

Understanding Families' Motivation for Engaging in Livestock Exhibitions: A Collective Instrumental Case Study

Abstract

The purpose of this collective instrumental case study was to understand the motivational factors that support families' decisions to exhibit livestock. The expectancy value theory served as the theoretical lens, and a review of literature led to four issues to be explored. Four typical family cases were identified, and interviews were conducted. Five In-Vivo themes were identified: (a) "a family tradition," (b) "bonds us together," (c) "on-the-job training for life," (d) "joys and discomforts of agricultural life," and (e) "the show industry." It was concluded that families value tradition, family togetherness, the agricultural community, work ethic, and the development of life skills critical for the success of their children. Winning, as traditionally defined in the show ring, was not the expectation. Rather, families expected to grow together, enjoy their time, and be competitive. The perceived family utility outweighed the noted costs. It was recommended that all stakeholders in the livestock exhibition community identify ways to enhance family involvement and work to reward ethical behaviors.

Keywords: motivation; family; livestock exhibition; youth; expectancy-value theory; *The Journey Toward the Purple Banner*

(Opening vignette) Approximately 7,000 students and their families the 77 counties and five areas of Oklahoma crowded into the state fairgrounds last week in hopes of taking home a purple banner (the award given to champion quality animals). In all, roughly 700 market steers, 1,900 breeding heifers, 6,500 market barrows, 6,400 breeding gilts, 2,000 market sheep, and 2,000 market goats were nominated and entered for the [State Livestock Show]. Exhibiting livestock seems to be woven into the tradition of rural families in our communities and schools, but have we created a monster that cannot be tamed? The majority of students who crowd into the various barns across the nation each year are enrolled in agricultural education programs – publicly funded school-based programs intending to build career skills in agriculture. Teachers are required to leave their classrooms behind in the pursuit of obtaining the famous purple banner. It was recently announced that millions of dollars are spent on these projects statewide. Is this investment yielding the results that were intended? I spent some time with one of these show moms at a recent state junior livestock show and asked why she was so invested when research indicated students were not gaining the agricultural career or STEM skills so important to the program. I was surprised by her answer, "That is not the primary reason we show at all! Though I hope those skills are developed, we show for a very different reason. . . ."

This opening vignette begs the question of interest to this study, "Why do certain families choose to engage in livestock exhibitions as a cohort?" Research over the last thirty years (Davis et al., 2000; Randell et al., 1993; Rusk et al., 2003; Wooten & Rayfield, 2013) has identified a number of benefits to exhibiting livestock including skill development, STEM integration, family cohesiveness, development of life-skills, social relations, and financial support for education. Livestock exhibitions allow learners to apply their learning and use their skills in meaningful, authentic contexts, which resonates with Priority 4 of the AAAE Research Agenda: Meaningful, Engaged Learning in All Environments (Roberts et al., 2016). Today's learners need to be engaged in agriculture maybe more than ever before. Further, learners should be allowed to apply their knowledge both inside and outside

the classroom (Roberts et al., 2016). Although all are worthy reasons for students to participate in raising and exhibiting livestock, what is the motivation for *families* to engage in this time intensive experience?

Development of Issues: Review of Literature

Family dynamics have changed drastically over the past 50 years because families no longer have to rely as heavily on each other and do not spend as much time together as they once did (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; Hareven, 1977). Because of the limited amount of time families spend together, they are not as unified as those of yesteryear (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). This trend presents a threat to public education. "The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7). Therefore, the implications for families working and spending time together is imperative to a student's success in school.

Researchers have concluded that a family's culture is developed through active engagement with each other (Pai et al., 2006; Roy, 2012). Thus, the more time a family spends together, the better defined the unit becomes. Because of its emphasis on leadership development, agricultural education has long been known as a medium for building relationships through ". . . a love and understanding for agriculture, educating students and adults as to its importance, and the promotion of literacy throughout educational and community systems" (Dailey et al., 2001, p. 19). It is possible that families who participate in the livestock exhibition community do so, intentionally or otherwise, as a means to improve or cultivate their family's culture (Davis et al., 2000).

Families of the past relied on each other to survive, and as such, each family member had a specific role within the family structure (Hareven, 1977). Often these roles were defined according to sex and age and were *identifiers* for individuals. *Togetherness* was valued and served as the driving force behind the unity and cohesiveness of the family (Hareven, 1977; Pai et al., 2006). Unfortunately, family dynamics have changed substantially over the past 50 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Families today do not share the same dynamics (Roy, 2012). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the average American family spends only 2 hours together per day. This lack of family time is causing family culture to suffer (Roy, 2012), affecting negatively the "knowledge, beliefs, values, skills, behaviors and traditions" (Pai et al., 2006, p. 4) of the family unit. It is imperative that parents find ways to interact and build lasting relationships with their children for numerous reasons. One of which is because they "promote academic achievement and positive attitudes about education" (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004, p. 573). Sharing times and experiences together as a family allow parents to provide their children with important concepts, beliefs, ideals, and pertinent social capital that exist within the family (Coleman, 1988; Crosnoe, 2004; Furstenberg, 2005). Such connections between parents and children enhance educational resilience among adolescents (Crosnoe, 2000) and lead to independence and success for children as they mature into adults (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004).

Fortunately, the act of exhibiting livestock has been considered a *family project* (Davis et al., 2000) that allows students to earn prizes for the quality of their animals, as well as their work ethic (Rusk et al., 2006). Livestock exhibitions can serve as a motivator for students who wish to raise farm animals (Bird & Martin, 2013). Over the past several years, livestock exhibitions have witnessed an increase in participation ([State Livestock Show], 2016; Rusk et al., 2006). Specifically, students in [State] participate in multiple livestock expositions, such as the State Fair, county fairs and the [State Livestock Show] (Peck, 2016). Despite the decline of rural communities, [State] has seen an increase in livestock exhibition projects with over 7,000 students competing in the 2016 [State Livestock Show]

alone. Leaders of this livestock event recognize that, as numbers of participating youth increases, it becomes increasingly important to assess why families choose to invest so heavily in the exhibition of livestock ([State Livestock Show], 2016).

Researchers have determined numerous benefits to exhibiting livestock. Chief among them are the development of important leadership skills necessary for life and employment (Anderson et al., 2015; Heavner, et al., 2011; Holmgren & Reid, 2007). Specifically, junior livestock projects have been shown to improve students' science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) competencies (Wooten et al., 2013). In addition, livestock exhibition projects help students acquire personal development skills, such as self-confidence, decision-making, problem solving, and sportsmanship, as well as knowledge about the animal agricultural industry (Davis et al., 2000; Rusk et al., 2006). Though research documents a number of beneficial outcomes of livestock exhibitions, all that glitters is not gold. In fact, research has pointed to the fact that unethical practices can occur at youth livestock exhibitions and are often a direct result of adult involvement (Connors & Dever, 2005). As such, educational materials have been developed to teach about ethics related to exhibiting livestock (Rusk & Machtmes, 2003). Given the multifaceted, familial approach of the industry, "more detailed research on the topic of livestock exhibition . . . should be conducted" (Anderson et al., 2015, Recommendations for Future Research para.).

Theoretical Lens

Our research team viewed each of the cases through the lens of the expectancy-value theory proposed by Eccles et al. (1983). Through this lens, theorists argue that, "an individual's choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity" (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 68). Expectancies for success are defined as "children's beliefs about how well they will do in an upcoming task" (Wigfield, 1994, p. 52). Expectancy has been further described as a product of both task difficulty and domain specific self-concept (Eccles et al., 1983). Task value has been conceptualized as a construct built upon four major components: (a) attainment value, (b) intrinsic value or interest, (c) utility value, and (d) cost (Eccles, 1987). Attainment value is the importance of doing well on a given task. Intrinsic value is the enjoyment one finds in completing a task. Utility, or usefulness, refers to how well a task fits into an individual's future plans. The first three components are often referred to as the elements of a task that affect the "positive valence" of a task (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995, p. 216). The fourth and final component – cost – refers to what is lost, suffered, or sacrificed in order to complete a task and is described as the negative valence of a task (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995). Reflection on the model prior to case entry spurred a number of curiosities that ultimately guided issue development.

Focus of the Case through Issues Identification

Stake (1995) contended that the use of *issues* "draws attention to problems and concerns" (p. 16). Further, in an instrumental case study it is essential to utilize the case, defined by Stake as Θ , to fully focus on each of the issues, noted as ϑ , which are the central focus (Stake, 1995). Issue questions force attention to "complexity and contextuality" (p. 16).

Exhibiting livestock is a time and resource intensive event. Millions of dollars of public funds are being used to build school-based facilities to support these livestock projects. Recently, an endowment was created based on a large donation, to ensure that the [State Livestock Show] remain viable for years to come. However, livestock exhibition has become increasingly expensive, adults are becoming much more involved, and many are profiting from the transactions associated with this experience. Rusk et al. (2006) purported that the goals of this complex experience are to increase the agricultural knowledge of youth and develop their personal skills (Rusk et al., 2006). Is that why parents

choose to participate in livestock exhibitions? Our research team sought to understand why exactly families are motivated to engage in livestock exhibitions. Four issues guided this instrumental, collective, case study:

- 9₁: What values drive a family's decision to exhibit livestock?
- 9₂: What are the task expectancies that provide the motivation to participate?
- 9₃: What are the most substantial family costs associated with the decision to exhibit livestock?
- 9₄: Is the perceived utility greater than the perceived cost?

A Search for Understanding: Methods

A qualitative design was selected to describe the role of family in exhibiting livestock. This approach allowed for meaning to be found from observations in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013). Previous studies conducted in this area have been successful using a qualitative approach (Davis, 1998; Rusk et al., 2006; Williams, 1998; Wooten & Moore, 2013); however, they have not used a lens that focuses on family culture. A collective case study approach provided in-depth analysis of typical [STATE] livestock show families (Stake, 1995). The cases in this study were chosen in order to provide understanding, as considering different cases will "lead to better understanding and perhaps better theorizing of a still larger collection of cases" (Mertens, 2020, p. 352). The use of methodological triangulation provided insight into the case, and a semi-structured interview format allowed for exploration of concepts arising during the interview process (Stake, 1995).

The study utilized the ontology of realism and the epistemology of constructionism. Realism asserts that reality exists outside of the mind (Crotty, 2003). For realists, entities of the outside world are real, but are interpreted differently based on an individual's experience. The ontology of realism is compatible with constructionism in that something is socially constructed but exists because of the established expectations regarding the interaction or experience. However, those expectations can change. In a constructionism epistemology, meaning is constructed through the interaction between the participant and the experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, meaning is co-constructed through the interactions of researchers and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interaction and engagement between the two parties in this study allowed us to explore the multiple ways participants made meaning in the experience of exhibiting livestock. The ontology of realism and the epistemology of constructionism informed the theoretical lens of Expectancy-Value (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Typical case selection was used to identify four families to participate in the study. A typical case was defined as an [State] family that has at least two children raising livestock for exhibition purposes and who would not be considered an *elite legacy* show family. An elite legacy show family is one that has competed in livestock exhibitions for generations. Since a typical case selection was used, an elite legacy show family would not be an accurate depiction of a typical livestock exhibition family in [State]. Experts identified families who fit the criteria. The typical family was operationalized on how the families were identified by the expert family. These families are ones that have shown for no more than two generations. However, previous show experience was not required. Families were chosen based on attendance at multiple state and national livestock expositions along with proximity and availability. Experience in 4-H expositions was also acceptable, but each of these families exhibited as part of SBAE. Four families of at least four members were selected to participate. Each case consisted of immediate family members participating in the livestock projects. Using a focus group format for the interview was advantageous to examining the case as a whole (Creswell, 2013). Collective observations allowed for inspection of the entire case in its natural setting (Stake, 1995).

Individuals were invited to participate over the phone. Three different collection methods were used to achieve triangulation. First, a one-hour semi-structured interview was conducted in a focus group format and included all immediate family members. Questions focused on the family's involvement in raising their livestock exhibition projects. The focus group interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Observations were recorded during the interview and while touring the family's livestock facilities. Field notes were taken in detail and guided by the research questions. Finally, families were asked to share artifacts that might provide further insight. Artifacts included photographs, awards, or audiovisual material. Interviews and tours of the livestock facilities occurred on the same day for each family. One research team member conducted the interviews and were hosted by the family in a tour of the facilities and sharing of artifacts. Data and field notes were shared with the research team as analysis took place.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and field notes and artifacts were compiled. Each line of the interview was numbered to facilitate the coding process. In-vivo coding was used for the first cycle coding method as described by Saldaña (2013). Codes used the participants' exact words to allow for reflection on their true meaning (Saldaña, 2013). This method of coding was ideal for a group that included younger children because it allowed for the use of their own words rather than the researchers' interpretation of their words. Once initial coding was complete, a secondary cycle coding method was used to metasynthesize data. Pattern coding was used to discern relationships between codes and determine emergent themes (Saldaña, 2013).

In this study, we used Tracy's (2010) criteria to build quality into the study. Sincerity and ethical procedure were achieved through transparency throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Additionally, through in-vivo coding, we remained true to the participants' observations. We reached out to a representative from each family and requested permission for their family to voluntarily participate in the study. Participants were informed we intended to publish the findings and were advised of confidentiality through the consent form. Pseudonyms were assigned during transcription for confidentiality. To build credibility in the deductive process, transcript lines and researcher memos were aligned with findings to provide context to the descriptions. Crystallization was chosen as a measure of credibility as researchers gathered data through various methods and frameworks to bring truth to the larger picture. Through the use of transcribed interviews, field notes, observations, and selected artifacts, multiple accounts of the same story were provided (Tracy, 2010).

Reflexivity is important to any qualitative study to understand the researcher's background with the area he or she is studying and any bias he or she may bring into the study (Creswell, 2013). The four researchers involved in the study included two teacher educators, one instructor, and one graduate student at [State] University. Each researcher had a background in and certification to teach secondary agricultural education. The teacher educators taught agricultural education in the public-school system and are involved in preparing preservice teachers for [State] University. All four researchers were active in their respective livestock exhibition communities as youths, and two of the researchers have family members who exhibit livestock currently. Therefore, as researchers, we are familiar with the dynamics of the livestock exhibition community and recognize the need to be aware of and avoid existing bias (Tracy, 2010). To become self-aware of biases and experiences and ensure that the participants' voices were heard, bracketing was achieved through memo-ing throughout the data collection and analysis period (Tracy, 2010).

Description of Cases

The majority of homes are adorned with family photos. The homes of the participants were no different, except their family photos were set at fairs and county shows, with a large group of *extended family* surrounding their livestock projects. Interviews occurred at kitchen tables and in living rooms. As we walked through their livestock barns, participants shared the details of their projects like most people would describe their kid's honor status or touchdown record. In each case, barns were lined with winning banners, livestock sale pictures including their entire family, and various pieces of equipment they had won at livestock events. With each case examined, it became increasingly evident that exhibiting livestock was a large part of their family identity. These family units were fully engaged in livestock exhibition and had intentions of being competitive in the events for which they chose to participate.

Four case studies were conducted on livestock exhibition families. Family pseudonyms are used for confidentiality. The first family to participate was the Roberts family. The Roberts' bleed blue and gold. Both parents, Ronald (father) and Deborah (mother) were active in FFA when they were in high school, and they knew they wanted their three girls, Leslie, Kayla and Hazel, to follow suit. They have been raising cattle for the livestock exhibition circuit for the last five years. They spend in excess of 10 hours per week, on average, in the barn with their girls tending to their cattle.

The second family to participate was the Johnson family. The Johnson's have three kids, two older daughters, Emma and Olivia, and a younger son, Logan, who were motivated to exhibit sheep because of their father's active involvement in the livestock exhibition community. For the past seven years, the Johnson kids have spent the majority of their afternoons at the barn together where they feed, exercise, and work their sheep projects. The Johnson's maintain in excess of 20 head of sheep for various livestock exhibitions throughout the year. Their parents, James (father) and Abigail (mother), provide support, expertise, and help when needed, but believe, at the end of the day, it is their kids' responsibility to care for their projects.

The third family to participate was the Wagner family. Greg (father) exhibited livestock as a youth and served as an agricultural education instructor for ten years. Based on his former experiences, both he and his wife, Eliza, have always wanted their kids to exhibit livestock. Their daughter, Jamie, began exhibiting swine and goats when she entered the eighth grade. Even though she has since graduated, their son, Thomas, has continued by expanding their livestock exhibition enterprise. The Wagner's house their livestock projects at the school farm and spend every evening together caring for them.

The final family to participate was the Burns family. Their daughter, Alyssa, and son, Noah, have exhibited cattle and goats, but their main project includes sheep they have raised from their flock. Their barn sits directly across the street from their residence, and they spend countless hours each day caring for their animals. Both parents, William (father) and Mia (mother) were active in agricultural education, but only William had raised and exhibited livestock previously.

Assertions and Conclusions

From four focus group interviews, two of the four researchers extracted 165 and 164 process codes from the data. The research team negotiated 55 focused (i.e., secondary) codes, which were compressed into 28 tertiary codes (i.e., categories). The categories were deduced into five themes: *A Family Tradition, Bonds us Together, On-the-Job Training for Life, The Joys and Discomforts of Agricultural Life, and The Show Industry.*

Theme 1: A Family Tradition

In this category, families discussed how they got started as a family unit in exhibiting livestock, being in agriculture, how they develop and share traditions, and why they choose to invest in exhibiting livestock as a family. The first subtheme was: *Family Around Agriculture*. Families discussed why they got involved in exhibiting livestock. For all four families, at least one of the parents exhibited or was involved in agriculture as a youth and were “rooted” (4:273) in the industry. When discussing why families started exhibiting livestock, one parent responded, “I did it in high school. It was a good experience, and I wanted my kids to be able to do it” (4:6-7). When the children in the family discussed livestock exhibitions they stated, “It was never a question. It was something we were going to do” (3:42-43), and “It’s kinda the way we’ve been growing up” (1:679).

As a livestock exhibition family, traditions have been created and established. Families stated, “we’ve never really taken vacations anywhere and [when considering] one of those places that we went somewhere together, it was probably the stock shows” (3:507-509). One participant stated,

Some people play golf . . . This [exhibiting livestock] is something that we’ve chosen to do. We enjoy it. This is our family activity. We get home in the afternoon, and we change clothes, and we go up there [to the barn] and spend some time together, and that’s just kind of our thing that we like to do as a family (3:119-123).

When asked about their traditions, all four families stated: “Spring Break is [State Livestock Event]” (4:220, 2:405, 1:697, 3:218). James Johnson stated, “After the show [exhibition] is over, we sit down and talk about what went well, what didn’t, and what we could do better, how we could improve” (2:414-415). Within traditions, participants showed family ownership of experiences by the use of the word, *we*, or the indication that showing is a family event. Instead of referring to the projects as *the kids*, both parents and kids referred to activities as something “we do.” For example, when starting a project, Leslie Roberts stated, “So we kind of made that decision together” (1:32) that we would invest in this experience as a family. Moreover, it was reported that exhibiting livestock is “worth the investment” (2:38) because it is something these families choose to do together as a unit. Families stated that caring for and exhibiting livestock is “fun” (3:13) and that it allows them to have “fun together as a family” (1:616). For example, “You can have memories from a cruise, but you won’t have memories like you have from the livestock show” (3:126). Families participated “for the enjoyment” (3:115).

Previous literature by Bird et al. (2013) indicated that SAE projects created from intrinsic motivation are more sustainable and lead to greater outcomes. Intrinsic motivators are more effective than extrinsic motivators, and agricultural education should focus its efforts on helping students discover their intrinsic motivation (Bird et al., 2013). Families in our study listed various intrinsic motivators as reasons for participation, such as: family identity, continuing tradition, and enjoyment. Enjoyment as a motivator is consistent amongst both our study and Bird et al.’s. (2013).

Theme 2: Bonds Us Together

The second theme to emerge was: *Bonds Us Together*. Although family was defined as immediate blood relatives in this study, the term family took a much broader meaning with these cases. Families discussed community, support, friendships, and mentoring as the things that bond them together. Within the immediate family, subthemes included stronger bonds, gender roles, and working together.

When asked about people who participate in the livestock exhibition circles, participants identified them as “extended family” (3:607), “tight-knit” (3:582), and a “big community” (2:495). When asked about the extended family, parents stated that other families “took us under their wing”

(1:639) and were “incredibly welcoming” (1:633). Students reported that through exhibiting livestock, they “have a lot of unrelated brothers” (4:756) and “have a lot of friends because of [exhibiting]” (4:31). Mentoring also was an important component of the community as indicated by one parent who said: “Ronald has been mentored by a lot of men in the show barns, and those tables have turned really quickly as he’s mentored a lot of people” (1:646-647). Additionally, participants acknowledged the shared values within the community in statements such as, “I think it’s that fraternity of being around people that have the same values and the same principles that you do” (3:646-651). One of the participants stated, “That’s why I love agricultural education and FFA so much. The values of what the program was designed for really aligns well with how people raise their kids” (4:522).

Working with and exhibiting livestock projects has equated to “required family time” (1:269) that has brought the participants “closer as a family” (1:613) and created a “strong bond” (2:146). Working with and exhibiting livestock are viewed as “our family activity” (3:121) and “gives opportunity to spend some time together” (3:122). Additionally, families “work through and learn through all kinds of relationship issues” (1:606-607). When discussing the bond livestock exhibitions create, one parent said: “It’s helped us as parents learn a lot about the girls and their behaviors. Hopefully the girls have learned a little bit about our strengths and weaknesses and what makes us tick” (1:606-613).

Roles of each family member were discussed throughout the focus groups. Mothers identified themselves as, “behind the scenes person” (2:222), “encourager” (1:618), and “in charge of food for the humans” (1:534). Fathers identified themselves as the financial providers of the experience. One mother stated, “this is the ‘money bags’ (pointing at father)” (3:403). Another father admitted, “I support them financially” (4:305). Roles in the families also were identified in terms of jobs related to caring for the livestock. “Everyone has a role” and families “share the load” (1:253). Work was usually done “on a rotation” (1:497) so the workload was shared because “the more hands you have on deck, the faster it goes” (1:510). “If there’s a task at hand that we need to accomplish as a family, then we can probably get it done” (2:304).

Davis et al. (2000, p. 122) also found that livestock exhibitions are an opportunity for families to “travel as a family unit that is working toward a common goal.” Consistent with what we found, families learned that emotions play a role in learning about each other and opening up the opportunity for family bonding (Davis et al., 2000). The findings of this study support the notion that these families work together to accomplish daily chores related to livestock exhibition projects, which aligns with Davis et al. (2000).”

Theme 3: On-the-Job Training for Life

All four families admitted that raising and exhibiting livestock was “on-the-job training for life” (1:663). This theme emerged as the participating families that exhibiting livestock provided their families “great life lessons” (1:361-362) and the opportunity to learn “skills that employers want.” Eliza Wagner stated, “We’re choosing to invest this in our kids and in the invaluable lessons” (4:770-772). Life lessons that these families felt they were learning through their livestock experience included “how to take care of something other than themselves” (3:28), “to be humble and to . . . accept winning with dignity, but also accept defeat” (2:380-381), and “hard work doesn’t always get rewarded, but it always pays off” (4:537).

Families also found that they were learning important career skills through their livestock projects. All families perceived exhibiting livestock “instilled tremendous work ethic” (2:91). They compared their childrens’ work ethic to their peers. Ronald Roberts stated, “I’m very impressed by our

girls and their ability to work and their willingness to work because there's a lot of kids who don't" (1:246-247). Along with hard work, they believed that "the responsibilities of just taking care of animals" (3:197) could translate to the workplace. Something as simple as the ability to "show up to work on time" (3:273) could put them at an advantage in the future. Some of the parents verbalized that their children were responsible for their own projects and their role was to assist when needed. James Johnson stated that his kids "really do it themselves" and he is "just sort of an oversight and making sure things are going okay and assisting with problem solving" (2: 214-216). Noah explained that when he was younger his dad used to help a lot more "but as we got older, it kind of declined and now me and my sister pretty much do everything" (4:311-312). Finally, parents noted that their children were learning time management through having to balance school, their livestock projects, homework, and other activities, and they recognized that raising livestock projects for exhibition was helping their children mature into workers future employers could "depend on" (3:266-269). James Johnson stated, "I feel pretty comfortable that when they come to a college campus and they start pursuing that higher level academic degree, they're going to be prepared to time manage and balance the academic requirements" (2:93-94). Families value the opportunity for personal growth and "take advantage . . . of teaching them through those times" (1-361-363).

These findings align with previous literature stating that students are learning skills related to personal development, such as responsibility and work ethic (Davis et al., 2000). Davis et al. (2000) further confirmed our findings that parents want to play an active role in helping their students learn from their livestock projects. They claimed that parents take on the role of teaching and modeling to help students learn desirable character traits (Davis et al., 2000). Parent participants in a study by Dailey et al. (2001) identified that character traits were more desirable outcomes for their children than academics.

Theme 4: Joys and Discomforts of Agricultural Life

"In the [FFA] Creed it says, 'For I know the joys and discomforts of agricultural life.'" (1: 330-332). This theme emerged from two tertiary themes: *Realize that you're part of feeding the world and learn a lot about sacrifice*. These two subthemes convey the recurring idea from all four families that they see both the enjoyable and challenging aspects of agriculture. All four families mentioned that there are numerous joys associated with raising livestock. The Burns family found a specific purpose in their projects related to this theme. Mia stated:

I don't think a lot of kids that are not involved in agriculture or even FFA understand where their food comes from and just that aspect of it. To realize that you're part of feeding the world, you know? I think that is pretty remarkable to know that you're part of people being able to eat (4: 131-134).

Exhibiting livestock allows these families to feel like they are "contributing to our county, our state, the agricultural world" (4:772). The Wagner family found purpose in an opportunity to donate their animal to a local food bank. Noah stated he chose to donate his pig project after the exhibition season ended not for the recognition but "because I want to do it" (3: 225-226).

On the other side, these families also are privy to the discomforts of agriculture. Three of the four families shared unfortunate experiences related to animal death and disease. Kayla Roberts recounted losing her heifer and the negative effects it had on her:

It was really hard on me and I avoided going to the barn and I don't know, it just really upset me . . . I was going through this time where I hated showing. I didn't want to do it, and it was the last thing I wanted to talk about (1: 319-325).

The Wagner family learned that death and disease are part of the learning process and have come to accept the reality that with livestock projects “if you don’t want something [unfortunate] to happen, don’t own ’em” (3:542).

These families have also discovered that through this process you learn a lot about sacrifice. All four identified three areas of sacrifice: *time*, *money*, and *opportunities*. The Johnson family described their daily time commitment:

When we’re in ‘showing season,’ we get up and go feed in the morning. And then after school, we will be at the barn for at least three hours every night. Just working sheep, getting sheep ready for shows, yeah it’s a lot of time commitment. (2:50-52)

Each family expressed that they “just don’t have a lot of free time” (2-130). Each of the participating students stated that they “don’t have much time after school to do very much” (3:323-324) because they invest so much time in their projects.

In addition, all participants identified money as a large sacrifice. They recognized their livestock projects are a “big financial commitment” (1:348) and realized “it takes a long time to develop a program that money starts coming back around” (1:349). The Roberts’ felt that “it’s been a lot of investing, investing, investing” (1:351-352). The Johnson family acknowledged “the financial stress” showing livestock puts on their family. Finally each family identified the sacrifice of opportunities, such as other activities and time for friends. The student participants shared their experiences of having to set priorities and forfeit other activities to exhibit livestock. Emma Johnson stated:

We both (Emma and Olivia) used to be involved in sports. And we were both girl scouts when we were little. We both took piano lessons. But as time goes on, we really started to prioritize and figure out . . . this is what I want to do, this is what I’m committed to, and some of the other stuff we were just kind of like, it’s just kind of taking time that we would rather spend doing what we love (2:116-120).

Noah Burns also recounted missing “a lot of football practices” and social events due to having to care for his animals. Sacrificing time with friends also was mentioned in all four interviews. Although the majority of kids are available to hang out on the weekends, the participants often have to tell their friends “they can’t do that this weekend because they’ve got a show coming up” (2:124-125). The students acknowledged this as a challenging sacrifice stating it required them to make “adjustments with friends” (1:375).

Davis’s et al. (2000) also found students developed their character through the high points and struggles they were exposed to while exhibiting livestock. In support of our findings, their study found families experience both the highs and lows together, leading to learning opportunities (Davis et al., 2000). These similarities provide reassurance; however, we have found that our livestock families have deeper struggles than losing or dealing with the reality of selling their animal at the end of the livestock exhibition season (Davis et al., 2000).

Theme 5: The Showing Industry

Eccles and Wigfield (1995) described cost as the negative valence that draws a person away from an activity. Though there were a number of sacrifices and challenges noted in each of the cases, the true cost was most often connected to what Greg called “the showing industry” (4:161). Greg explained,

The showing industry for me has changed a lot over the years. When I was involved in it, you didn’t have so many of the livestock *jocks* [i.e., professional fitters] and now I think it’s turned into a business for a lot of people. I don’t want to say the program’s completely gotten away

from what we're trying to do here, but I think a lot of it, you know, to be successful and to be honest in doing it, is really hard. (4:161-165)

Each family perceived that exhibiting livestock had evolved requiring greater financial resources and including professional fitters who might not always go about the process honestly.

The financial burden was a subtheme that emerged. William shared that, "one of the things that I struggle with the most is we've gotten the show program to such an investment level that it's hard for the average person to get into it" (3:288-290). "I wish there was a way to get the skills that you gain through it but not have such an investment responsibility" (3:296-297). The need for increased financial investments was a result of the increased rigor of the activity. "Today you've got feed costs that are so much and keeping them in warm places, keeping wood chips, the facilities. Twenty years ago, it just wasn't that way" (3:298-300). "There's a lot of people that spend a lot of money in the livestock industry and we're not in that category" (2:175). Closely tied to the financial burden of remaining competitive in *the show industry* was the time and effort required. One case shared that "dad lives in the barn" (1:174). In describing the routine of the family, one father shared, "we have a guy that comes and works with the girls once every two weeks. He'll work with them at shows. They are always being trained" (1:464-466). The burden and effort to remain competitive seemed to be approaching the limit in respect to perceived utility.

The final subtheme that emerged was a frustration with cheating. One father explained that, "We don't cheat - we will do it honest[ly] or we will not win. We raise our own animals. My kids don't show up to the show and grab a halter and go into the ring. They've earned it" (4:507-509). Eliza shared, "When you go in a show ring and [someone] beats you because someone else has done the work for them, it's hard for our kids to understand how that is fair" (4: 171-184). Though there have been numerous frustrating moments, as shared by Abigail, her children have learned that when they leave a livestock exhibition event they know they have maintained their family's moral code (2:183). Inherently, this implies not everyone has done the same. Though families shared that exhibiting livestock has become a place where ethics are questioned, the discussions in all four cases support the top unethical practices in livestock exhibition reported by Nestor (2000) and Connors and Dever (2005): (a) paying extreme prices for animals to improve chances of winning, (b) parents or teachers preparing animals for show rather than youth, and (c) the grooming of show animals by professionals rather than youth. This is tied to the general idea of this theme – that exhibiting livestock can, and has, shifted to more of an adult industry rather than a child's learning experience. Table 1 summarizes the resolution of each of the four issue questions.

Table 1

Key issues and resolution

Issue Question	Resolution
ϑ ₁ : What task values drive the decision to exhibit?	Family's attainment value is grounded in their self-identity as a show family. Honesty, work ethic, tradition, family unity, and agricultural community typify this identity.
ϑ ₂ : What expectancies for success do families have?	Winning is not operationalized as a child's final place in a class. Rather, success seems to be tied to the children's life skill development and family enjoyment of the activity.
ϑ ₃ : What are the family costs?	Costs include unrealistic financial pressures, a growing trend of <i>cheating</i> through professional assistance, and time commitments that actually prevent families from spending time together.

Q4: Is utility greater than cost?	Families perceive the utility outweighs the costs. However, it is important to identify the desired utility. If the utility is career and technical skills/knowledge in agriculture, perhaps not. If the utility is work ethic, determination, and socialization as a family – yes.
-----------------------------------	---

Discussion and Praxis

“The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well” (Stake, 1995, p. 8). In that spirit, there is a great deal to learn from these four cases. First, the exhibition of livestock as a family activity was effective in building family relations in all four of these cases, which is consistent with the findings of Rusk et al. (2003) and Davis et al. (2000). Henderson and Mapp (2002) presented overwhelming evidence that engaged families lead to better school performance, and they suggested that all families could benefit from special efforts to engage better. From the findings of this study, it appears livestock exhibitions are one experience that can engage the entire family unit. Additional research is needed to determine how exhibiting livestock might affect youths’ performance in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The power of livestock exhibition in these cases was found in the familial connection and involvement. It should be recognized that each of these families lived far above the poverty line, came from privileged backgrounds, and had the time and resources required to participate in livestock exhibitions. How can opportunities to raise and exhibit livestock be extended to youth of less fortunate families who have lacking resources to allow them to realize the familial bonding observed in each of these four cases? A finding of this study seemed to suggest that livestock exhibitions have become too expensive and extravagant. Perhaps it is time to determine a new format for those wanting to participate but cannot compete with the escalating financial costs. The families in this study desired to have a better bond with their youth. Livestock exhibitions were deemed an appropriate vehicle for allowing all family members to participate in an authentic learning environment, while developing bonds, acquiring and practicing essential life skills, and learning about the joys and difficulties of agricultural life.

These findings suggest it is possible that livestock exhibitions can improve a person’s sense of belonging, which can lead to student success (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). Additional research should compare academic student success of those who originated from families involved in livestock exhibitions with those who did not. Specifically, studies should seek to compare academic success and employability skill attainment. Additionally, children originating from livestock exhibition families should be followed longitudinally to determine their long-term wellbeing, i.e., success, and if such investments are determined to be worth the cost.

Second, from a family perspective, the primary goal of livestock exhibitions in these cases was to build familial bonds, become a part of the agricultural community, and develop personally. Although noble reasons to engage, they are not congruent with other researchers who found the primary goals of livestock exhibitions were to increase and develop job skills related to animal agriculture (Rusk et al., 2006) or to integrate STEM in animal agriculture (Wooten et al., 2013). This begs the question, what exactly are the outcomes of interest for livestock exhibitions and how are those measured to determine impact? In each of these cases, livestock exhibition was tied to publicly funded, school-based, agricultural education. What outcomes of livestock exhibition are public schools hoping for and how can they be achieved? In these cases, families were personally motivated to participate in hopes of gaining familial bonds. Based on overwhelming evidence that family engagement is one of the best predictors of school performance, families should be encouraged to participate in raising and exhibiting livestock with their children as a means of strengthening their family dynamics. In the four distinct cases described in our study, families do not perceive academic performance as an expectancy or value

associated with livestock exhibition. However, they do value family engagement, which has the potential to lead to academic success (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004).

Third, it is essential that livestock exhibitions maintain a realistic balance. Currently, each family found the utility to outweigh the costs. However, it did appear that the perceived costs were steadily increasing and the growing financial, ethical, and temporal demands were taxing at times. Therefore, it is important that family structures be reminded of the purpose of livestock exhibitions, as described in this study, and not *create a monster that cannot be controlled*. With that said, livestock exhibitions provide structures to support the culture of community, love of agriculture, the value of hard work, and the teaching of ethical behavior.

The literature is clear in documenting the benefits of families building connections and spending time together as a unit (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). The family units of interest in this study demonstrated the power of livestock exhibitions in allowing families to participate together, acquire life skills, compete for recognition, and learn about an entire. The livestock exhibition industry allows entire family units to participate, which allows for emotional bonding and connections between and among family members and structures. In these cases, sharing times and experiences together as a family allowed for parents to provide their children with important concepts, beliefs, ideals, and pertinent social capital that exist within the family (Coleman, 1988; Crosnoe, 2004; Furstenberg, 2005). Livestock exhibition projects can serve as a vehicle for engaging family units similar to those featured in this study.

(Closing vignette) The show mom wasted no time sharing why her family makes the enormous investment in junior livestock exhibitions. "Our family shows because it is a family tradition. We show because a family that shows together stays together. Our children will know the joys and discomforts of an industry that means so much to us. . . and the world. We put our money into this activity because it prepares our children for life. There are costs, but for us, the benefits are invaluable. We are a show family!

References

- Anderson, J., Bruce, J. A., Jones, D. W. W., & Flowers, J. L. (2015). The impact of livestock exhibition on youth leadership life skill development: Youth agricultural organizations. *Journal of Extension*, 53(1). <https://www.joe.org/joe/2015february/a5.php>
- Bird, W. A., Martin, M. J., & Simonsen, J. C. (2013). Student motivation for involvement in supervised agricultural experiences: A historical perspective. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 54(1), 31–46. <https://doi:10.5032/jae.2013.01031>
- Bagozzi, R. P. (1984). Expectancy-value attitude models: An analysis of critical measurement issues. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 1(4), 295–310. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-8116\(84\)90017-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-8116(84)90017-X)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). *American time use survey*. <http://www.bls.gov/tus/charts/childcare.htm>.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital and the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 95–121. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243>

- Connors, J. J., & Dever, J. E. (2005). Unethical practices observed at youth livestock exhibitions by Ohio secondary agricultural educators. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 46(1), 20–31. <https://doi:10.5032/jae.2005.01046>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Crosnoe, R. (2000). Friendships in childhood and adolescence: The life course and new directions. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), 377–391. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695847>
- Crosnoe, R. (2004). Social capital and the interplay of families and schools. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(2), 267–280. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2004.00019.x>
- Crosnoe, R., & Elder, G. H., Jr., (2004). Family dynamics, supportive relationships, and educational resilience during adolescence. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(5), 571–602. <https://doi:10.1177/0192513X03258307>
- Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dailey, A. L., Conroy, C. A., & Shelley-Tolbert, C. A. (2001). Using agricultural education as the context to teach life skills. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 42(1), 11–20. <https://doi:10.5032/jae.2001.01011>
- Davis C., Keith, L., Williams, K., & Frazee, S. (2000). Validation of perceived benefits of competitive livestock exhibition by Texas 4-H members: A qualitative study. *Annual Publication of the Southern Agricultural Education Research Conference, USA*, 50, 119–125.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (1995). In the mind of the actor: The structure of adolescents' achievement task values and expectancy-related beliefs. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21 (3), 215–225. <https://doi:10.1177/0146167295213003>
- Furstenberg, F. F. (2005). Banking on families: How families generate and distribute social capital. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(4), 809–821. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00177.x>
- Hareven, T. K. (1977). Family time and historical time. *Daedalus*, 106(2), 57–70. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024476>
- Heavner, J., Hicks, K., & Nicodemus, S. (2011). Parental perceptions of participation in 4-H beef, sheep and swine livestock projects and fostering of life skill development in youth. *Journal of Youth Development*, 6(2), 78–86. <https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/190/176>
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual Synthesis 2002*. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.

- Holmgren, L. N., & Reid, C. R. (2007). 4-H and FFA livestock projects: Life skills gained and knowledge learned. *Journal of Youth Development*, 2(1), 124–132. <https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/367/353>
- Mertens, D. M. (2020). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods* (5th ed.). Sage.
- [State] Youth [Livestock Show]. (2016). *Our history*. Author. [http://www.\[State Livestock Show\].com/abouthistory](http://www.[State Livestock Show].com/abouthistory)
- Pai, Y., Adler, S. A., & Shadiow, L. K. (2006). *Cultural foundations of education* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Peck, L. (2016). Calendar. [State Magazine]. [https://\[state magazine\].com/calendar.html](https://[state magazine].com/calendar.html)
- Randell, R. S., Arrington L. R., & Cheek, J. G. (1993). The relationship of supervised agricultural experience program participation and student achievement in practical skills in agricultural science. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 31(1), 26–32. <https://doi:10.5032/jae.1993.0126>
- Roy, K. M. (2012). In search of a culture: Navigating the dimensions of qualitative research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(4), 660–665. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00981.x>
- Roberts, T. G., Harder, A., & Brashears, M. T. (Eds). (2016). *American Association for Agricultural Education national research agenda: 2016-2020*. Gainesville, FL: Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.
- Rusk, C. P., & Machtmes, K. (2003). Livestock ethics -- A lesson for high school students. *Journal of Extension*, 41(3). <https://www.joe.org/joe/2003june/iw4.php>
- Rusk, C. P., Summerlot-Early, J. M., Machtmes, K. L., Talbert, B. A., & Balschweid, M. A. (2006). The impact of raising and exhibiting selected 4-H livestock projects on the development of life and project skills. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 44(3), 1–11. <https://doi:10.5032/jae.2003.03001>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- The Agricultural Education Mission. (2016). <https://www.ffa.org/about/agricultural-education>
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Wigfield, A. (1994). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation: A developmental perspective. *Educational Psychology Review*, 6(1), 49–78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02209024>

- Wigfield, A. & Eccles, J. S. (1992). The development of achievement task values: A theoretical analysis. *Developmental Review, 12*(3), 265–310. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297\(92\)90011-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297(92)90011-P)
- Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 68–81. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1015>
- Wooten, K., Rayfield, J., & Moore, L. L. (2013). Identifying STEM concepts associated with junior livestock projects. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 54*(4), 31–44. <https://doi:10.5032/jae.2013.04030>