historically high rate of retention (97%) (NAAE, 2019), it can be expected that rates of prejudice will decline over coming years when taking gender into account. However, no research was found exploring hometown populations of current and rising teachers. Therefore, its recommended researchers consider adding this as a demographic question in future work. Additionally, it's recommended that SBAE state staff and teacher educators focus on tolerance within their diversity programming for all teachers, but particularly for pre- and in-service teachers who are male or from rural settings.

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