

EXPERIENCES OF RECENTLY GRADUATED WOMEN SCHOOL BASED  
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN ARIZONA: A CRITICAL FEMINIST  
APPROACH

by

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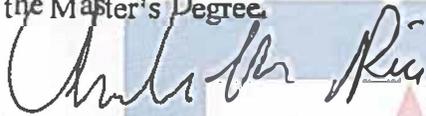
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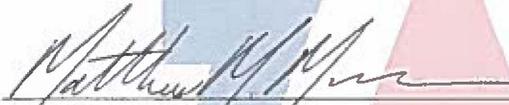
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As members of the Master's Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by *Angus Donaldson*, titled *Experiences of Recently Graduated Women SBAE Students in Arizona: A Critical Feminist Approach* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Master's Degree.



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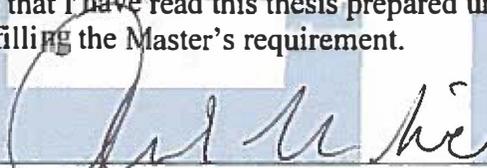


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Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the thesis to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this thesis prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the Master's requirement.



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ARIZONA

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

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## **Abstract**

*School based agricultural education (SBAE) works to grow high school students' leadership abilities and likelihood for success in agriculture careers. Past research found inequalities between the experiences of women and men students in SBAE and currently there is a paucity of research investigating the experiences of women students in Arizona SBAE programs. The central research question that guided this study was: What are the experiences of recent women graduates of SBAE programs in Arizona? This research was conducted utilizing critical feminist theory and used Acker's theory of gendered organizations as its theoretical framework. Data were collected through interviews with fifteen recent women graduates from Arizona SBAE programs. Five themes emerged from the data: 1) *Advisors perpetuate the Culture of SBAE in Their Programs*, 2) *Differing Expectations Exist Between Women and Men Students in SBAE*, 3) *Enforcement of FFA Official Dress Disproportionately Affects Women Students*, 4) *Gendered Interactions with Advisors, Peers, and the Community*, and 5) *Women Not Seen in the Same Spaces as Men Within the Agriculture Industry*. It is recommended that further research explore the experiences of other women students in SBAE, women students who left SBAE early, SBAE students that do not identify as cis gendered, and how the expectations placed upon women and men students affect their experiences in SBAE. Recommendations for practice include encouraging the updated FFA official dress rules allowing any student to wear slacks or a skirt, refraining from setting expectations based on gender, and increase representation of women throughout the agriculture industry.*

**Keywords:** *SBAE; women students; gendered organizations; critical feminist theory*

## Introduction

School based agricultural education (SBAE) consists of three integrated components: classroom/laboratory instruction, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs, and student leadership development through the National FFA Organization. SBAE prepares students for successful careers in global agriculture, fiber, food, and natural resources at the middle and secondary school levels (National FFA Organization, 2021). The National FFA Organization was founded in 1928, creating a structured system of SBAE in the United States, but women were not allowed membership until 1969. Women are, and have historically been, heavily involved in the agriculture industry and agricultural education, but were often relegated to roles not directly involved in production agriculture (Enns & Martin, 2015). However, for 41 years women were not formally allowed participation within traditional SBAE environments, creating patterns of a gendered organization (Enns & Martin, 2015).

Since 1969, the enrollment of women in SBAE has been steadily increasing. As of 2020, 44% of the National FFA membership was female (National FFA Organization, 2020). Additionally, female students in SBAE hold the majority of officer positions and annually make more money after graduating high school than female officers in non-SBAE programs (Velez et al., 2018). In Florida, female FFA officers were more willing to work outside of their comfort zones, felt a stronger need for power and affiliation, and were described as more mature than their male counterparts (Ricketts et al., 2004). However, female students may also be less active in production agriculture-based content areas within the curriculum (Ricketts et al., 2004). While enrollment data of women students and records of their participation in SBAE programs is encouraging, these statistics have the potential to distract us from underlying issues. It becomes

imperative to dive deeper into the experiences of women in SBAE to critically evaluate patterns of a gendered organization.

FFA membership in SBAE improves students' overall experience in high school and meets their need for belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization in Maslow's hierarchical needs (Rose et al., 2016). Moreover, experiential learning in SBAE through SAE provides benefits such as, "...increased subject matter retention among students, active engagement, use of higher order thinking skills, and academic success" (Arnold et al., 2006, p. 30). In Illinois elementary and junior high classrooms, students benefited from agricultural education curriculum because it offered an authentic learning context and numerous opportunities to connect concepts to students' lives and interests (Knobloch et al., 2007).

It is important to ensure that the benefits and applicability of SBAE are consistent across students of all gender identities, especially as SBAE becomes increasingly diverse. While limited research has been conducted at the state and national levels, not much is known about the unique experiences of women in SBAE programs and the effects of these experiences on their development. Specifically in Arizona, there is a paucity of research on the experiences of women in SBAE pertaining to all parts of the three-component model of agricultural education. What the limited amount of research does show is patterns of an institutionalized gendered culture within SBAE and the agriculture industry as a whole.

Beginning with SBAE teachers themselves, a gendered trend in their demographic makeup can be seen in the managerial power structure they are players in. In Arizona, 53.1% of the SBAE teachers identified as female and 46.9% identified as male in 2021 (B. Matos, Personal Communication, December 7, 2021). In comparison to the general teaching population, SBAE has a larger percentage of men teachers. In the general Arizona teacher population, 76%

of teachers are women and 24% are men (Bennet et al., 2020). This difference in the gender make-up between SBAE and general education shows that the educators directly responsible for the experiences of students in SBAE are part of the gendered culture that have persisted in SBAE since its conception.

The goal of SAE's in SBAE is for students to work outside of the classroom to learn and apply new knowledge while also preparing for careers. However, if the agriculture industry is not inclusive of all genders, then that access to learning can be compromised. Many women in the agriculture industry are relegated to "bookkeeping" or to the role of "farm wives" instead of the decision makers on the farm. Due to this phenomenon, women agriculturists often feel unwelcome in not only agriculture industry roles, but also in non-traditional agricultural education settings (Trauger et al., 2008). Also, from 1978 to 2012, the number of women principal farm operators tripled, but this still left women greatly under-represented in the farming industry (Fremstad & Paul, 2020). Additionally, farms ran by women earn 40% less on average than farms ran by men (Fremstad & Paul, 2020). This poor representation, gendered earnings gap, and relegation of roles create more barriers to entry for women farmers and agriculturists, which are signs of gendered culture in the agriculture industry and in agricultural work-based learning (i.e., SAE).

In the youth leadership component (i.e., FFA), there are multiple instances that showcase the gendered culture within SBAE. After women were granted FFA membership in 1969, they were not allowed to wear the same uniform, called official dress, as men (National FFA Organization, 2019). Until 2019, women students were required to wear black skirts and black pantyhose, while men students were required to wear black dress slacks and black dress socks (National FFA Organization, 2019). This recent perpetuation of gendered stereotypes on attire

highlights the gendered culture of SBAE well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and does not account for students who do not identify in the gender binary.

One early example of gendering culture in SBAE is in content areas such as horticulture and home economics. Initially, these were often the only roles where women were allowed to participate in SBAE (Enns & Martin, 2015). Although now women students are technically allowed to partake in any subject or content area they desire, some of these trends persist today in the form of gatekeeping by individuals in power. Even more recently, women students often end up in horticulture and communications related activities more than they end up in livestock or mechanics related activities, and women students also tend to be more active in non-production agriculture related curriculum (Ricketts et al., 2004).

Trends in content area participation among women students can also be seen in FFA participation through Career Development Event (CDE) enrollment data in Arizona. In 2020, the Floriculture CDE had the largest number of women participants, while the Agricultural Mechanics CDE had the largest number of men (B. Matos, Personal Communication, December 7, 2021). In addition to CDEs, FFA also involves students within various leadership roles, including officers, at all levels of the organization. Currently female students hold more officer positions in SBAE than males (Velez et al., 2018). Looking specifically at the gender of state officers in Arizona over the past five years, the proportion of women to men state officers was greater than the proportion of women to men student membership (B. Matos, Personal Communication, December 7, 2021). However, in that same five-year period, and the eight years prior, a woman occupied every Arizona FFA State secretary position. This shows that SBAE's organizational culture sees this position, and its duties, as woman oriented rather than gender

neutral. FFA official dress and the gendered trends in content areas and officer positions highlight the gendered culture within SBAE that is guided by gender stereotypes.

Signs of the gendered culture of SBAE have also been observed through the interactions between individuals at post-secondary institutions and in cooperative extension. At the collegiate level in Oklahoma, it was discovered that female students faced discrimination from their male peers and from supervising practitioners during student teaching, but over all were supported by collegiate faculty (Kelsey, 2006). Women in agricultural education and Extension education graduate programs also reported negative experiences that were described as “living in a man’s world” and “the Good Ol’ Boys Club” (Cline et al., 2020). These women also reported instances of microaggressions and questioning of their and other women’s competency (Cline et al., 2020). However, less is known about the interactions at the high school level within SBAE. In two Missouri SBAE programs, male and female students had differing ideas about how their own and the opposite gender thinks about leadership (Kagay et al., 2015). This gendered split could add to the complex interactions between men and women students in youth leadership settings. Research on what interactions exist between high school SBAE students and what role gender plays in those interactions is currently lacking.

Interactions within SBAE and its culture may also be affected by homophily. Homophily is the tendency of people to seek out or be drawn to others who are similar to themselves (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). In organizations, both the structure and choices of the individuals, can lead to homophily (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). Along with its presence in organizations, homophily between the same gender has been observed among students’ choices of friends in school (McCormick et al., 2015). In high school SBAE, homophily based

on gender has not been studied, but students in Kentucky have displayed homophily based on race and sexual orientation (Austin et al., 2021).

Organizations, despite decades of change, continue to enact behaviors, interactions, and structures that enable inequalities between genders (Acker, 2012). It is crucial that women receive equitable experiences in SBAE but based on prior research women students are not receiving equitable experiences in SBAE due to its institutionalized gendered culture. By examining SBAE through a critical feminist lens it will be better understood where SBAE might adapt programming to meet the needs of the women it serves.

While research on the experiences of women SBAE teachers, graduate students, and undergraduate students is considerable, there is a paucity of current research on women SBAE students' experiences within the high school setting. Even less descriptive qualitative research has been conducted to obtain in-depth data on the experiences of women students. While inequality and discrimination based on gender occurs throughout agriculture industry (Leckie, 1996), it is important to describe its presence and effects at the high school level in SBAE, as those students will then become the future leaders and change agents in the agriculture industry.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to understand how the gendered substructure has affected the experiences of women students who participated in SBAE programs in Arizona through a critical feminist lens. The central research question aligned with three priority areas within the American Association for Agricultural Education's (AAAE) 2016-2020 National Research Agenda: Meaningful, Engaged Learning in All Environments, Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs, and Addressing Complex Problems (Roberts et al., 2016). The

central research question that guided this study was: What are the experiences of recent women graduates of SBAE programs in Arizona? Secondary research questions included:

1. How has the gendered substructure affected the classroom/laboratory experiences of women SBAE students?
2. How has the gendered substructure affected the work-based learning (i.e., SAE) experiences of women SBAE students?
3. How has the gendered substructure affected the youth leadership (i.e., FFA) experiences of women SBAE students?

### **Theoretical Framework**

I applied critical feminist theory to investigate the central research question. Critical feminist research allows for collaboration between researchers and participants to avoid exploitation and objectification and to critically evaluate problematic situations faced by women and the institutions involved in creating those situations (Creswell, 2013). Research guided by critical feminist theory also considers the intersectionality between gender and race, class, sexuality, able-bodied-ness, and age that can play a role in perpetuating inequalities (Olesen, 2011). Feminist theory addresses many issues that have been historically left out of social science research such as identities, gender roles, domestic violence, comparable worth, affirmative action, and women's social devaluation and powerlessness within familial and organizational structures (Franz, 1994).

Within critical feminist theory lies Acker's (1990; 2012) theory of gendered organizations, which was utilized as the guiding framework for this study to critically and purposefully analyze the experiences of women students in SBAE. Acker's (1990; 2012) theory

of gendered organizations states that organizations are not gender neutral, even though many appear to be on the surface. Prior to the development of this theory, the idea of organizations being gender neutral constrained much of the feminist research (Acker, 1990). Acker's (1990; 2012) theory works to identify why this inequity persists in organizations by looking at the gendered substructure within organizations. Acker (2012) breaks her theory of gendered organizations into *the gendered substructure, gendered subtext, organizational logic, and the gender neutral, abstract worker* that together create and sustain the structure and processes of organizations and begin to identify why gender inequities still exist even after many years of advancement for women in society. Acker's (2012) gendered substructure is further broken down into four components: *organizing processes, organization culture, interventions on the job, and gender identity*. This study was guided by these four components of the gendered substructure in particular. Many aspects of Acker's (2012) theory of gendered organizations and its substructure permeate SBAE.

The first component of the gendered substructure within Acker's (2012) theory of gendered organizations is *organizing processes* that sustain inequalities into the roles within organizations. This substructure is seen in the rules, supervisor and management power, wages, physical design of workspaces, and job descriptions in organizations. Organizing processes are present in SBAE throughout the classroom, SAE, and FFA.

The next component of the gendered substructure in Acker's theory (2012) is the *organization culture*. This substructure is created when people throughout the organization hold unexamined beliefs about differences between genders. These beliefs then affect the actions, behaviors, and decisions of those within the organization (Acker, 2012). There is evidence that the organizational culture of SBAE contributes to perpetuating the gendered substructure.

Another component of the gendered substructure of Acker's (2012) theory of gendered organizations is *interactions on the job*. Interactions that form gendered structures can occur between colleagues or between those at different levels in the organization as formal or informal interactions. Interactions on the job, as it relates to SBAE, includes interactions in learning environments as an important part of the gendered substructure. Person to person interactions or group interactions have the opportunity to either reinforce equality or affirm inequalities (Acker, 2012).

*Gender identity* forms the last component of the gendered substructure of Acker's (2012) theory of gendered organizations. The gendered structures within organizations can influence how individuals present their own gender identities and how they view others' identities. This can be seen when one's gender identity affects the way they act in management positions or how they may respond to being managed by the same or different gender. Gender identity is established early on in life and for many people it does not change, but the ideas and roles associated with one's gender identity possess much more flexibility (Kite, 2001). As children enter adolescence this differentiation begins to occur in the roles and traits associated with one's gender. As puberty begins, children often feel strong pressure to conform to societal standards of gender roles, but as they progress through puberty this pressure to conform usually lessens (Kite, 2001). Students participate in SBAE during this period of self-discovery about their own gender identities making this substructure especially relevant. Using Acker's (2012) theory of gendered organizations as a framework, this study aims to describe the relationship between the experiences of women students and their gender identity within SBAE.

*Gendered subtext* within Acker's (2012) theory of gendered organizations is similar to the gendered substructure but plays its own role in gendered organizations. The gendered subtext

can be part of the gendered substructure, but is not solely based within it (Acker, 2012). The gendered subtext includes any written information, guides, resources, or common practices used within an organization that either implicitly or explicitly add to the gendered nature of it as a whole (Acker, 2012). While gendered subtext is different from the substructure that guided this study, it plays a part in the gendered substructure that did guide the research. Also, most SBAE students do not directly interact with the gendered subtext in SBAE. Instead, gendered subtexts are relayed to them through their program's advisor. Due to this indirect interaction, much of students' experiences with the gendered subtext in SBAE will be through the four components of the gendered substructure. Therefore, gendered subtext may present itself contextually within participant interviews.

Acker's (2012) idea of *organizational logic* did not directly guide this study as the exploration and data collected focused on the local high school level and not on the logic and structure in the school's administration, the Arizona Association FFA, or the Arizona Department of Education as a whole. Acker's *gender neutral, abstract worker* idea was also not used to guide this research as many parts of it do not directly apply to high school students or SBAE (Acker, 2012).

This research builds upon on previous work done by Mars and Hart (2017) through the use of Acker's (1990; 2012) theory of gendered organizations. While I used Acker's (1990; 2012) theory of gendered organizations to explore how the gendered substructure affects SBAE at the high school level, Mars and Hart (2017) utilized Acker's (1990; 2012) theory to critically analyze graduate STEM-based agricultural education. By doing so, they proved the theory's applicability within education systems.

## Methods

I conducted this research using critical theory, which is not tied to any specific methodology. It can be applied at the micro level to individuals and at the macro level to local systems and contexts or to entire systems (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). More specifically, I approached this study through a critical feminist lens. Critical feminist theory aims to describe inequalities between genders and explore avenues to create more equal systems (Martin, 2003). While critical feminist theory often contributes to the academic field in which it was conducted, the ultimate goal of critical feminist work is to create positive social change (Ferguson, 2017). Using critical feminist theory allowed me to evaluate the roles that gender plays in education and how institutions may create inequalities between genders (Creswell, 2013). I used Acker's (1990; 2012) theory of gendered organizations to critically examine women students' experiences in SBAE. The components of the gendered substructure (organizing processes, organization culture, interactions on the job, and gender identity) within Acker's (2012) theory guided the research questions, interview protocol, and data analysis.

As the researcher in this qualitative study, I am the main tool for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Because I have this role, it is important for me to disclose my positionality to avoid bias in the collection and analysis of the data (Tracy, 2010). I identify as a white, cisgender man and have been involved in SBAE for nine years. I was a student in high school SBAE, a state officer for Arizona Association FFA, earned a bachelor's and master's degree in agricultural education, and was recently hired as a high school agriculture teacher. By reflecting on and evaluating my positionality throughout the study, I was better able to reduce bias (Tracy, 2010) and bracket my experiences (Creswell, 2013).

## Participants

Participants in this study included 15 women who had participated in SBAE in Arizona. I selected the participants using maximum variation purposeful sampling to obtain data from the most information rich sources that would reveal the greatest widespread patterns and themes (Merriam, 2009). Utilizing the Arizona Association FFA member roster, I identified individuals from various geographic areas across Arizona, from programs located in various community sizes (e.g., rural, urban, and suburban), and from areas of differing socioeconomic levels to ensure maximum variation (Merriam, 2009). All participants must have been at least 18 years old and enrolled in at least three years of SBAE at the high school level. For recency of memory, all participants must have been no more than three years out of high school SBAE. I chose these parameters to ensure that each participant could legally participate without consent from a guardian and had spent adequate time in SBAE to have meaningful experiences in the classroom, SAE, and FFA. See Table 1. for a detailed description of participants, including pseudonyms, years enrolled in SBAE, and SBAE program location (e.g., rural, urban, or suburban).

**Table 1.**

Pseudonym	Years Enrolled in SBAE	SBAE Program Location	Single or Multi-teacher program	Teacher Gender
Fatima	4	Urban	Multi-teacher	Women/Men
Gabriel	3	Urban	Single teacher	Man
Erica	4	Rural	Single teacher	Man
Ali	4	Suburban	Multi-teacher	Women/Men
Beatriz	4	Rural	Single teacher	Woman
Elleanor	4	Urban	Multi-teacher	Women/Men
Scarlett	4	Suburban	Single teacher	Man
Penelope	4	Urban	Multi-teacher	Women/Men
Hazel	4	Urban	Multi-teacher	Women/Men

Maya	4	Urban	Single teacher	Woman
Claire	4	Rural	Single teacher	Woman
Remi	4	Rural	Single teacher	Man
Ximena	3	Urban	Single teacher	Woman
Vera	4	Urban	Multi-teacher	Women/Men
Octavia	4	Suburban	Single teacher	Man

*Participant Demographics*

**Data Collection and Analysis**

I collected data through in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. I chose one-on-one interviews due to the sensitive nature of this topic and to give participants the time and space for honest reflection on their experiences. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes in length, were conducted February through April 2022, and were transcribed verbatim. I utilized Zoom video conferencing software to conduct all interviews due to the participants being located across the state of Arizona and to obtain the most information dense data from the participants as possible. I constructed the interview questions to capture the participants experiences in all three components of SBAE (i.e., classroom/laboratory instruction, SAE, and FFA) and elicit how Acker’s (2012) gendered substructure of gendered organizations manifested within the participants’ experiences. Example interview questions included: How did the rules and code of conduct in FFA affect your experiences as a woman? How did your beliefs on the role of women change during your time in FFA, SAE’s, and classroom/laboratory activities? I utilized Nvivo 12 qualitative data management software throughout data collection and analysis.

I analyzed the data using critical feminist theory, and more specifically Acker’s (1990; 2012) theory of gendered organizations. I coded the data using a three-stage coding process of initial codes, categories, and themes. First, I examined all data and created 89 initial coded segments. Next, I reduced those initial codes into 15 categories by removing any over-lap or

redundancies and looking for patterns and relationships across codes. Lastly, I analyzed the categories and condensed them into five themes that served as the basis of my findings (Creswell, 2013). I analyzed the data using both deductive and inductive coding techniques. Deductive analysis was conducted using Acker's (1990; 2012) theory of gendered organizations, including the four components of the gendered substructure (Gelo et al., 2008). I also engaged in inductive analysis to discover themes that organically emerged from the data and did not directly fit into Acker's (2012) theory (Gelo et al., 2008). I practiced reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis process by examining my own position within the data and to ensure the findings were representative of the participants experiences (Tracy, 2010).

### **Trustworthiness**

I utilized three strategies to build trustworthiness: rich and thick descriptions in the form of participant quotes, member checking of emergent findings with participants, and memoing throughout data collection and analysis (Tracy, 2010). Rich, thick descriptions in the form of participants' quotes can be seen in the findings. These participant voices were transcribed verbatim and shared to accurately relay the experiences of the participants in their own words (Tracy, 2010). Member checking was used to ensure that these quotes represented the participants, and I did not extrapolate meaning from them that was not there (Tracy, 2010). Member checks were completed prior to and after data were analyzed to ensure accuracy and credible messaging (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, memoing was used throughout the research process. Memoing involved taking notes during the interviews and data analysis of ideas, phrases, or concepts that would later be useful for coding and identifying themes (Creswell, 2013). Memoing also allowed for reflection on ideas and my positionality, as well as easier communication and continuity of concepts throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

## Findings

Five overarching themes emerged from the data describing the experiences of recent women graduates of Arizona SBAE programs: *Advisors perpetuate the Culture of SBAE in Their Programs; Differing Expectations Exist Between Women and Men Students in SBAE; Enforcement of FFA Official Dress Disproportionately Affects Women Students; Gendered Interactions with Advisors, Peers, and the Community; and Women Not Seen in the Same Spaces as Men Within the Agriculture Industry*. These five themes were seen throughout the total program of SBAE (i.e., classroom/laboratory instruction, SAE, and FFA). Acker's (1990; 2012) gendered substructure components (organizing processes, organizational culture, interactions on the job, and gender identity) that guided the study were present throughout all of the themes. As I completed this research using qualitative methods, the results cannot be generalized, but they may be transferable to similar situations. Data gained through the interviews was also limited by the memory of the participants as they were asked to think back on their experiences in SBAE from prior years. The requirements for this study included participation in SBAE for at least three years, so any experiences that led women students to leave SBAE early were not captured.

### **Advisors perpetuate the Culture of SBAE**

The first emergent theme was the participants' advisors (i.e., teachers) were the ones perpetuating the culture of SBAE in their programs. Sometimes this culture was positive in nature, but often it contained overt and covert gendered subtext. The advisor was the primary individual who shaped how the students interacted with one another and what the program as a whole valued. Although the advisors themselves are influenced and by the institutionalized culture in the SBAE profession. In an extreme example, Octavia shared that her advisor would

make sexist comments and encourage other students to go along with those comments, making Octavia feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. She said,

My advisor, he was just a very racist and sexist old man. ...he a lot of times would make comments that were, like, upsetting. I was like, okay, I don't really want to be involved in this. But then he would also get some of the students to go along with him. So, that made it a little more irritating, I guess, because it was like he was kind of influencing all of the students around me, and it made me not really want to be around those students too.

While outright comments of racism and sexism from advisors was not common amongst participants, this participant voice displays just how much power advisors have in shaping the culture of SBAE programs.

Penelope explained how much her chapter changed as they transitioned between advisors and by comparing differing approaches, highlights the influence an advisor has on perpetuating the gendered substructure within the organizational culture of SBAE. The SBAE program started as a place that she did not feel welcome as a woman, then when her next advisor was hired, the program became a place where everyone belonged, exemplified through an increase in student membership. She reflected,

Up until the end of my sophomore year, only the men were allowed to drive the tractors because she [advisor] would tell us you have to have this license, but she would only ever ask the men [to get the license]. So up until we got a new advisor, was I ever allowed to drive the tractor [shook head no]? But until I got a new adviser, a lot of the times it was very much like, here's the dainty girls. Here's

the big guys. The big guys can do the real work. The girls stay behind. But I got a new advisor, my junior, senior year. She really changed things around.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Fatima shared that her advisors in a multi-teacher program held the whole chapter to a high standard, regardless of gender, creating an environment that perpetuated hard work rather than gendered aspects of SBAE culture. She said, "...the advisors really, I think they really made it clear to us that this program needs to be held to high standards and they held us all to high standards." Fatima further explained, "I think that my advisors had a lot of impact, especially the engineering advisor. There was just no difference whether you were a man or a woman."

Advisors also perpetuated gendered aspects of wider SBAE culture in their programs through the way they assigned roles, jobs, and tasks. Many of the participants discussed their advisors assigning more physical, mechanical, livestock, and/or production agriculture related tasks and roles to men students rather than women students. The participants often encountered advisors asking for "a few strong boys" to help with something. Scarlett said, "It was like, you know, we have to go move this. Are you guys willing to do that? Or 'hey, I need someone to throw this ag mech project together real quick', and he sends a group of guys..." Erica discussed the gendered assignment of officer positions in her FFA chapter, showcasing how this phenomenon was present within the FFA leadership component of SBAE. She shared,

Positions seem to kind of fall in a certain theme... For some reason, Treasurer [FFA office] was always a boy, and Sentinel [FFA office] was usually a boy as well. And it was more of like the positions, like Reporter and Secretary [FFA offices] those were mainly girls.

Ali shared similar experiences with her SBAE program, “Sometimes the teachers would specifically ask for guys or strongmen to help move things, even if it [strength] wasn't really required, but we're strong!” Penelope also described an experience where her advisor would choose men students over women students for physical tasks. She said, “Classic age-old phrase of like, I need some strong men to move these things. There were times, I would say, where my best friend and I were overlooked for things because we looked very weak and fragile...” Penelope further explained that this was advisor driven because some men students were often assigned to roles that they did not want. She shared, “I was the poultry intern, and he [another student] was... the compost manager, him, and this other guy. And they were like, I don't want to do this. Like, they liked flowers and stuff.” Ali did reveal a positive experience where her woman advisor did not perpetuate this gendered part of SBAE culture by refraining from assigning tasks based on gender like many of the other participants experienced. She said, “Ms. Lauda, she knows girls can do things, so she would just be like, oh, go do this, no matter what your gender was.”

### **Differing Expectations Exist Between Women and Men Students in SBAE**

Another theme that emerged from the data was that expectations differed for women and men students in SBAE. Many participants reported that expectations set by their advisors, other students, and themselves were more stringent for women than their men peers in FFA, leadership activities, and in the classroom during non-production agriculture and non-mechanics content. Vera expressed that the women on her FFA officer team received less leeway than the men officers. She shared, “... the boys know like they could slack off and it was okay but if those three specific girls, the president, vice president, secretary, if any of those girls showed any slack, they would get reamed.” Some participants also shared that advisors and students alike

held lower expectations for women students during production agriculture and mechanics content in the classroom. Maya described this sentiment held by her advisor, "...he's like a boy and that's kind of stuff you should kind of know or be good at versus like a girl who shouldn't know how to do that, so they might need more time to work with it." Claire had an experience where some men students expected less of her while completing a building project in class. She reflected,

When I carry just one cinderblock, they didn't say anything, but then I realized the guys were carrying two at a time. So, I decided to carry two at a time once. And one of the guys only carried one at a time, right? And they, like, made fun of it because even Claire's carrying two at a time. And I was like, wait a minute. When I was carrying one, you didn't give me a hard time, but he carried one once and then you're comparing his level to mine. They didn't expect me, but they expected, like the other guys, to at least be the same level as me, which I thought was interesting.

Expectations for women students were also different when it came to SAE projects. Multiple participants expressed that women students were not expected to be involved with large stock animal projects. Women students were expected to have small stock animal projects or work in other supporting roles. Erica explained that when she raised a steer it was very unusual, and men were surprised to see her in that position. She said,

I raised steers...usually when you see a guy showing a steer or something, the stereotypical response like really pay no mind, you're like, OK, cool. But then when it's a girl and I'm short and much, much smaller than the steer, their initial response is like, she's brave. Like she's brave to do that.

Gabriel further displayed the gender roles present in SAE through her SAE project in auctioneering. She discussed that peers and community members expected her to run charity auctions rather than livestock auctions. She elaborated, "... a lot of women are doing charity events nowadays and those are very popular. But I want to sell cattle. I want to sell large stock. And girls haven't really been in that industry as a part of auctioneering.

Ali shared that along with expectations for women to have specific projects based on gender, there were also expectations for men students *not* to have certain SAE's. She said, Typically, it was looked down on if men would show like rabbits or chickens in our community...if you're a guy, you can't show a goat. It kind of looks weird... but for girls, there are specific SAE projects with animals that you were just supposed to go into.

Vera also expressed that her advisors' "old-school" nature led to expectations for men students to participate in agricultural mechanics, but also were not expected to participate in floriculture She shared, "They're both kind of old school. You know, when it comes to like that kind of stuff. So, it was like only girls on floriculture, only guys on ag mech, you know."

Many of the participants also put expectations on themselves to work hard and do well to prove that they were not "less than" as a woman. Scarlett shared that she had this feeling as she progressed through SBAE. She reflected,

...growing up in the [hometown] ag lands, I believe that is heavily skewed male. So, it kind of in high school when you're grown up through it, especially in today's day and age. I think a lot of us girls kind of were like, in spite of that, we were going to do the most that we could in high school to prove them wrong.

Beatriz said that she also put expectations on herself to do well in the agricultural mechanics CDE to disprove gender bias. She shared,

...I don't have to be the best, but I will not be the worst. I will not be the reason the team loses. I don't want them to have to be able to say it was me. I don't want them to say it was Beatriz as a person or Beatriz as a woman.

Elleanor also had this expectation for herself, "...well, that's how it is, you know, doesn't change my stance. I'm going to make sure that I do the best job that I can... I'm not going to let it stop me from going forward..." Gabriel shared a similar sentiment, "I've kind of been like, dang, I just want to, I want to go beat them all. I want to show them a girl can be as good as them..."

### **Enforcement of FFA Official Dress Disproportionately Affects Women Students**

Almost all of the participants interviewed reported that enforcement of FFA official dress affected them to some degree, ranging from slight annoyance to lasting physical and emotional pain. Even though the rules for official dress were changed in 2019 allowing every student to wear what they preferred regardless of gender identity (National FFA Organization, 2019), many participants explained that their advisors still forced them to wear a skirt and pantyhose if they were women. This shows that although the explicit subtext within the organizing process gendering official dress for women students had been removed, the implicit gendered subtext restricting official dress still remains within the organizational culture of SBAE. Participants discussed that they did not feel comfortable or welcome to wear anything other than a skirt, or they saw other SBAE programs and their FFA chapters still enforcing the former rules on official dress. Claire stated, "...it was nice when it was changed to pants later, but even then, we still were required by advisors to wear [skirts]." Vera also expressed that even after the rule change,

her advisors would not allow her to wear pants. Penelope explained that not being able to wear what she preferred caused her to be insecure and anxious. She shared,

I remember my freshman year I was pretty insecure about my body. So, when it came to the [official dress] aspect, I was really nervous about it, and I wanted to wear pants. And so, I did a bunch of research and found out they had recently made it so women could wear pants, but my advisor did not allow it.

In addition to reinforcing stereotypes on how woman should dress in a professional setting, enforcing gendered official dress also placed a financial burden on women students that was not equal to that of the men students. Ali explained the cost of always wearing pantyhose in official dress. She said, “One of the main issues was that typically [pantyhose] are expensive, so like buying [pantyhose] for the different CDEs and FFA events were kind of annoying, especially since they rip a lot.” Ximena further elaborated on the cost, “The financial situation of your students...I remember when I bought my first black skirt. That was like thirty-five or forty dollars, and I was like, oh, my goodness.”

Women students also experienced extra requirements or expectations about their appearance that men students did not share. These included specific types of heels, makeup, or hair styles that are not explicitly required for FFA official dress within the official FFA Manual (National FFA Organization, 2022). Erica explained, “It just was interesting to be automatically put into that category. And requiring skirts, heels, always have your makeup done, have your hair done, like look presentable.” After asking her to elaborate further on this comment, she provided the following example,

Like on an FFA trip, we were there and one of the girls had her hair up and like no makeup on, and one of the guys was like, ‘You can't do that. You can't travel

without makeup on, you have to have your hair done.' Like, we all have to look presentable, but our presentable takes 30-45, almost an hour, longer than their presentable.

Ali also discussed an observation she made of other FFA chapters. She said, "I know some of the chapters would make the girls, put their hair in buns to look very professional. I remember talking to some of the different chapters throughout high school. So that was always weird to me." Eleanor shared that along with still enforcing skirts, her advisor had preferences on appearance too, including wearing heels. The extra expectations for their appearance that the participants experienced placed another hurdle to their full participation in all aspects of SBAE that required official dress.

### **Gendered Interactions with Advisors, the Community, and Peers**

Many of the women participants recounted experiences where they were treated differently than the men students in their SBAE programs. These gendered interactions occurred with advisors, peers, and community members. One way that gendered interactions transpired was through comments made by their advisors. Participants explained that most of the comments made to them were meant to be positive, but still made the participants feel less welcomed or discouraged from SBAE participation. Remi shared an experience where a comment made by her advisor may have had good intentions, but instead made her feel singled out and less welcome because she was a woman. She said,

"...he said the girls were better welders because they're more detail oriented, and they'll take more time, and they don't get easily frustrated and all this stuff. But had he not said that he probably would have just gone on that day, but he made it

seem like he needed to say something to me instead of just like, oh, she's a typical everyday average Joe, you know?

Erica also dealt with comments from her advisor regarding her gender that on the surface seemed like compliments, but revealed gender bias. She shared,

He'd be like, Oh, look at you carrying a bag of food, which was only like 40 something pounds. He's like, 'Look at you. That's what I like to see.' And like, I love being celebrated for that stuff. But like, how am I so much different than a boy?

Elleanor said that her advisors' negative interactions with her and preference towards men students were part of the reason that her participation in SBAE declined during her time in the program. She said,

I've spoken to other girls that I went to school with, and he [advisor] was very, you know, he knew who he could be an asshole to basically. ... he wants the guys involved. But the girls ended up doing the work and then he'd be like, 'Oh, well, thanks.'

Men advisors preferring men students was shared by other participants as well. Vera said, "I remember Mr. Schumacher [advisor] favoring the men a lot more... It did seem like they cared more about the issues that the guys brought up." Octavia shared that her advisor would let more men students do whatever they wanted in class because they had similar interests to the advisor and were better able to converse with him.

The participants also encountered men advisors taking over what they were doing or explaining it to them even though the women students knew what they were doing, indicative of

mansplaining which is the act of a man talking down to a woman in a condescending or patronizing manner (Koc-Michalska et al., 2021). Ali shared this experience from her SAE project with her advisor, “He [advisor] would always like correct how I was doing something, or he knew better basically. Even though, sometimes I would just know how to do something, he would go through and explain it all over again.” Ali went on to clarify that this behavior was not present in her observations of her advisor and her men peers, leading her to believe the interactions were based on her being a woman.

Participants also appreciated when advisors interacted with and supported students equitably but did so in a manner that gave the appearance of equality, no matter the gender of the student. Fatima explained that her advisor would offer extra help and encouragement to those that needed it in their mechanics class, but it was done in a way that was discrete as to not single out the individual that was receiving extra attention, regardless of gender. She reflected,

I think the students who needed to have that experience did get that experience, but I never saw it. He [advisor] was so good at doing that stuff in private or in passing in a quick way and easy way. And I didn't even know really until I looked back and was like, wow, he really did do all that for me and like talking to other people who went through the program. And it's like, well, he did that for you too. And I didn't even know. And it's, he was, he's an amazing guy. He's an amazing person.

Remi shared that she also had equal opportunities with her advisor, “I think Mr. Riccardo had a really good way of meeting the needs of both genders. I guess you could say he was very much in it for the right reason... overall, he provides an opportunity for everybody.”

The interactions women students had with community members, especially men, impacted their time in SBAE as well, as community involvement is a vital component of SBAE programs. Participants shared that men in the community often mansplained production agriculture concepts to them and sometimes took over their SAE projects, especially livestock projects. Ali shared this experience with her goat at county fair,

Half the time people would just take the goat from me and like, help do it for me instead of just like letting me struggle, I guess. Whereas most of the guys were just like, Oh, you know how to do it? Like, figure it out, even though you're struggling, like, we're not going to help kind of thing. Whereas if you're a girl, we'll take hold and basically just do it for you.

Erica described a similar experience with her SAE steer project,

Even if like my steer something started to get a little bit out of hand like... other men would jump and be like, Oh, do you need help? Are you ok? Like, which is fine. I appreciate that. But that same response isn't the same with boys or guys, you know?

Ximena described a time during her SAE project that it felt as though a community member assumed she was the assistant because she was a woman. She said,

[A community member] came over and he was like, ... What are you doing here? I explained it. And then he was like, Oh, are you his assistant? And I was like, Why would you just assume I'm his assistant. We're *partners*? So that made me really sad.

Peers themselves also engaged in gendered interactions. Erica discussed a time when a male student made a comment at an FFA event that made her feel unwelcome and self-conscious

about her desire to become an agriculture teacher and FFA advisor. She said, "...the boy next to me said I, I just can't imagine having a woman advisor. I just don't think it would be fun, like it would not be fun to have a woman advisor." This quote in particular shows how even comments not made directly to students can have a profound effect on their experience in SBAE. Vera shared that overall, men students in her SBAE program were not welcoming to women students. She reflected, "I remember a lot of the men in FFA and my chapter just like that specifically were pretty toxic towards women." Beatriz explained that the men students in her agricultural mechanics classes teased her for being in that space. She shared, "I got teased a lot by the guys for just like doing ag mechanics and being in the shop... about like, Are you really a girl?" These gendered interactions shared by the participants occurred in all three components of SBAE and between everyone involved, creating negative impacts and barriers for women students to navigate while learning.

### **Women Not Seen in the Same Spaces as Men Within the Agriculture Industry**

Most of the participants discussed a lack of women representation in the agriculture industry as a whole, but specifically a lack of women in production agriculture roles. The participants reported seeing women primarily in roles that kept them inside an office or at a desk rather than in the field. Claire shared her experience, "So a lot of the women were like the farmer wives, and they helped a lot with like the money side of things." Maya also described a similar perspective,

My initial impressions were that ag was a white male industry. And it's like there were farmers and farmers' wives kind of idea... a lot of ways I see women specifically in [agriculture]... it was more in roles like Ginnie Wolff's role, like

that kind of advocacy, lobbying type of way versus necessarily the more production side.

Hazel also had limited exposure to women in agricultural production-based positions, seeing women mostly in National FFA positions, Farm Bureau, and lobbyist positions.

Ali explained that the lack of representation in her community deterred her from becoming a farmer,

I did want to be a farmer. I decided against that. I think that part of the reason why just because women aren't seen as the main farmers, I guess, in our community.

We all have like the farmer's wife, and she'll go out and do like the same exact thing that her husband can do, but it's not her main role. I guess she's more like the office type person. So that was definitely one of the main reasons I decided not to be a farmer.

The lack of diversity in women's roles did not necessarily keep women in the agriculture industry from impacting the participants. Penelope expressed, "...some of the most inspirational people to me in ag are females, but a lot of those people are also the people behind the desks and not in the fields." When the participants were able to have experiences with women involved in male dominated areas of agriculture it had a positive and encouraging impact on their time in SBAE. Octavia described how seeing her older sister involved in agriculture made her excited that women choose to go into agriculture on their own, not just because they married someone involved in the agriculture industry. Octavia also had a positive experience with her woman CDE coach, which made a career in forestry more realistic for her to obtain. She said, "...our coach for forestry was a lady who worked for the Forest Service who was in charge of the area. She was such an example of a woman like kind of running everything. So, it didn't seem unattainable."

Beatriz also shared a positive experience she had with a woman in her community. She said, “There was a lady in my community who would let me use her welding stuff, and she had been a welder before she retired herself. And so that was really good. I really liked learning from her.” Ximena discussed how her school’s principal was an incredibly positive figure for her while in SBAE. She reflected,

Ms. Hunt is really, really cool. And she used to work for the fish and game. So, she was definitely somebody that I like really latched on to as a role model... that does hold a lot of weight for me because it just it's another thing that's like, Oh, we're similar I could be that person.

Some participants expressed that their FFA chapters were often more inclusive than the agriculture industry itself. So, once they actually entered the agriculture industry as adults, they were faced with discrimination, misogyny, and/or sexism that was not present in their SBAE program. Fatima described her experience when she began a welding program in college. She said,

FFA actually really set up an understanding for me that I could do any of this, and there was plenty of women doing it too. Then getting out of the program [SBAE] and just being in life and in college and seeing that it's not really like that actually.

It was really surprising, and honestly, really hard.

While the inclusivity present within SBAE from some participants was positive, it illustrates yet another challenge for women students once they leave SBAE and join the agriculture industry as young professionals or college students.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how the gendered substructure in SBAE affects the experiences of women SBAE students in Arizona, with attention to the gendered substructure present in the classroom/laboratory, SAE, and FFA. The findings of this research are limited to the women that participated and their SBAE programs. It is also important to remember that all women are not homogenous and instead have different experiences, come from diverse backgrounds, and hold different values. Although this study identified themes in the experiences of women SBAE students in Arizona by looking at similarities, each participant's experience in SBAE, and what they gained from that experience, was unique. All four components of the gendered substructure from Acker's (1990; 2012) theory of gendered organizations (organizing processes, organizational culture, interactions on the job, and gender identity) surfaced during interviews and were present in each theme that emerged during data analysis. While most of the participants reported that their overall time in SBAE was considered positive, the gendered substructure did cause negative experiences and prevented the participants from having all the same opportunities as men students in their SBAE programs.

Gendered enforcement of FFA official dress and differing expectations on appearance for women students arose as a major negative impact during the participants' time in SBAE. Past research has shown individuals that conform to cultural ideals of appearance, including societal ideas of how men and women should look, benefit from institutional advantages in the workplace (Kwan & Trautner, 2009). Based on the findings, this phenomenon also holds true within SBAE. The participants who felt more comfortable in a skirt, pantyhose, heels, and makeup had an easier time participating in SBAE during activities that required FFA official dress. Participants who felt less comfortable experienced extra barriers to feel confident in

official dress and also faced additional challenges to ensure their appearance fit the culture and expectations of their advisor and SBAE program. Even though the rules have changed to allow women students to wear slacks as a part of FFA official dress (National FFA, 2019), many SBAE teachers still had organizing processes in place explicitly requiring women students to wear a skirt and pantyhose, or the SBAE's culture, perpetuated by the teacher, did not welcome slacks as a legitimate choice.

Research has also revealed that women are often held to additional expectations on their appearance that men do not experience in the workplace (Trautner & Kwan, 2010). This was also found in this study with women students reporting that they were expected to follow rules for their appearance that are not a part of FFA official dress, such as wearing makeup or particular hair styles. This increases the amount of effort it takes for women students to simply participate in activities and also intensifies the advantages for those students that more easily fit the gendered expectations placed upon them. Participants also expressed that these requirements for women students came with an extra financial burden; therefore, women students coming from more privileged economic backgrounds will more easily meet these expectations and reap the advantages of conforming to societal standards (Kwan & Trautner, 2009).

Based on the participant's experiences, not all aspects of SBAE have kept up with or changed to serve the increasing number of women students in SBAE. While prior research shows that women students are able to hold and succeed in FFA leadership roles (Ricketts et al., 2004); women were not given the same opportunities as their men counterparts to hold roles or complete tasks outside of the leadership realm. The inclusion of women students in agriculture mechanics and production agriculture roles remains limited. The lack of opportunities for women students to participate in these male dominated spaces can lead to a lack of learning

opportunities, which is the goal of education. Job involvement, organizational commitment, and the work environment are major factors affecting pre-training self-efficacy and pre-training motivation (Tracey et al., 2001). SBAE is failing to create a work environment supportive to women students, commit as an organization to show women that they are welcomed in all spaces, and highlight women involvement in agriculture mechanics and production agriculture careers. Therefore, even if women students are given the space to participate in agricultural mechanics and production agriculture through SBAE, they will not fully achieve all learning outcomes because they are not able to build the pre-training self-efficacy and motivation needed (Tracey et al., 2001). Phenomena seen by the participants that heavily affected their ability to achieve pre-training motivation and self-efficacy were physical expectations set for them and the focus on demonstrations of strength. Participants felt that they were not given the opportunity to demonstrate their physical abilities, felt they did not have the physical abilities required for a task, or were singled out when they did demonstrate their strength. All of which negatively impacted the work environment, organizational commitment, and their feeling of belonging in the space, leading to fewer opportunities to obtain new technical skills.

The under representation of women in the agriculture industry (Fremstad & Paul, 2020) was clearly seen by the participants and was a reason that some participants changed their career plans. It has been observed that the relegation of women in the agriculture industry to “bookkeeping” and “farm wife” roles has made women feel uncomfortable in the agriculture industry and in non-traditional agricultural education settings (Trauger et al., 2008). This lack of representation also caused the participants in this study to feel unwelcome in those settings and in other traditional SBAE settings. The representation of women in SBAE classrooms and the agriculture industry affected the participant’s experiences and showed that the gendered structure

in SBAE and the agriculture industry are complexly intertwined. It is still unclear whether the agriculture industry or SBAE is the main factor driving the gendered representation of women in the agricultural workforce.

Some of the gendered trends in the agriculture industry were also seen in the participants' SAE projects. One trend mirrored in the participants' experiences was the tendency for men to take on more physically demanding and production agriculture roles. Another trend was the expectation that men raise large livestock species while women are relegated to small livestock species (Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Trauger et al., 2008). This illustrates that SBAE has not expanded the participants' horizons in the agriculture industry; rather, it has reinforced the gendered trends and culture seen in the agriculture industry. Although, one trend that SBAE had not reinforced was the gender pay gap. Past research has found that women farm operators made less money than their men counterparts (Fremstad & Paul, 2020). Participants in this study did not report a difference in compensation between men and women students during their SAE projects. Fremstad and Paul (2020) found that the gender pay gap was smaller in community supported agriculture. None of the participants had SAE projects that followed the same community supported agriculture format described by Fremstad and Paul (2020), but participants shared that their SBAE programs had strong community engagement. Currently it is not known if this community engagement may be leading to the elimination of a gender pay gap in SBAE or if women students' lack of access to more physically demanding and large livestock-based SAE projects affects their earning potential within SBAE.

The findings of this study also showed that the gendered structure in SBAE culture have caused gendered trends in content interest and participation to continue with the participant's programs, even years after the gendered content trends were first described in the literature

(Ricketts et al., 2004). The findings also echo previous research observing far more women students in officer positions than men students in SBAE (Velez et al., 2018), through high FFA participation and multiple students holding officer positions for participants in this study. Some participants explained that seeing the increased number of women Arizona FFA state officers over the last decade (B. Matos, Personal Communication, December 7, 2021) pushed them to be an officer in their SBAE program, showing that positive representation can have real effects on the success and experiences of women SBAE students.

Just as homophily with the same gender has been seen among students' choice of friends in schools (McCormick et al., 2015), homophily along gender was observed in this study as well. It was not always reported as a negative part of the participants' experiences, but it affected how students interacted with each other, interactions on the job, and sometimes affected their decision on what aspects of SBAE in which they participated. Are more women students participating in women dominated SBAE activities because the activities are women dominated? Are more men students participating in men dominated SBAE activities because the activities are men dominated? Further research is needed to determine if homophily is a major factor in the continued content engagement trends and preferences between women and men students (Ricketts et al., 2004).

Since SBAE in Arizona has a higher number of men teachers than general education (Bennet et al., 2020; B. Matos, Personal Communication, December 7, 2021) and SBAE teachers perpetuate the culture of SBAE, it is possible that this gender ratio and influence over program culture is leading to systemically gendered managerial power and organizing processes in SBAE. The ratio of men to women SBAE teachers in Arizona may also allow for the possibility of more unexamined gender beliefs to affect the organizational culture. The experiences of the

participants also match what has been observed at the collegiate level in prior research. In Oklahoma female students faced discrimination from their male peers and from supervising practitioners during student teaching (Kelsey, 2006). Women in agricultural education and Extension education graduate programs experienced “living in a man’s world”, “the Good Ol’ Boys Club” environment, microaggressions, and questioning of their and other women’s competency (Cline et al., 2020). The finding of this study show that these gendered experiences do not begin at the collegiate level but may also be present throughout SBAE at the secondary level. Further research is needed to determine if these negative experiences for women students originate in secondary programs and continue during post-secondary experiences or if they arise independently in both settings.

Although Kite (2001) wrote that youths’ pressure to conform usually lessens as they move through adolescence, this research found that during their time in SBAE the participants faced more pressure to conform to how the agriculture industry sees women. Many women students were motivated to work hard and pursue new opportunities by this pressure to conform. While the participants noted that fighting against the pressure to conform and fighting against stereotypes was part of what caused them to achieve success in SBAE, the participants did not see this same pressure applied to men students. Although the pressure to conform may appear to be helpful for women students in this study, it is important to note that women students should not be subjected to negative motivation that tries to make them conform solely because they identify as a woman. There are many theories on student motivation and strategies to best utilize it, but negative motivation based on gender is not accepted as an effective way to motivate students (Schunk, 2012). While prior research in two Missouri SBAE programs found that students there had different perceptions on how individuals of different genders should act as

leaders (Kagay et al., 2015), most of the women in this study did not share this sentiment. The participants reported that most of the perceptions on leadership between genders came from SBAE teachers, community members, and a lesser amount from men peers. The women in this study did not necessarily see leadership tied to their or other's gender identity.

The participants in this study came from SBAE programs with a single teacher, multiple teachers, men teachers, women teachers, and both men and women teachers. The participants also came from programs located in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Based on the findings, these differences between SBAE programs did not affect how the gendered substructure within SBAE impacted the participants' experiences. This lack of difference in experiences between programs showed that the gendered substructure can persist no matter the gender of teachers, number of teachers, or location of the SBAE program.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There is a lack of research on women students' experiences in SBAE; therefore, my first recommendation is to expand research exploring the experiences of women in SBAE. By better understanding the experience of all students, it becomes possible to create a more positive and equitable learning environment. Some participants acknowledged their privilege during interviews, identifying as straight and cis gendered women, because they felt that women who identified differently may have fewer positive experiences in SBAE. There is a lack of research on the experiences of individuals who do not identify as cis gendered in SBAE. Due to this it is recommended that further research be conducted looking into the experiences of students that are not cis gendered or do not identify with the gender binary.

Based on the lack of meaningful differences between the experiences in urban, suburban, and rural programs, it is recommended that future research further investigate the experiences of

women students in different areas. As this study cannot be generalized, future research should investigate how the area and community a program is located in affects the experiences of its students and how experiences of women students differ between areas.

I also recommend that all future research in SBAE recognizes the intersectionality of the issues it explores. Intersectionality matters in research because it allows researchers to acknowledge and investigate how multiple social factors often compound to affect marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 2017). Factors such as race, class, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. may all impact a single problem, but if research only examines one factor the reality and complexity of the problem will be lost (Crenshaw, 2017).

Due to the difference in expectations that exist between women and men students observed in this study, further research should also investigate whether the higher expectations of women students in leadership and FFA activities are leading to the increased participation of women students and decreased participation of men students in leadership roles in SBAE. Researchers should also explore if the lower expectations of women students in agricultural mechanics and production agriculture activities is driving the decreased number of women students involved and increased number of men students involved in those activities.

Finally, any women students who decided to leave SBAE before their senior year of high school were not included in the research due to the research parameters. Therefore, I recommend that a follow-up study is conducted to explore the experiences of women students that have left SBAE programs early, so their experiences can be better understood. This research could illuminate where SBAE programs are failing to meet the needs of students and reveal how SBAE can evolve to effectively serve all future students from a variety of backgrounds.

## **Recommendations for Future Practice**

SBAE teachers hold most of the managerial power at the local level and perpetuate the culture of SBAE. Therefore, they have the opportunity to make a significant impact on their students through creating inclusive spaces in the classroom, FFA, and SAE that are supportive, welcoming of all students, and do not perpetuate gendered aspects of SBAE culture. I recommend that teachers continually reevaluate their personal biases and unexamined gender beliefs to ensure that they are not reinforcing gender stereotypes or gendered SBAE culture in their programs. One recommended practice is to assign tasks equally between men and women students. This research discovered that more physical, mechanical, and production agriculture roles were assigned to men students by teachers in the participants' SBAE programs. A more equitable distribution of roles can be achieved by encouraging students to pursue roles, and assigning students to roles, based on the student's interests and skills. This includes gendered assignment of officer roles within the officer election process. Common gendered trends in officer roles seen in this study were assigning women students to the secretary and reporter positions. At the state level, the secretary and reporter positions have also commonly been assigned to women (B. Matos, Personal Communication, December 7, 2021). SBAE teachers should also educate all individuals involved in the officer selection process of these trends to ensure that gender is not a factor in officer role assignments.

In addition to assigning officer roles, SBAE teachers must also carefully monitor student interactions to avoid gender bias. Of course, overtly sexist, misogynistic, or otherwise offensive comments should not be said, but due to unexamined gender beliefs, even a comment that is made with good intentions can cause women students to feel unwelcome or alienated. Praise and criticism should be given to men and women students for the same reasons and in the same

manner. Additionally, praise or criticism should not be given to women students just because of their gender. For example, praising women students for caring heavier items than men students or commenting on attention to detail in agricultural mechanics because they are women. I also recommend SBAE teachers do not set different expectations for women and men students within FFA, leadership, and classroom activities based on gender. Conversely, women students should not be held to lower expectations than men students in mechanics and production agriculture-based activities. Expectations should be set equitably based on students' skill level and prior knowledge.

Gendered enforcement of FFA official dress was also an issue faced by the participants. I recommend SBAE teachers, state FFA association staff, and National FFA staff fully embrace and encourage the updated FFA official dress rules allowing any student to wear slacks or a skirt, a tie or scarf, and any closed toed black dress shoes (National FFA Organization, 2019). Requiring women students to wear skirts, pantyhose, and heels can cause discomfort, insecurity, physical pain, and lack of ability to physically participate in all activities. Participants in this study changed what activities they participated in, participated in less activities, or had negative experiences during FFA activities due to official dress requirements. Therefore, it is especially important that all FFA advisors and FFA state staff not only allow, but welcome students to wear the components of FFA official dress in which they feel most comfortable. State and National FFA staff can facilitate this culture shift by encouraging all State and National FFA Officers to wear slacks or a skirt at any FFA event, as these individuals serve as role models to the membership. I also recommend that FFA advisors do not place expectations on their students' appearance beyond the rules of FFA official dress. Whether explicitly or implicitly, women students should not be expected to wear makeup, a specific hair style, or heels. These are not

required in FFA official dress (National FFA Organization, 2022) and put extra barriers in place for women students to participate in SBAE.

SBAE teachers not only perpetuate the culture of SBAE in their program but are also many students' first introduction to SBAE and the agriculture industry. With this responsibility, SBAE teachers can introduce students to an industry and organization where all students see a place for themselves to belong. I recommend SBAE teachers express that all students have the opportunity to succeed in the agriculture industry and utilize women in images, videos, and examples when teaching students about agriculture. It is not enough just to show women in agriculture; women should be shown specifically in production agriculture and mechanics roles. These are the roles that participants reported seeing women in the least and some participants did not report seeing women at all in mechanics or production-based agriculture roles. Diverse representation of women should also be the responsibility of state FFA associations and The National FFA Organization. The state and national levels set the explicit rules and implicit expectations for local SBAE programs. Therefore, FFA at the state and national level should be setting the standard that women participate and succeed in all sectors of the agriculture industry. The National FFA Organization should also highlight and expand their current diversity inclusion practices. I recommend that state and National FFA staff do not tokenize diversity on social media platforms or at conferences, both of which were seen by participants in this study.

SBAE teachers must also decide carefully what community members they bring into their programs. First, to make sure that the individuals they invite into their programs are supportive of all students and do not reinforce gendered aspects of SBAE. Second, to ensure they are presenting a representative and inclusive picture of the agriculture industry. If every woman from the agriculture industry that interacts with the SBAE program is in a non-production agriculture

role (e.g., education, management, finance) then it presents the picture that women belong in those roles more so than production agriculture roles.

Lastly, I recommend that grassroots efforts be made in SBAE teacher communities and SBAE teacher associations to better educate SBAE teachers of these issues. If teachers are not first made aware of the gender biases and inequities present in SBAE, then enacting change will not be possible. Grassroots education efforts must also teach SBAE teachers how they can dismantle and avoid gendered biases and inequities in their own SBAE programs in order to better serve all of their students.

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