

EXAMINING A COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCE THROUGHOUT  
THE LIVESTOCK JUDGING EXPERIENCE

BY

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the self-perceived influence of a livestock judging experience on skills learned and overall usefulness outside of competition at different ages and competitive levels. This study investigated two different areas of the participant's livestock judging experience; skills and stress. Also, this study evaluated participant's personal characteristics in relation to the enjoyment of the judging experience and total benefit of that experience. A qualitative interview protocol was developed for the target audience who were Kentucky 4-H livestock judging participants. With the design of this study and the need for multiple experience levels, specific age and experience parameters were in place. The results of this study were that the livestock judging experience is contributing to the human development of its participants. This experience was shown to influence the development of life and career skills, stress management, and should be continued as a fundamental youth development activity.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background and Setting**

Within every industry, there is always a desire for forward movement and improvement of the product. In the livestock industry, a way to improve the product is through livestock judging. Livestock evaluation is a traditional program in 4-H and FFA youth development programs. A livestock judging contest evaluates contestants' ability to make logical decisions, in a fixed amount of time, with a given scenario and a selected group of animals (Rusk & Culp III, 2001). It has been shown in previous research that livestock judging helps participants develop several skill areas including the ability to verbally defend a decision, animal industry knowledge, decision making, oral communication, organizational skills, problem-solving, self-confidence, self-discipline, self-motivation, and teamwork (Nash & Sant, 2005).

In Kentucky, students may start competing at nine-years-old as of January 1st. In 4-H students may continue to compete until they are 19 years old or until they compete in the National 4-H Contest (Austin, 2016). To compete in the National Contest for Kentucky participants must place in the top 15 at the state contest to be invited to Top 12 Week which is the first step of making the final four to compete at Nationals. During Top 12 Week participants judge multiple classes and give several sets of reasons over a week. By the end of that week they are cut down to the traveling eight. These eight will then travel and compete in the several multistate contests throughout the fall. After the last multistate contest, but before the national contest in November, the participants are then cut down to the final four that will compete in the National Contest. The process for selecting the final eight differ per the coach's preference.

FFA members may start competing in the Livestock Evaluation Career Development Event or CDE, from freshman to senior years of high school. In Kentucky once a student competes at the State contest they are unable to compete again. Unlike the 4-H teams, the FFA team competes as a chapter and the state winning chapter will then compete at National FFA Convention in October.

After graduating High School judging participants have a choice if they would like to continue their judging experience. There are financial incentives for attending a junior college before transferring to a four-year university. Many of the top performers on a national level are actively recruited by junior college coaches, as early as the sophomore year of high school. Several junior colleges have scholarship opportunities for their judging team members. Junior colleges traditionally have two different teams, one for freshmen and one for sophomores. There are two teams because participants usually compete at Nationals during their sophomore year, but will practice and compete as freshmen as well. Each college differs on how many students are on their team, but for National Contest, five team members compete and all five scores count. Some of the more successful teams have up to 10 members per team, and the members are whittled down to the final five that will compete.

Much like 4-H and FFA members, junior college participants also have a choice after they have completed their time at the two-year college. If these students choose to continue their judging careers, they may do so at a four-year university or senior college. Similarly, to junior colleges, many senior colleges also start recruiting early, many straight out of high school. Some junior colleges are considered “feeder” schools, meaning that the students traditionally attend the same senior colleges because of the relationships between coaches. Not all senior college teams are made up of junior college team members, but the most competitive traditionally are.

There are major developmental differences between youth and adults. This is one of the main reasons that separation between ages occurs in competition. Youth or adolescence is classified by Erikson from the ages of 12 to 20 and are placed into the identity stage of development. The characteristics of the adolescence stage is that individuals are exploring self-identity, direction, and alternative solutions to roles. Also during this time career exploration is key for individuals (Erikson, 1968). From this early development research there have been further studies that show within the adolescence stage, individuals are developing different skills, and are exploring their environment at different rates. Current research further divides the adolescences into two groups of development, the first from 12 to 14 years old and the second from 15 to 18. Individuals above the age of maturity are not grouped as youth.

Due to the differences in development, this study will evaluate livestock judging team members at multiple competitive levels. First, dividing the youth into junior 4-H, ages of 12 to 14, and senior 4-H, ages 15 to 18. The second division would consist of individuals above the age of maturity or the 'adults'. The adults will then be divided based on age again into those competing at the Junior College level, and those competing or have recently competed at the Senior College Level. The study will also evaluate members at the same age and competitive level that have relative difference in competitive experience.

## **Problem**

A need exists to know the impact of the livestock judging experience in and outside the competition ring. How livestock judging participants are learning skills and if they use those skills outside of livestock judging. While research has been done from similar standpoints, no research has been done that compares minors to adults and different durations of experience at the same competitive level.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine the self-perceived influence of the livestock judging experience on skills learned and overall usefulness outside of competition at different ages and competitive levels. This study will investigate two different areas of the participant's livestock judging experience; skills and stress. Also, this study will evaluate participant's personal characteristics in relation to the enjoyment of the judging experience and total benefit of that experience.

## **Objectives**

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following objectives were pursued:

### **1. Skills**

- Determine what skills were learned at participant's current stage in the livestock judging experience, and if these skills are used outside of judging competitions, and if there are skills that could be improved.

### **2. Stress**

- Determine if livestock judging contributes to the stress level and if so, at what age or competitive level stress develops the most. If this experience does increase the stress level, how do participants deal or lessen that stress.

### **3. Personal Characteristics**

- Determine if livestock judging is an enjoyable event that the participants intend to continue or who recommend others to participate in.
- Determine if participants must judge at all competitive levels to receive benefits from livestock judging.



**Scope**

The scope of this project includes members of the Kentucky 4-H livestock judging program. Three participants will have competed on the Kentucky State 4-H Livestock Judging Team. Four participants will be under the age of 18 and not have judged in the FFA Livestock Evaluation Career Development Event (CDE).

**Significance**

The significance of this study and its results are vital in assessing the development of skills throughout the livestock judging experience. In addition to skills, this study will investigate the effects of those skills at different life stages. With demand on student's time outside of school increasing and participation decreasing, this study is intended to show the continued relevance of livestock judging programs at all age and competition levels. It is also intended to determine if students that participate in livestock judging programs can transfer skills learned in livestock judging to outside the judging arena.

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were included in this study:

1. The interviewees were honest and thoughtful in their answering of the questions during the interview.
2. That the interviewees were impacted by their livestock judging experience.

**Limitations**

The following limitations were noted in this study:

1. This study is limited in scope to eight participants

The scope of the study was limited to eight due to several factors. The first factor was time constraints. This study was completed for a master's thesis within three semesters. The second factor was the minimum necessary sample of 8; this is due to the study design.

## 2. This study is limited to Kentucky 4-H Livestock Judging Participants

The foundational environment of Kentucky was useful for this design so that all participants had similar opportunities.

### **Definitions**

4-H- the nation's largest positive youth development and youth mentoring organization (4-H Foundation, 2015)

FFA- inter curricular student organization for those interested in agriculture and leadership (National FFA organization, 2015).

The Floor- Slang term for the part of a contest where the placings are made, before reasons are given. Ex: I was the low drop off the floor- meaning dropped the fewest points in placings.

Judging Contest- Competitions designed to evaluate contestants' ability to make a decision among selected group of animals in a fixed time period (Rusk & Culp III, 2001).

Junior College (JuCo) - A school that has two years of studies similar to those in the first two years of a four-year college, judging participants compete in the fall of the Sophomore year.

Marking- Slang term for placing a class and "marking" a placing card.

National Contest- Livestock Judging Contest at North American International Livestock Exposition taking place in Louisville, Kentucky.

Oral Reasons- Presentations used in livestock and horse judging contests for students to express verbally why they placed a given class the way they did (Johnson, 1991).

Room- Slang term for Oral Reasons. Ex: I was averaging a 45 in the room, meaning individual was receiving a score of 45 on average in Oral Reasons.

Senior College (SrCo)- A college offering the regular four-year course traditionally required for a bachelor's degree, judging participants can compete in the junior or senior year, but most commonly in the fall of the senior year.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

This chapter consists of the review of the literature, which provided a basis and background for this study. Literature that is being reviewed highlights key areas regarding livestock judging, youth, and adult development. In particular interpersonal and life skills that are learned through livestock judging will be analyzed.

#### **Theoretical Background and Needs**

Good jobs increasingly depend on people who can put knowledge to work (SCANS, 1991). Youth today lack the skills necessary to transition into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace. 4-H programming is contributing to the development of workforce skills (Bennett, 2009).

In 1990, the Department of Labor assigned a Commission to talk to business owners, to public employers, to the people who manage employees daily, to union officials and workers on the line and at their desks (SCANS, 1991). This committee is referred to as the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills or SCANS. The purpose of this commission was to ascertain what employers are requiring of new employees. This commission was formed in conjunction with President Bush's educational strategy "AMERICA 2000" which was released in April of 1991. From the conversations, the commission had three major conclusions were drawn; 1) All-American high school students must develop a new set of competencies and foundation skills if they are to enjoy a productive, full, and satisfying life, 2) The qualities of high performance that today characterize our most competitive companies must become the standard for the vast majority of our companies, large and small, local and global, and 3) The nation's schools must be transformed into high-performance organizations in their own right. Whether they go next to work,

apprenticeship, the armed services, or college, all young Americans should leave high school with the know-how to make their way in the world. In this (SCANS) report, know-how has two parts: competence and a foundation of skills and personal qualities (SCANS, 1991).

The know-how identified by SCANS is made up of five competencies and a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities that are needed for solid job performance. These include: **Competencies:** *Resources*- allocating time, money, material, space, and staff; *Interpersonal Skills*- working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading negotiation, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds; *Information*- acquiring and evaluation data, organizing and maintain files, interpreting and communication, and using computers to process information; *Systems*- understanding social, organization, and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems; *Technologies*- selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies; **Foundation:** *Basic Skills*- reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking, and listening; *Thinking Skills*- thinking creatively, making decision, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning; *Personal Qualities*- individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity. (SCANS, 1991).

Similar to SCANS, Robinson conducted a study based on employability skills, but unlike the previous research this study also surveyed recent college graduates. Robinson found that the employability skill in greatest need of curricular attention, according to graduates, is problem solving and decision making (Robinson, 2006). Six of the top ten important employability skills deal with motivation, organization, and time management. Therefore, it can be implied that supervisors desire employees who are highly motivated, organized, and can manage their time well. Supervisors perceive more skills to be in greater need of curriculum enhancement as opposed

to graduates. According to supervisors, the employability skill item in greatest need of attention is problem-solving. This finding is consistent with graduates, as both graduates and supervisors perceived “solving problems” to be the top rated employability skill in need of curriculum enhancement (Robinson, 2006).

These skills and know-how can be developed through extra-curricular activities and programs. An example of this development and improvement would be that; (Ohio) Youth reported that 4-H has helped them with oral communication, leadership, organization, teamwork, diversity, taking initiative, motivation, asking for help, work ethics, and time management (Bennett, 2009).

After analyzing the need for skills and programs that help to develop and improve those vital skills, the next sections will determine how youth and adults develop. It is important to know the foundations of human development to understand how and when the necessary employability skills are obtained.

### **Youth Development Fundamentals**

Adolescence is a time of change and transition, usually encompassing the ages of ten to nineteen (Linden & Fertman, 1998). They (children) experience a transition during which they give up the freedoms of childhood, learn new roles they will take on as adults, experience uncertainties about their future, and wonder and worry about whether they will fail or succeed when it is their time to contribute to society (Ianni, 1989). What is needed for adolescents to succeed and become contributing adults?

**Hierarchy of Needs.** Maslow suggests that humans have a *hierarchy of needs*, which ranges from lower-level needs for survival and safety to higher-level needs for intellectual achievement and self-actualization or self-fulfillment (Maslow, 1968). The four lower level or

*deficiency needs* include; survival, safety, self-esteem, and belonging. When these needs are satisfied, the motivation for fulfilling decreases. The three higher-level needs Maslow calls the *being needs* include; intellectual achievement, aesthetic appreciation, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). Therefore, the more success people achieve in their search for knowledge and understanding. The more likely they are to strive for even greater knowledge and understanding. Unlike the deficiency needs, being needs can never be completely fulfilled. The motivation to achieve them is endlessly renewed (Linden & Fertman, 1998).

These needs are important in any educational setting if the lower level needs are not met then there is no possibility that the higher level needs will be reached. In livestock judging youth are asked to develop and improve on the higher level needs. As educators and coaches the priority should be the deficiency needs so that youth have the opportunity to achieve the being needs.

**Stages of Leadership Development.** The stages of adolescent leadership development are sequential but fluid. Individuals may move from one stage to the next, only to return to the previous stage when they encounter a new situation. In each leadership development stage, young people acquire leadership information and attitudes, and an array of interpersonal skills (communication, decision-making, and stress management). Our hope is for young people to arrive at adolescence with an awareness of their leadership knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Teenagers are not passive learners. They select the things they do or do not pay attention to, and they choose how to respond to the demands of parents, teachers, and peers. Adolescents strive to formulate individual viewpoints, weighing those attitudes against the expectations of others, both adults and peers, who have their own opinions about which ideas and behaviors are appropriate (Linden & Fertman, 1998).

In the adolescent period, leadership development is best viewed as proceeding in three stages (awareness, interaction, and mastery) (Linden & Fertman, 1998). Linden and Fertman use five dimensions found within each leadership development stage to demonstrate the differences between the three stages. Those five dimensions are:

- 1) Leadership Information—what adolescents know about leaders and leadership
- 2) Leadership attitude—adolescents' dispositions, thoughts, and feelings
- 3) Communication—exchange of thoughts, messages, and information
- 4) Decision Making—choosing between competing courses of action
- 5) Stress Management—how adolescents react to and deal with stress.

Leadership development is important in livestock judging because the participants must use these skills to be successful in competition and throughout life. The five areas described above can be further tailored to livestock judging by changing the description slightly. For the first area of leadership information, consider this livestock information, what adolescents know about livestock and livestock evaluation. This would be the building block of their livestock judging experience. Leadership attitude, how the participants are feeling and how they interact with teammates. Communication is a direct correlation with the judging experience through oral reasons. How participant express themselves and their decisions both verbally and non-verbally. Decision making is one of the key skills that will be discussed further in the chapter and throughout this study. Stress and stress management will also be laid out as an objective to look closely at throughout a participant's livestock judging experience.

**Stage One: Awareness.** In Stage One, youth doubt their abilities. They don't think of themselves as leaders, and this new viewpoint confuses them. They feel they will have to change their behavior and begin acting differently, and they are uncomfortable with being unlike the rest



of their friends (Linden & Fertman, 1998). 1) Youth need to know why and what of leadership development, 2) They need to start becoming more assertive and share group leadership, 3) Youth need to learn verbal and non-verbal messages, 4) Develop an active awareness of the decision-making process and how to use decision making, when comparing, 5) Identify personal stress (Linden & Fertman, 1998).

In our livestock judging scenario: 1) Youth need to know the why and what of livestock judging, 2) Livestock judging is a team activity and all individuals play a part in the knowledge and skill development, 3) Participants need to learn what the format of oral reasons is, what new vocabulary is needed, along with non-verbal body language, 4) Develop a method for making decisions, 5) Identify personal stress.

Most adolescents (some adults) live their lives in Stage One of leadership development. They accept all the cultural and societal norms and traditions about who leaders are, how people become leaders, and what leaders do. Leadership is externalized from their being. The primary task in Stage One is to recognize a young person's leadership potential and then prepare them to move to a higher level (Linden & Fertman, 1998). This stage of development is often seen at the junior level of the judging experience. It is common for these areas also to be seen at higher levels if an individual has had little to no experience with livestock or judging competitions.

**Stage Two: Interaction.** Teenagers in Stage Two of leadership development, the interaction stage, wrestle with the idea that they are leaders. Stage Two is about action. It is testing possibilities, reaching limits, resting, and reflecting. They (youth) want to do everything; they have big ideas, but don't know how to put them into action (Linden & Fertman, 1998). During this stage youth are: 1) Internalizing- group expectations, group dynamics, group stages, and experiential learning, 2) Validating attitudes, stabilizing attitudes, being ethical, being sensitive to others, 3)

Learning how to listen, 4) Beginning to see all of the alternatives and consequences when making decision, 5) Managing the environment, changing perceptions of stressors, managing self (Linden & Fertman, 1998).

Relating this stage back to the livestock judging experience, in stage two youth are: 1) Internalizing group dynamics of their coaches and teammates, 2) Adjusting to differences of opinion and personalities while building confidence in themselves, 3) Learning to listen, picking up new terminology for oral reasons 4) Developing sense of alternatives and consequences when making decisions, 5) Managing their environment, time, and self for stressors.

Stage Two is about support and balance. Adolescents in this stage are in the middle of the leadership development process. At times, they regress to Stage One attitudes and behaviors. At other times, they stretch themselves to Stage Three and then relax back to Stage Two. Young people in Stage Two can become heavily involved in leadership activities; they often overextend and over commit themselves. Keeping a balance between doing leadership tasks and being a leader is a constant struggle for these youths (Linden & Fertman, 1998). Stage two is often observed at the conclusion of junior and beginning the senior level of livestock judging.

**Stage Three: Mastery.** Stage Three is about the focused effort in small areas of one's life. For adolescents, it means using leadership skills and abilities to create and generate new interest and energy in some part of their lives. Stage Three involves having the energy, resources, and guidance to pursue a personal vision (Linden & Fertman, 1998). Within the focus areas of Stage Three, youth are: 1) Internalizing- group expectations, group dynamics, group stages, and experiential learning, 2) Working towards goals and vision competence, 3) Processing thoughts and feelings effectively and using active listening, 4) Regularly evaluating decisions already made, 5) Monitoring the need to increase or decrease stress (Linden & Fertman, 1998).

During the judging experience youth are developing stage three at the senior level of competition and will continue to improve mastery throughout their judging experience. An example of what youth are developing in the key areas at this point are: 1) Continuing to internalizing group dynamics and group expectations, 2) Setting personal goals and working towards their completion, 3) Processing thoughts effectively and making decisions based on alternatives and consequences, 5) Monitoring their stress needs.

Stage Three leadership is about stepping forward and being seen. It is gathering and focusing of energy that allows adolescents to step into a new role in one area of their lives. It involves preparation and support. It can be full of anxiety, self-doubt, and resistance, but is also highly fulfilling. In this stage, ordinary adolescents realize that they have an interest, ability, or desire that can propel them to another level of development and discovery. In Stage Three, adolescents are actually directing their lives. They are leaders (Linden & Fertman, 1998).

These leaders will then move into adulthood and begin to develop another set of skills to make them even more successful. Adults will continue to develop in many of the same ways that youth did, but to a greater degree. The next section will dissect the ways adults develop particularly at the ages where individuals are competing at junior and senior college levels.

### **Late Youth and Adult Development**

**Formalized Thinking.** The stage of *formal operational thinking* is Piaget's final stage of childhood development and is the springboard for adult thinking (Robinson, 2013). Robinson defines *Formal Operational Thinking* as; a form of thinking that emerges first in adolescence, and is characterized by an understanding of theory, causality, hypotheses and abstract systems of thought such as law, metaphor and algebra (Robinson, 2013).

This form of thinking (formal operational) emerges around the beginning of the teenage years and is the result of the emergence of some new mental capacities. One new ability that appears at this stage is *internalized problem-solving*, which occurs through the combined use of internal reasoning, logic, imagination, and planning strategies (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). That's to this internalized thinking, a formal operational child can for the first time employ highly abstract operations, such as formulae, algebra, metaphor, and can start to think in terms of causality theories and systems of ideas (Piaget, Brown, Kaegi, & Rosenzweig, 1981).

Another key formal-operational ability is the capacity to have hypotheses about actions before acting before acting; to consider what is possible and likely before testing out that predication through trial and error (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Along with the greater capacity to imagine, predict, and idealize, adolescents also develop the capacity to reflect on the past, themselves and their thinking or metacognition (Flavell, 1996)

**Emerging Adulthood.** Emerging adulthood is a distinct and definable life stage that runs between approximately the ages of 18 and 25 and is characterized by features that distinguish it qualitatively from what comes before and after. This stage in life can be described as an in-between stage during which a person is part-adolescent and part-adult.

Key differences between adolescence and emerging adulthood include: (a) the fact that adolescences are defined for the majority by living with parents, whereas emerging adults typically have moved out of the family home, (b) that after the age of 18 people are given adult rights such as driving, drinking, voting, and marriage and (c) that due to increased independence from family, the scope for experimentation and risk-taking is greater than in adolescence.

Key differences between emerging adulthood and later adulthood include (a) presence of continuing education for many, (b) a noncommittal approach to relationships and career, (c) a lack

of financial independence from parents, (d) frequent changes in residence and work, (e) and a tendency to question one's own worldview and experiment with alternatives (Arnett, 2000).

**Development in College Years.** Perry provides a model of intellectual development and epistemic cognition in the college years which would encompass both junior and senior college participants. Robinson describes *epistemic cognition* as involving thinking about knowledge itself—about what is real, what is true, what is right and what is certain (Robinson, 2013).

Within Perry's developmental model there are four stages to the trajectory; Dualistic thinking, Multiplistic thinking, Relativistic thinking, and Committed thinking. In the first step or stage of dualistic thinking; knowledge is true, or it is false, actions are either right or wrong. Right answers for everything exist, and authorities hold correct views on this knowledge. This thinking then moves forward into multiplistic thinking, in which the diversity of opinion is perceived as legitimate, more uncertainty is found in knowledge, and people have a right to their opinion. Individuals then progress into to relativistic thinking where all knowledge and values are perceived as contextual, and relativist, dualistic right or wrong thinking is relegated to structured problem-solving but is also viewed as resting on assumptions. The final progression is committed thinking where personal commitments to values, theories and goals are taken, despite understanding that they are not absolute or perfect (Robinson, 2013).

While livestock judging is a science with specific criteria, but some of those criteria are abstract and difficult for younger participants to understand. These developmental models are useful in understanding why individuals develop skills at certain time periods. These stages also begin to explain why older participants in livestock judging can understand some theories such as volume between different body types of breeding animals.

## **Livestock Judging Fundamentals**

Since the early 1900s, judging contests in the United States have been an effective means of measuring a team's or individual's ability to evaluate dairy cattle, horses and livestock. Judging competitions are enjoyable as well as educational. They evaluate contestants' ability to make logical decisions, in a fixed amount of time, with a given scenario and a selected group of animals (Rusk & Culp III, 2001).

When the human mind is called upon to compare facts and arrive at a decision it has enacted judgment. No judgment can be fair or accurate without a knowledge of many facts, much mental discipline, and the natural desire to be impartial (Coffey, 1930). The first and greatest value to the student trained in livestock judging lies in the development of the ability to make decisions. This ability is based first, upon the student's proclivity toward mastering information; second, a keen observation; third, the right sense of proportion in balancing evidence; and fourth, the courage necessary to express a conviction (Coffey, 1930).

Livestock evaluation and judging is a skill developed through patient study and practice. To be a good evaluator and judge of livestock you must: 1) Know the parts of the animal and their location, 2) know which parts are important for breeding stock or for cuts of meat in market animals and recognize the most desirable shape of each part, 3) visualize the 'ideal' animal, 4) make critical observations and identify and compare the strong (good) and weak (bad) points of each animal, and 5) Develop a system of analyzing and examining animals so you do not overlook important points (Oregon State University, 1986). Evaluating and judging animals is a valuable experience for every boy and girl to learn the principles of animal selection. Through evaluation and judging, you learn to: obtain up-to-date information, make accurate observations, weigh and

balance for comparison, and arrive at a definite conclusion, which is a judgment (Oregon State University, 1986).

Rusk and Culp describe a list of objectives of a competitive judging program and characteristics of a well-run and effective judging contest. The objectives are as follows:

1. To cultivate public speaking abilities, develop poise, and instill confidence through the contestants' oral defense of their placings.
2. To train contestants to be knowledgeable livestock-oriented individuals who are honest, diligent, and capable of communicating their standards and viewpoints to others in a professional manner.
3. To train contestants to observe and recognize differences in livestock, to make sound judgmental decisions, and ultimately to arrive at a logical placing, given a current set of criteria (industry standards).
4. To instill in contestants the fundamental awareness that all market animals simply cannot, from an economic standpoint, be placed strictly on cutability or marketability, because other factors such as structural soundness and growth rate are of equal importance.
5. To ensure consistency among contests by paralleling the Indiana State 4-H/FFA Judging Contest (Published for Indiana 4-H), and all the county and area contest that precede it, to the national judging contests and the collegiate judging contests held across the country.

Now that the purpose of livestock judging contest has been evaluated, the next sections will go further in depth on how skills are developed through these contests. The following sections will examine the previous research that has been conducted on livestock judging. These studies

have been conducted in multiple states on either youth or adults, but have not examined both comparatively as this study will.

### **Workforce and Life Skill Development in Youth**

The purpose of (evaluation) activities has been to encourage the critical evaluation of the livestock and horses as a method of bringing about the improvement of the animals, but the skills developed through the evaluation process of the judging activity can be utilized in real life situations. Livestock judging in combination with oral reasons provides participants with valuable real-life tools (Nash & Sant, 2005). Nash and Sant state that 63.8% of (Idaho) 4-H judging participants were positively influenced in preparation for the workforce and over 64% of respondents indicated that the 4-H judging program had a positive influence on their personal success. Idaho judging alumni ranked the skills that were learned through the 4-H judging program as 1) Animal Industry Knowledge, 2) Self-Confidence, 3) Decision Making, 4) Verbally Defend a Decision, 5) Team Work, 6) Oral Communication, 7) Self-Motivation, 8) Organizational Skills, 9) Problem Solving, and 10) Self-Discipline (Nash & Sant, 2005).

The skills listed by Nash and Sant directly correlate with the skills and competencies laid out by the SCANS Commission. This helps provide strong proof that livestock judging helps to prepare participants for life and the workforce, and become a well-rounded individual.

Over 60% of youth reported 4-H has helped them with oral communication, leadership, organization, teamwork, diversity, taking initiative, motivation, asking for help, work ethics and time management. Over 75% agreed or strongly agreed 4-H has helped them learn to be encouraging and supporting of others, set goals for their self and work hard to achieve the, make good decisions and have a positive attitude about the work they do. Over 80% of the youth noted



4-H has helped them to work well with others to achieve a goal, and to be respectful of others (Bennett, 2009)

Learning to learn, with 81.0% of those surveyed rating 4-H judging team participation as being either highly influential or almost essential to development of the skill; contributions to group effort, with 79.3% people indicating a rating of highly influential or almost essential; teamwork, with 79.0% people indicating a rating of highly influential or almost essential; and decision making, with 45.0% of those surveyed indicating a rating of highly influential or almost essential (Anderson, 2014). As a result of 4-H judging team participation, youths strengthened their abilities in numerous life skills, including learning to learn, contributions to the group effort, teamwork, self-motivation, decision making, communication, cooperation, and social skills (Anderson, 2014).

77% indicated the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program had a positive influence in preparing them for the workforce (Rusk, Martin, Talbert, Balschweid, 2002). From making personal contacts to developing necessary life skills, the (Indiana) judging program holds special value to its alumni in a variety of ways. These individuals become life-long learners as a result of their participation. Judging livestock is a beneficial educational tool used to prepare youth for the workforce, regardless of their chosen careers. Former participants have learned to become team players, which is essential to their success and efficiency in the workplace (Rusk, Martin, Talbert, & Balschweid, 2002).

4-H youth rated their development of leadership life skills higher than did non-4-H youth in all five measurement scales (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992). The five measurement skills that Boyd, Herring, and Briers were evaluating the students on; working with groups, understanding self, communication, making decisions, and leadership.

In addition to developing leadership skills, 4-H clubs can be effective at helping youth develop critical life skills such as decision-making, responsibility, interpersonal skills, an ethic of service, and how to get along with others (Astroth, 1996). 4-H places nearly equal emphasis on developing practical, technical skills. Members often cited 4-H's opportunities to work in hands-on ways with a variety of materials and tools that they could use throughout their lives (Astroth, 1996). 4-H can teach the skills that schools cannot precisely because of the voluntary and low-risk nature of non-formal programs. Autonomy-oriented leaders can foster both life skills and practical, non-cognitive skills, and they do so better than control-oriented leaders (Astroth, 1996).

These positive results are not just limited to youth involved in 4-H livestock judging, but also continue to be seen on the collegiate level which will be shown in the next section. The following collegiate studies have been conducted more recently when compared to the youth.

### **Workforce and Life Skill Development in College Students**

Through judging team participation at OSU, former judging team members learned to communicate better verbally with others, and they gained confidence as leaders, in social situations, and with authority figures while learning to be assertive, patient, prioritize tasks and goals, and work well with others (Mefford, 2013). Livestock judging team members perceived greater skill development for confidence with authority figures than members of either the horse or meat judging teams (Mefford, 2013). Former animal science judging team members perceive communication skills as improved the most by competing on judging teams (Mefford, 2013). Judging team members developed strong public speaking skills while learning to work together as a team. Former judging team members also indicated decision-making was highly developed by participating (Mefford, 2013).

From the data gathered, respondents most strongly developed public speaking ability through their participation in collegiate livestock. In the interpersonal skills construct, the ability to verbally communicate with others was the skill most strongly developed through collegiate livestock judging (Bolton, Duncan, Flanders, 2015). The next three items referring to the development of confidence were all ranked within a very close range of each other. Following public speaking ability were skills such as hard work and dedication to a common team goal and the ability to be self-assertive. Students in youth livestock judging programs should be encouraged to continue to eventually compete at the collegiate level. The skills participants obtain not only beneficial at the time of the contest, but also contribute to success later in life by developing skills in demand by employers (Bolton, Duncan, Fuhrman, & Flanders, 2015).

The current data reinforce the successful establishment of communication skills, along with confidence in social settings and confidence as a leader among many other valuable skills (Cavinder & Byrd, Brooke; Franke, Jake; Holub, 2011). Engagement is developed in judging team members in preparation for and during intercollegiate contests. Students are required to make independent decisions under pressure, and then defend those decisions via either oral or written communication to an industry expert. Engagement is also instilled by teammates interacting as competitors (Miller et al., 2011).

Students participating on a competitive judging team demonstrate numerically higher critical thinking scores and score higher about national norms compared to their peers who have not previously had any animal evaluation training. Offering opportunities to students, including involvement on a competitive judging team, should be utilized and supported as an important aspect of higher education (White, Layfield, & Birrenkott, 2012).

If academic success is what departments and colleges seek, then promoting involvement in competitive extracurricular activities should also be a priority (Ashorn, 2009). The purpose of Ashorn's study was to investigate the characteristics of the participants of a competitive team at the collegiate level, her second objective was to identify any differences between participants and non-participants of a competitive team at the collegiate level. Ashorn's results included the difference of academic performance. The mean for the participant (n=15) first-year academic performance (GPA) was 3.62, the median 3.77, the standard deviation .34 (Ashorn, 2009). Their academic performance ranged from 2.92 to 4.0. The mean for the nonparticipant's (n=13) first-year academic performance was 3.35 (Ashorn, 2009). Also, participants felt like they were not just another number on the university campus. This can be attributed to the fact that as a participant on an intercollegiate judging team, they travel all over the nation to represent the university. This could provide the individual with a self-pride in oneself and their school (Ashorn, 2009).

While the research described above provides a foundation suggesting the importance of livestock judging to youth and emerging adult development, little currently exists that shows how participants develop over time, and the particular skills they master through the process. This study to investigate these processes.

### **Research Questions**

Given what we know about how youth and adults develop this study was designed with three objectives in mind. Within those objectives there are specific questions that were analyzed. The following is an outline of the interview protocol for a full list of questions see the Appendix.

### 1. Skills

- What skills were learned at participant's current stage in the livestock judging experience? Are these skills used outside of judging competitions? Can these skills be improved?

### 2. Stress

- Does livestock judging contribute to the participants stress level? What age or competitive level stress develops the most? How do participants deal or lessen the stress if any?

### 3. Personal Characteristics

- Is livestock judging an enjoyable event that the participants intend to continue? Would participants recommend others to participate in this activity?
- Do participants have to judge at all competitive levels to receive benefits from livestock judging?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Design**

A thematic content analysis is the basis of this qualitative study. This analysis was the best method due to its adaptability. Personal qualitative interviews were utilized to collect data from the target population. This allowed for an in-depth conversation with a wide scope of qualitative information. During these interviews a series of generally open-ended questions that are few and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants. These interviews were also audio-recorded to ensure accuracy.

#### **Population**

The target population for this study was Kentucky 4-H livestock judging participants. With the design of this study and the need for multiple experience levels, specific age and experience parameters were in place.

#### **Sample**

The population was broken up first into four age samples; junior 4-H, senior 4-H, Junior College, and Senior College. Within the four different age levels, there are two experience levels. The experience levels are comparative to the other participant at that age level. Of the two participants in the junior 4-H level, one started judging when they were nine, and the other had been judging for one year. The individuals of senior 4-H, one competed at a junior level, and the other had just competed at the senior level. Within the junior college participants, one had judged from a junior 4-H level and the other had not judged in 4-H. The final group of senior college participants, one began judging at the junior 4-H level, continued to junior college and then through

senior college, and the other had limited experience in 4-H and did not attend junior college, but competed on a senior college team.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher developed an interview protocol with the assistance of an advisor. The interview process was a series of generalized questions that were asking about experiences through livestock judging. For example, 'What do you like the most about judging' and 'Tell me about a favorite memory from your judging experience'. These questions were based on the objectives laid out in the first chapter; skills, stress, and personal characteristics. Skills: learned, improved, and skills used outside of judging. Stress: feel stress and cope with stress. Personal characteristics: involvement, favorite memories, and enjoyment. For full questions see the Appendix.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected from both youth and adults. The procedure was similar with some slight differences as will be described in the following sections.

#### **Youth**

The youth were contacted through the county livestock club leader. There were four programs that showed interest, with one program that had all four youth that were needed. One program was preferred so that all participants has a similar foundational instruction and environment. These participants were interviewed on the same evening prior to their 4-H club meeting and judging practice. Consent forms were obtained, and confidentiality was assured.

All participants are coded for anonymity sake; Junior Members are 1 and 2 and the senior members are 3 and 4. The lower number will be that member with less experience. Participant 1 is a junior 4-H member, and this is their first year to participate in livestock judging. Participant 2 is also a junior 4-H member, and this is their fifth year to participate. Participant 3 is a senior 4-H

member, and this is their third year to participate in livestock judging. Participant 4 is also a senior 4-H member; this is their seventh year to participate, and they have competed on the traveling state 4-H team, but have yet to compete in the national contest.

### **Adults**

The adult participants were contacted through the Kentucky State Livestock Judging Team and the University of Kentucky's Livestock judging team. The researcher participated on both of these teams and had personal information that was able to be used to contact perspective participants. Interviews were conducted in two different settings three of the four participants were interviewed at their homes, and the final participant was interviewed at their school. As with the youth, consent forms were obtained and confidentiality was assured.

All participants were coded for anonymity, participants 5 and 6 are Junior College competitors, and the final two participants 7 and 8 have competed at the Senior College level. Participant 5 has had limited amount of experience at a 4-H level, not competing on an organized team, but competed at the national contest for a Midwest junior college and has transferred to a four-year university within the last year to compete at the senior college level. Participant 6 competed at the national contest for a Western junior college team and has also transferred to a four-year university within the last year to compete at the senior college level. Participant 6 has been competing in livestock judging since the age nine for a total of 11 years; this individual competed at the national 4-H contest on the state 4-H traveling team. Member 7 has competed at the national contest for Southern senior college, this individual did not compete at the junior college level and had limited experience at the 4-H level only competing in a couple of contests. Finally, member 8 competed at the national contest for a Midwestern senior college, prior to this experience this individual competed in the national contest for a Western junior college as well as



competing at the national contest for both 4-H and FFA. Participant 8 has competed in livestock judging from the age of 9 for a total of 13 years.

The following chapter will discuss the results of the data collected in these qualitative interviews.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The focus of this chapter is to identify the common themes found based on the eight qualitative interviews given. Through these interviews several skills were described to have improved due to the participants livestock judging experience, the majority of these skills were used outside competition in other areas of the participant's life. The skills that were discussed by youth were selection/evaluation skills, confidence, and speaking skills. Adults that were interviewed talked on some of the same skills of youth in confidence and speaking skills, but also mentioned decision-making skills and time management skills.

Through answering questions on stress and how the participants deal with stress, remarkably all participants stated that they felt stress going into competitions. On why they felt this stress and how they dealt with it was different for each individual. All members said that narrowing their focus to the class at hand was one way they removed themselves from the stress they were feeling. Also, all the participants said that the pressure and stress of competition was put on themselves rather than coming from coaches, teammates, or parents. Also, all of the individuals said that the pressure made them more driven to learn more and do better in competition.

The personal characteristics of these eight individuals were similar in the way that they got involved in livestock judging; their parents or older siblings had been involved. In addition to this, all of the participants exhibited livestock as well as being involved in livestock judging. The reason for continued involvement in judging was different between the youth and adults. While youth were more focused on the social aspect of friends and learning more about livestock in general, the adults were more focused on networking for future career success and bettering their personal breeding stock.

The following sections will explore these themes in further detail.

## **Skills**

Skills are the foundation for any enterprise or event. Participants must have the basic skills to be successful in any competitive event; livestock judging is no different. All of the skills that the interviewees spoke on are included in several of the previous research studies conducted. The purpose of asking these individuals about skills again when there has already been research done, was to gain more detailed knowledge of:

1. Skills that participants learned through their livestock judging experience.
2. Which skills they found the most beneficial.
3. Were the skills learned through this experience used outside of the competition arena?

## **Youth**

The overwhelming response from youth on the questions about skills they had learned from their judging experience was selection and evaluation skills, with all four of the interviewees giving this response. The context of using this skill outside of judging is in the selection of their show animals. All of these participants exhibit livestock as well as participate in livestock judging.

“I feel like I know what the judge is looking for when I pick out my show lambs.” Stated participant 1.

The senior members mentioned being able to project young stock into the future to see if structural issues will get worse as the animal grows.

“Because of all the older animals I’ve seen in practice or contests, I know that if they break behind their shoulders or are tight ribbed, that won’t improve but will only get worse as they gain

weight and get older. Knowing that helps me to be more critical of young stock that I am picking to show.” Mentioned participant 4.

This common theme was not surprising because it is the basis of the livestock judging experience. Evaluation skills are the foundation of the event and is the first skill that is taught by coaches. Each one of these youth were able to connect the skills that were learned in the classroom or in practice to outside of that specific arena.

### **Adults**

A common theme for the adults, with all four giving a response of decision-making and time-management as skills developed through livestock judging. Half of the individuals mentioned relative time to make a decision had improved because of their experience in livestock judging. The other half of the participants stated that the overall quality of their decisions has been improved due to their livestock judging experience.

“I never liked to make decisions whether it was where to go to eat, or deciding which school to go to for college, but because of judging and having to make several decisions per class I am more comfortable and quicker making decisions.” Participant 5.

Time-management was another theme that was repeated by all four adults interviewed.

“Right before Louisville (National Contest) was a crazy time with practice, school, practice, and what little social life I had. I really had to manage my time to get everything accomplished” Participant 5.

“I really learned time management skills during high school while I was traveling on the State 4-H Team. Pretty much all of our weekends were devoted to practice, so I had to plan when I was going to get my school and farm work done in between club meetings and sports.” Participant 6.

“Transitioning from junior college to senior college was tough, mainly because of all the time demands. If I hadn’t figured out how to plan my time well in junior college, I’m not sure how successful I would have been in senior college.” Participant 8.

“Time management is key to me more so now that I am out of school. Being able to schedule my time to be the most effective before I have to be on the road for work. This makes the farm work easier for my wife and less stressful on me when I am gone.” Participant 7.

As seen in the previous quotes, time management skills were further developed due to the demand on these participants time. All mentioned that they thought this particular skill, would help them in their future careers. They felt that they would be more successful in their chosen career with the help of this skill, because they could be more efficient with their time and would be more effective without supervision.

### **Confidence**

All eight of the participants stated that their confidence in themselves has increased because of livestock judging. These members all mentioned that they were more confident, and not just about livestock, but also about life in general and they notice it in school and their careers.

“I speak up more in school because I am more confident about what I know, and I am not as nervous to say so.” Participant 3.

The three members that had or were currently competing on a junior college team said that there was a low period, where they were second guessing their decisions and not confident in a contest setting.

“Junior college was a real eye-opener for me. After a couple of bad contests and practices, I really started second guessing myself and over-thinking the classes. I had to take a step back and remember the fundamentals of judging and focus on those to put everything into perspective. In

4-H, I was above average, but once I got to junior college, I realized that I wasn't the best and I had to work harder to mark at a contest." Participant 6.

"I went to JuCo thinking I was pretty good, and I wasn't the big fish that I was in 4-H. The whole junior college experience for me was being broken down to build myself back up. I was learning so many new things about the small details that I was putting too much emphasis on them and not the big picture. My confidence to a real hit because of some bad decisions, but once I got back to the big picture things, I marked better, and I began to trust myself again. I think I thought that I could go like I had in 4-H and not push myself to be better." Participant 8.

The participants that had competed at a senior college level described how the confidence they had obtained through livestock judging helped them in their job search and current careers.

"You don't have to 50 every question, just get a 47 or 48 and stay consistent" Participant 8 describing the interview process of their job search.

"At trade shows, I am much more comfortable approaching people and talk about the products I sell. Having to go into a room with someone I didn't know and explaining why I placed a class the way I did, helped in developing that confidence." Participant 7.

Confidence is another theme that is seen in previous studies for both youth and college students. The ability to trust yourself and your judgments is a large component in livestock judging competitions. Competitors must believe enough in their placings to stand in front of a stranger and explain their decisions in oral reasons. The most pronounced benefit to this confidence can be seen outside the judging arena when participants have more confidence in school, job interviews, and eventually their jobs or careers.

## Speaking Skills

Oral reasons were the common skill between all eight participants that was both the most difficult to master and the skill that could be improved. When asked ‘What skills did you learn from your livestock judging experience?’ across the board speaking skills was one of the first skills mentioned.

All eight said that oral reasons have helped them to improve and further develop their speaking skills. Half of the members interviewed have competed successfully in other speaking contests.

“In junior college we gave several sets every day, that kind of practice will make you better at just about anything; my public speaking skills have improved tenfold because of that kind of practice. I now can look at a speech or presentation’s main points; I don’t have to memorize what I am going to say because I can transition from point to point.” Participant 6.

Participant 1 explained how they could continue to improve their speaking skills “The older I get, the better I am going to be talking to people.” This participant said that oral reasons were their favorite part of the judging experience so far. This was their first year judging and had previously competed in 4-H speaking contests. This individual mentioned that she prefers ‘normal’ speeches because there is more time to prepare. “But, I understand how reasons will help me present in speeches, because even if I mess up, I can recover easier thanks to the structure of reasons.”

In studies that examined livestock judging participants in states surrounding Kentucky; Indiana, Ohio, and West Virginia, oral communication was ranked in the top three skills developed through livestock judging (Rusk, Bennett, and Anderson). This study found the same results that

all participants mentioned their oral communication skills were improved through giving oral reasons.

## **Stress**

Since livestock judging is a competitive event, there is some inherent stress involved in the experience. The purpose of this series of questions was to determine:

1. The level of stress that is perceived by the participants.
2. Where or who the stress is originating from.
3. Does the stress or pressure distract the participant from the enjoyment of the experience of the event?
4. Is the participant's performance positively or negatively affected by the pressure?
5. How participants deal with or lessen the perceived stress?

## **Traditional Pressure**

Across the four age groups tradition pressure was the top pick. Traditional pressure is meant as pressure that is felt because of the traditional success of the team or coach.

"I don't want to be the reason the team doesn't win the state contest again." Participant 1.

"There was a banner outside the classroom that we were in everyday that had a list of all the national championships the team had ever won. There were a lot of them. Coach would say this needs to be a 'banner year'. I think that both helped and hindered me." Participant 6.

"I put pressure on myself because I don't want to let my friends down." Participant 3.

"Pressure was good for me because I am a competitive person, and it drives me to work harder and push myself to get better." Participant 7.



“I don’t feel a lot of pressure because I know there will be a second chance. I am sure that will change a little as I get older, and I won’t have those second chances like I do now.” Participant 2.

“Obviously, the national contest was the most stressful for me. It was the last contest I would ever judge, and it was on my home turf- Louisville. I think it being here was a huge benefit for me, NAILE (North American International Livestock Exposition) has always been my favorite show. I had judged here twice already, once in 4-H and once for junior college, so third time was the charm.” Participant 8.

“The pressure I put on myself caused me to overthink some classes in the beginning, but as I got more practice and contests under my belt, I became more confident and more able to ignore that stress and pressure.” Participant 4.

By the responses to the inquiries about stress and pressure, where the pressure was coming from differed between youth and adults. For the youth, the pressure was coming more from themselves than their coaches. The junior members, in particular, had to think more about if they felt stress when judging. Participant 2’s quote summed up the majority of the feelings that the youth had about stress and pressure, that there is always another contest to go to and get better.

The adult group also felt pressure that they put on themselves as the youth had, but they also had pressure coming more from coaches. Coaches at the junior and senior college level are paid positions either through tenure and non-tenure track positions or graduate assistantships. On the local level, 4-H coaches are volunteers while most state positions are non-tenure extension positions. The difference in coaching status could have an impact on the amount of pressure these individuals felt. This difference could also be seen outside the context of livestock judging, especially when considering youth sports. There is a historical 35% annual dropout rate in youth

sports (Rotella, Hanson, & Coop, 1991). One reason for this could be similar to the change of coaching style from youth leagues with volunteer coaches to senior high and college with paid coaches.

### **Focus and ‘the Zone’**

All eight participants had a way to deal with the pressure and stress they feel while judging. The juniors that mentioned that they did not feel much stress said they just ignore it and focus on the class that is in front of them. The adults were more descriptive about the ‘zone’ they get into before going into a contest.

“We (teammates) would close our eyes and say ‘today is a good day to have a good day,’ then we would open our eyes and walk into the contest building. This really helped me to get into the ‘zone’ and leave anything I was worried about behind me.” Participant 5.

“In junior college we would drink energy drinks and listen to loud rocking music, I figured out by senior college that that was not the best way for me to focus. I would be so amped up that I would just be thinking too fast and not make the best decisions. When I started judging in senior college, I would just drink water and listen to slower, calmer music. I really needed to make myself take a step back and slow everything down. This worked much better because it would calm me down and help me leave my nerves behind.” Participant 8.

“Focusing was pretty easy for me; I could just ‘flip a switch’ and be ready to go. This was especially true the last couple of contests we competed in. I just got into a routine of looking over my notes of what we had worked on that week or go over a set of reasons that I really liked, and I would be ready. In the van ride over we (teammates) would all have our earbuds in, because some of my teammates liked calmer and slow music while some needed loud more pump up music.” Participant 7.

“Every contest there is stress and pressure. I don’t know that you do really deal with that pressure, but you handle it the best you can. The stress of getting everything done before a contest, I mean school work, was a heck of a lot more stressful than a contest ever was. Now I don’t really worry about deadlines because I know that I can get it done.” Participant 6.

Dealing with stress was different for all of the individuals. The common theme was that they had to get into a ‘zone’, focus on the contest, and leave everything else behind them.

### **Personal Characteristics**

Due to the fact that all these participants come from different backgrounds and experiences, there was a need to analyze their personal characteristics. Main points to analyze were how the participant got involved in livestock judging and what their favorite memory has been within their judging experience.

### **Involvement**

All eight participants started exhibiting livestock before they started judging. Seven of the eight of the participants raise livestock, in addition to exhibiting.

“Mom said that I needed to learn about judging so I could understand what the judge meant when they talked about my lambs in a show.” Participant 4

“I wanted to learn more about the animals I was raising so I came to a livestock meeting and just never left I enjoyed it that much.” Participant 3.

The majority of interviewees had an older sibling or parent that was involved in judging or showing while they were eligible.

“My dad judged at the senior college level, so he knew how much judging would benefit me. He supported and encouraged me to get more structured instruction through junior college. One of the big reasons I chose to come to this university was to judge, academics didn’t play a

huge part in the decision. I mean it was important for my future, but I wanted to continue to judge, and I would not have been able to that at my second choice.” Participant 5.

“All of my older siblings, there are a lot of us, competing in livestock judging, so I just fell in line. Even if they (siblings) hadn’t done it, I think that I would have wanted to because I enjoy being around these friends and learning more about livestock.” Participant 2.

The biggest draw for these participants becoming involved in livestock judging was the involvement of their relatives and learning more about livestock. The social aspect of the experience kept them involved in judging.

### **Favorite Experiences**

When asked about their favorite experiences, as expected there was a wide range of responses. What was not expected was that only one would be about a successful judging experience. The remaining seven were about the social aspect of the participant’s experiences, the places they had been and the friends that they had been with.

“I’ll never forget the feeling of winning the high point nine-year-old at the state contest. Even after the awards that I have received in the seven years since then, that memory sticks out the most.” Participant 4.

“There really hasn’t been just one experience that was my favorite but a culmination of experiences. I have learned something from every member of my team, not just about livestock, even though I did learn a ton about livestock, but also about life and connections. It was really the people that I met that have had the biggest impact on me. The places we went to and practiced at were great and we saw some amazing animals that I hope to be able to raise that kind of quality someday, but more so the advice that producers gave us I will remember even more.” Participant 5.

“My favorite memory was before state contest two years ago; my whole family went camping close to the contest. Judging is something that all my family is involved in, and it is great to do this together” Participant 2.

“I love everything about it; I don’t know what I would do without judging. I mean it has pretty much paid for my college so I seriously don’t know what I would do without it.” Participant 6.

“My teammates from 4-H all the way until senior college are my best friends and even though we aren’t together 24/7 like we were when we were judging, we can still pick up the conversation just like it was nothing. Those friends really make all the work worth it, no matter if we win or not we are still a team, and we support each other.” Participant 8.

“My favorite thing about judging is meeting new people and being around my friends” Participant 1.

“My favorite really isn’t an experience at all, but the people especially my teammates. We are all still really close, just being together more times than not for the two years we judged really cemented our friendship. We could just go to each other and rant about our classes or coach sometimes, or we could just go and hang out. We were all really involved in other things too, but it didn’t matter how busy we were if one of us needed help we would all be there. I think that is true to this day if there were a crisis or a problem we would be there even though we live hundreds of miles from each other.” Participant 7.

“Judging has made me better and has contributed to every part of my life and how I interact with people. I wouldn’t trade this experience for the world.” Participant 3.

These participants explained that the livestock judging experience isn’t not just about the competition but is about the friends and people you meet along the way. As these interviewees

grew in age and experience, they described a family atmosphere with their team mates that they may not have gotten anywhere else.

The next chapter will go into further discussion of the results found in these interviews. It will also evaluate the judging experience as a whole based on the reflections of these participants.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the self-perceived influence of the livestock judging experience on skills learned and overall usefulness outside of competition at different ages and competitive levels. This study investigated two different areas of the participant's livestock judging experience; skills and stress. Also, this study evaluated participant's personal characteristics in relation to the enjoyment of the judging experience and total benefit of that experience. The objectives that were developed to accomplish the purpose of this study are as follows:

#### 1. Skills

- Determine what skills were learned at participant's current stage in the livestock judging experience, and if these skills are used outside of judging competitions, and if there are skills that could be improved.

#### 2. Stress

- Determine if livestock judging contributes to the stress level and if so at what age or competitive level stress develops the most. If this experience does increase the stress level, how do participants deal or lessen that stress.

#### 3. Personal Characteristics

- Determine if livestock judging is an enjoyable event that the participants intend to continue or who recommend others to participate in.
- Determine if participants must judge at all competitive levels to receive benefits from livestock judging.

The target population for this study was Kentucky 4-H livestock judging participants. With the design of this study and the need for multiple experience levels, specific age and experience parameters were in place. The population was broken up first into four age samples; junior 4-H, senior 4-H, Junior College, and Senior College. Within the four different age levels there are two experience levels. Data was collected through face-to-face qualitative interviews.

The interview process was a series of generalized questions that were asking about experiences through livestock judging. These questions were based on the objectives laid out in the first chapter; skills, stress, and personal characteristics. Skills: learned, improved, and skills used outside of judging. Stress: feel stress and cope with stress. Personal characteristics: involvement, favorite memories, and enjoyment.

### **Significance of Findings**

Participants in this research ranged in age from 13 to 23. They were asked questions about experiences through livestock judging. These questions were based on the objectives laid out in the first chapter; skills, stress, and personal characteristics. Skills: learned, improved, and skills used outside of judging. Stress: feel stress and cope with stress. Personal characteristics: involvement, favorite memories, and enjoyment. Within these objectives, the responses were broken down into smaller themes.

**Skills.** As discovered in the previous chapter, five themes were found in the responses of the skills questions; Evaluation, Confidence, Speaking, Time-Management, and Decision Making Skills. Each of the participants used these skills within their livestock judging experiences as well as outside of the competition arena. The above-mentioned skills were developed or improved because of the participant's involvement in livestock judging, but the significance of these skills is their successful use in other competitions, school, or careers. The most influential self-perceived



skills were: Confidence and Speaking Skills. These two skills were mentioned throughout the interviews as skills that would be used and improved throughout the participant's judging experience and life. In particular member 3 repeatedly said that their social skills were learned and developed due to her involvement in livestock judging, they have 'broken outside' their comfort bubble to be more outgoing and confident.

Based on past research by Anderson, Bolton, Nash, and Rusk these five skills were expected to be found in the participants that had relatively more experience than their peers. What was surprising was the response rate of these skills for the four 'unexperienced' participants, these members found these skills equally and in multiple cases almost essential when compared to their peers. Also surprising was the depth of response to these questions, for adolescents to respond with answers detailing how their confidence has been improved and how they use that skill on a daily basis, was impressive. This response is strongly related to the 81% of judging participants found that experience either highly influential or almost essential to the development of these skills (Anderson, 2014). This is also true of an earlier study done by Boyd, Herring, and Briers showing that 4-H youth ranked their development of leadership life skills higher than did non-4-H youth (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992).

**Stress.** Within any competitive event there is inherent stress or pressure, this was also found within livestock judging. These participants found that they felt the most pressure due to the traditional success of their team or coach. As expected the older and higher level participants experienced a higher level of stress. In particular, the individuals that had participated in Junior College perceived a level of pressure that caused them to doubt their decisions and had an impact on their confidence. The benefit of the junior college experience versus the stress level will be further discussed in the Implications section that is to follow.

Even with the stress and pressure that these competitors feel, they are still able to focus on the contest and put their other thoughts out of their mind. The zone and focus that these participants spoke about are very beneficial to them because they can narrow down what they need to be concerned with and not worry about everything. These members know that once they enter the contest everything is up to them, and the results are up to them and their decisions. That they can use this focus skill when dealing with school and job deadlines is an additional benefit of the total judging experience.

Dealing with stress is an essential part of leadership development, through the three stages of youth development, adolescents are developing their sense of personal stress and learning to control that stress and their environment (Linden & Fertman, 1998). These responses show that livestock judging participants are developing their sense of and reaction to stress.

**Personal Characteristics.** The personal characteristics of these individuals were very similar with only one or two differences. All of the participants currently exhibited livestock or had previously exhibited, if they were no longer eligible. All minus one had an older sibling or parents that had been involved in livestock judging. This characteristic becomes very important when discussing implications in the following section of this chapter.

As mentioned in the previous chapter the participants were asked about their favorite experience. Unexpectedly only one of those responses was about the results of a judging contest. The youth were more interested in the social aspect of the judging experience, all mentioning times surrounded by friends and family. While the adults did have similar experiences, they were more concerned with the connections they were making and how they could use those connections and the knowledge they were gaining to benefit them in the future. Many of the adults whether

experienced or not mentioned a ‘family-like’ atmosphere and how their teammates were more than just friends, but rather like family.

This aspect of the judging experience is important because these individuals found a sense of belonging to their teams, no matter what competitive level or how long they had been participating in livestock judging.

### **Implications**

The results of this study suggest that the livestock judging experience is contributing to the human development of its participants. Implications were found for the participants of livestock judging in the objective areas of skills, stress, and personal characteristics.

**Skills.** The results found that each of the participants had developed or further improved skills based on their competitive level. Each of these members used these skills outside livestock judging. All of the individuals had multiple skills that they felt could be improved with more practice and instruction.

The judging program as a whole should not hesitate to recruit unexperienced participants at older ages. While recruiting these types of individuals makes for a steeper learning curve, there is an overall improvement of skills in these individuals.

**Stress.** Based on the responses the participants felt that judging did contribute to their stress level. The level that stress was most prevalent was in the adults, in particular, the members that were involved at the junior college level. Interviewees dealt with the stress that they felt by focusing on the contest and getting in a ‘zone’ where they did not worry about anything other than the decisions they were making during a contest. Due to the fact that judging is a competitive event and there is inherent stress, coaches should aspire to lessen the stress felt by their team members. This is especially true on the higher competitive levels such as junior and senior college.

**Personal Characteristics.** The individuals that were interviewed found that livestock judging was an enjoyable event that they intended to continue if they were eligible. If they were not eligible, they intended to continue by judging livestock shows rather than in judging competitions. All participants said they would recommend this event to others that were interested in learning more about livestock or who wanted to improve their speaking skills.

After analyzing the responses from all competitive levels and all experience ranges from first-year participants to 11<sup>th</sup> and final year participants. It was found that all members receive benefits from their livestock judging experience. It is noted that the longer the participants were involved in this event, the more successful they were in judging competitions. This shows a stronger correlation than what was reported by Nash and Sant's study which stated that 63.8% of 4-H judging participants were positively influenced by their experience (Nash & Sant, 2005).

The results of this study identify two main areas for improvement for the livestock judging experience. First would be the recruitment of its participants. From the responses of all participants involved, there was the overwhelming theme of a previous livestock background. The benefits of this youth development activity are wide-ranging enough to draw non-livestock participants. More efforts should be made to bring in members that have not previously been involved in the agriculture and livestock industry.

The second area for improvement is the stress level versus the benefit of the junior college experience. Of the three participants that were currently or had previously competed at the Junior College level, all said that the stress and pressure that they felt whether put, on themselves, by teammates, or by coaches was large enough that they started doubting their decisions. This pressure contributed to a decrease in confidence and performance. While the most competitive and

successful members competed at the junior college level is the amount of pressure great enough to offset the benefit of this success?

In the words of member 5 “I think it would be a waste of time to judge at the senior college level if you had not judged in junior college, I think you would be letting down your teammates because you didn’t have that extra practice and instruction”.

While that is one example of the benefit of that particular individual’s experience in junior college, that sentiment was echoed by the other junior college participants. They all felt that the pressure made them better, in the long run, one individual saying “what doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.” While they may not have enjoyed the pressure while in the moment all three recognized that the junior college experience benefits or will benefit them at the senior college level as well as deal with the ‘real-world.’ At the same time, all three, as well as the fourth adult participant, mentioned that the junior college experience is not for everyone and that you have to take judging like a ‘job’ and be prepared to dedicate a majority of your waking hours to your coach and teammates. To summarize their points, it is up to individuals whether the junior college experience is for them and if the benefits outweigh the pressure and seriousness of the experience. All four adults said they would recommend the experience to anyone to try.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

If this study is to be replicated the following recommendations would be made:

1. Address the limitations by including more subjects and include individuals from several states.
2. Include participants from other 4-H activities to determine if the skills and experiences that were found in this study are limited to the livestock judging experience.

3. Include coaches in the interview process to find what skills they feel is most important for their team members to develop. Determine what skill the coaches found most difficult to teach and what skills they would like to see improvement from their team members. Find if there is any correlation between coaches and team members.

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## APPENDIX

**Interview Questions- Youth**

1. How did you get involved in Livestock Judging?
2. What is your favorite/least favorite species?
  - a. Why?
3. Tell me a favorite memory from your judging experience.
  - a. Why was this your favorite
  - b. Who was involved?
  - c. How does this experience affect you today if at all?
4. What skills have you learned from livestock judging?
  - a. What skill or skills did you find the most difficult to learn or understand?
    - i. Could it still be improved?
5. Do you enjoy competing?
  - a. How do you get ready for a contest?
6. What do you like the most about judging?
  - a. Why?
7. What is the least enjoyable or what is not so much fun about judging?
  - a. Why?
8. If you could improve anything about how good you are at livestock judging what would it be?
  - a. Why?
9. Could you talk about a time that you used skills learned through livestock judging outside of judging?

- a. Do any other instances or skills come to mind?
10. How do you deal with the pressure/stress of doing a good job judging?
- a. Where did you learn to do that?
  - b. Do you think this helps you in other areas?
    - i. Why or why not?

**Interview Questions- Adults**

1. How did you get involved in Livestock Judging?
2. What is your favorite/least favorite species?
  - a. Why?
3. Could you talk about a really significant experience you've had so far in judging?
  - a. Why was this your favorite
  - b. Who was involved?
  - c. How does this experience affect you today if at all?
4. What skills have you learned from your livestock judging experience?
  - a. What skill or skills did you find the most difficult to master?
    - i. Could it still be improved?
5. Do you enjoy competing?
  - a. How do you get ready for a contest?
6. What do you enjoy most about judging?
  - a. Why?
7. What is least enjoyable about livestock judging?
  - a. Why?
8. If you could improve anything about your judging skills what would it be?
  - a. Why?
9. Could you talk about a time that you ever used a skill you use in judging in another area of your life?
  - a. Do any other instances or skills come to mind?
10. How do you deal with the pressure/stress of doing a good job judging?

- a. Where did you learn to do that?
- b. Do you think this helps you in other areas?
  - i. Why or why not?