

10-31-2015

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Recommended Citation

Taylor, K., Scholl, J., & Hall, S. P. (2015). Longitudinal Study of a State 4-H Fashion Revue. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 3(3), 10. <https://doi.org/10.54718/PAZQ4591>

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Longitudinal Study of a State 4-H Fashion Revue

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The 4-H fashion revue contest gives young people the opportunity to create their own garment and present it in front of judges and an audience. To come to the conclusions reported here, the participant entry forms, participant evaluations, and judges' comments representing seven years (2006-2013) of state fashion revue participation in Pennsylvania were analyzed. No differences were found in cost or time allocation among those who placed as award winners and those who did not place. Data and participant comments indicated that participants gained some life skills. In addition, more than one-third of the youth involved in these contests were found to mend for their family and friends as part of their 4-H textile and clothing experiences.

Keywords: youth development, 4-H, fashion revue, contests

Introduction

Over the past century, there have been many Extension publications issued about 4-H contests. Most of them are premium lists, activity guides, and score cards. A few research studies have been conducted on standardizing livestock judging (Goodell & Newell, 1937). Edwards (1953) conducted a study of 4-H contests and the effects of participation on leaders and members, while Jones (1958) analyzed the relationship between awards and project enrollment in 4-H contests in New Mexico.

In 2010, Goodwin noted that among the positive youth development contests evaluated in Colorado, the 4-H fashion revue had the greatest influence on positive youth development. Searching the National 4-H Research website (Scholl & Munyua, 2004; Scholl & Paster, 2011) and several library databases, a four-page pamphlet by McPheeters and Helbing (1929) was found that gave suggestions for conducting girls' judging contests. But no investigation of fashion revue (called dress revue in the early years) was found among the more than 4,000 studies since the beginning of boys and girls clubs (early 4-H) in 1902. Since no study was located, and considering how many states hold and have held an annual event of this type (in some states for 80 years), a study of a fashion revue contest was conducted. The contest

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coordinators of this particular event also wanted to determine whether top-placed individuals had benefitted from practices, such as purchasing more expensive fabrics, which might give them an advantage over other youth.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to compare similarities and differences in participants who won awards in the Pennsylvania 4-H fashion revue contest and those who did not win, based on the following variables: age, number of years in club work, type of garment(s) sewn, cost of the garment(s) sewn, value of the garment(s) sewn, cost of the accessories purchased, hours spent in construction, and whether the members used their construction skills and/or benefitted from the development of life skills in addition to project requirements.

Hypothesis

Researchers anticipated that those 4-H members who spent the most money on fabrics and notions for their garment, those 4-H members who spent the most on accessories for their sewn garments, and those 4-H members who spent the most time completing their garments, would more likely be placed among the top individuals than those who spent less money or time on their garments.

Methods

Description of the State Fashion Revue Event and Participants

Seven years of Pennsylvania state 4-H fashion revue events were studied (2006–2013). The statewide events were held annually at an overall state teen conference of youths in late July or early August, depending on university scheduling. Fifty participants, age 13 to 18, were selected each year from regional events in the state. All participants constructed garments for this revue. Boys and girls participated in the statewide contest, though the number of males during these years was very low; thus gender was not included as a variable in the present study. While participants' modeling ability, the coordination of fabrics and accessories, and the choices made for personal coloring and proportions were judged, sewing construction was not.

Three hundred fifty-two (352) participant entries were studied. Because this was a population study, meaning that all of the participants' (100%) forms were used, there was no need for random sampling in order to represent the population. To comply with human subjects guidelines, no personal information related to participant name, address, or scores were used; only the placing in the top twelve of fifty participants (the top placing) was documented.

Data Sources

The main source of information for the present study was answers on participants' entry sheets. In addition to a 100-word modeling commentary, information on the 4-H clothing project entered was studied, including the actual cost and estimated retail value of both garments and accessories, the time taken to complete the sewn garments(s), and a list of any other garments made during the year. Judges, for the most part, did not see the participant entry forms unless there was a tie in scoring or if a photograph was needed to identify if the correct person was being scored.

Participants also evaluated the event, and these evaluations were taken under consideration to determine if the 4-H members felt there was discrimination of any type. In this evaluation, questions were asked about the quality of judging, the helpfulness of the committee, the value of the workshops, and the life skills that youth felt they learned by participating in the contest. In addition, the judges' written comments were summarized and sorted by modeling performance, the coordination of fabrics and accessories, and the choices made for personal coloring and proportions. Though "inside" construction was not judged, construction reflecting outside appearance, such as lack of pressing, facings rolling to the front of the garment, and uneven hems were evaluated and comments made. Only the comments, not the 4-H members' scores, were reviewed as the comments reflected suggestions made directly to the individual members.

Analyses

The variables of interest, as outlined in the objectives, were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2012). SPSS Crosstabs, an application of SPSS (2012) was used to make comparisons, and data were graphically plotted to identify "outliers" by persons who may have spent twice or more than most participants on fabric, notions, or accessories, and/or twice as much time in construction. Further statistical analysis was conducted, however, the few "outliers" skewed the results and provided no additional clarity in terms of the findings. To be sure an accurate assessment was made, individuals in the top ten were matched to individuals spending the most and the least time or money. The range of money spent by individuals was between \$15.00 and \$650.00 for the garments and \$1.50 (shoe polish) to \$368 for accessories. The range in time spent by individuals was 2-3 hours to 6 weeks.

The entire seven years were studied (2006–2013). There was no initial study of each year in relation to any other year, as the year was not a variable. However, a breakdown of the top placing 4-H members by year was conducted after the fact, and no appreciable differences were found in the data when reviewed by year.

Limitations

There were very few male participants in this fashion revue program. However, the number of males is often low in state fashion revue events. The top-placing 4-H members were the main consideration in this study, and in some years, this included both males and females.

While evaluations from the participants about the event and the judges' comments were reviewed, the main source of information was answers on the participants' entry sheets.

Findings and Discussion

The data were distributed evenly for the following variables: cost of making the garment, hours spent making the garment, cost of accessories, and other sewing completed (outside of their project). Comparing the spread of data, those participants who placed in the top twelve did not spend more time, spend more money, or complete more years of sewing projects when compared with those who did not place as high. Those who spent more on accessories, however, had a slight advantage in some cases.

No differences in placing were found between those who sewed additional garments and those who did not. However, participants who replicated special garments (as seen in Hollywood films, period pieces, and garments they had designed themselves) were not judged as high as participants wearing other garments. The judges noted that some of these participant choices did not suit a participant's coloring or proportion.

The largest number of comments found to be critical to the member's work related to color choice, the use of proportion, and lack of construction pressing (as shown on the outside of the garment). In terms of modeling, the majority of the comments reflected the need to "smile" and "show off" (be proud of) the garments they had made. In the entire group of judges' comments, more than 50% were positive in orientation to the participants' achievements.

On participant evaluations of the event, individuals remarked on the places they had worn their garments and the pride they felt in wearing them. In addition, several young people made the comment that it was a "rush" (an exciting experience) showing what they had accomplished to an audience of their peers. Some participants indicated that their most valuable learning experiences were at the county and regional levels. To some, receiving state recognition was not of critical importance as it had been one of their dreams just to participate at the state-level competition.

On the evaluation sheets, the young people also noted that they had obtained the following life skills: acquiring, analyzing, and using information (44%); communicating and working with and relating to others (68%); personal development skills (49%); problem solving and decision

making (38%); and managing resources (37%). It is not known whether the participants felt they had obtained these skills from their project work, in the contest judging, modeling in front of an audience, or from all of these experiences in combination. Without other studies available, it is also difficult to determine whether these life skill percentages are high or low compared with other fashion revue experiences.

Though not related to the actual fashion revue experience or to the study's objectives, 30% of the top ten individuals and 35% of the other revue participants, a total of 65%, indicated that they used the construction skills learned in their clothing and textiles project to mend and alter garments for their family and friends.

No differences were found between the age of the member and the top placed awards, likely because all participants were between 13 and 18 years of age, and many had been sewing and modeling for several years. Also, no differences were found among participants taking more than one textiles and clothing project in a given year or over several years.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study were especially valuable to supporters and organizers of this fashion revue contest. Since no relationships were found between the top placings and the cost of the garment, the accessories, or the time spent sewing the garment, these supporters and organizers interpreted the findings to mean that young people with more extensive resources were not at any advantage.

Organizers of other competitive state 4-H fashion revues may also want to conduct an analysis of this kind. The descriptive statistics and crosstabs (SPSS, 2012) were a simple and effective means of sorting and comparing the data and could easily be replicated by other state organizers who want to determine what aspects of the fashion revue are most valuable to participants.

Since there has been little study of the 4-H fashion revue experience, additional research on this topic is advised. Why didn't all participants indicate that they had learned life skills? Did the percentages reflect the personal development skills acquired from a workshop, the judging experiences, from being with other participants, or modeling on stage in front of an audience? Additional study is needed to answer these questions. Another key question for the event planners might be: What life skills can we expect that the young people will learn from contest participation?

One reason that the fashion revue may have been cited by participants as a "great experience" is that it represents not only the result of the determination and effort that went into the preparation of the garment and the creation of an ensemble, but also the organized demonstration of these

skills in front of family and friends. This may be why Colorado (Goodwin, 2010) found the fashion revue so helpful to young people.

With two-thirds of the 4-H members indicating that they mended and altered other garments, perhaps a state 4-H project should be developed to focus on mending and alterations. Mending can be a source of assistance to others, as well as a means of income for young people. Few states currently have such a 4-H project.

Though 4-H fashion revue contests are competitive, it is good to know that young people feel good about their experience, and that there seems, at least in this instance, to be no advantage to those who can afford more expensive fabrics, notions, or accessories. An increased focus on workshops, such as decision making in choosing colors for skin and body type, personal development, and presenting one's self to an audience, in addition to the judging, might increase participants' feeling that life skills were learned.

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