

# Do You Belong? Stories from Minority FFA Members and Their Feelings Towards the Florida FFA Association

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## Introduction

Conversations regarding agricultural education have increasingly shifted to focus on the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the years since.

(Elliot & Lambert, 2018; LaVergne et al., 2012; Luft, 1996; Vincent et al., 2015)

As diversity has increased in schools, that diversity has not been reflected in agricultural education programs. (Lawrence et al., 2013)

More research must be done to explore how agriculture teachers and programs can overcome barriers to student participation. (Martin & Kitchel, 2014)

## Research Purpose

To investigate how minority members feel about their sense of belonging during their involvement in the Florida FFA association

- How does power, economics, politics, and social factors influence minority member's sense of belonging?

## Theoretical Framework

**Social Constructivism** (Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978)

- knowledge is the result of active cognizing by individuals
- cognition is an adaptive process
- cognition organizes and makes sense of an individual's experiences
- knowledge roots back to biological construction, and social, cultural, and language-based interactions

Social constructivism can guide thought on **how educators' social experiences impact the treatment of students with different backgrounds and experiences** (Smagorinsky, 2007)

Social constructivism accounts for the ways that **power, economics, politics, and social factors impact how people build knowledge** and learn about the world (Yilmaz, 2008)

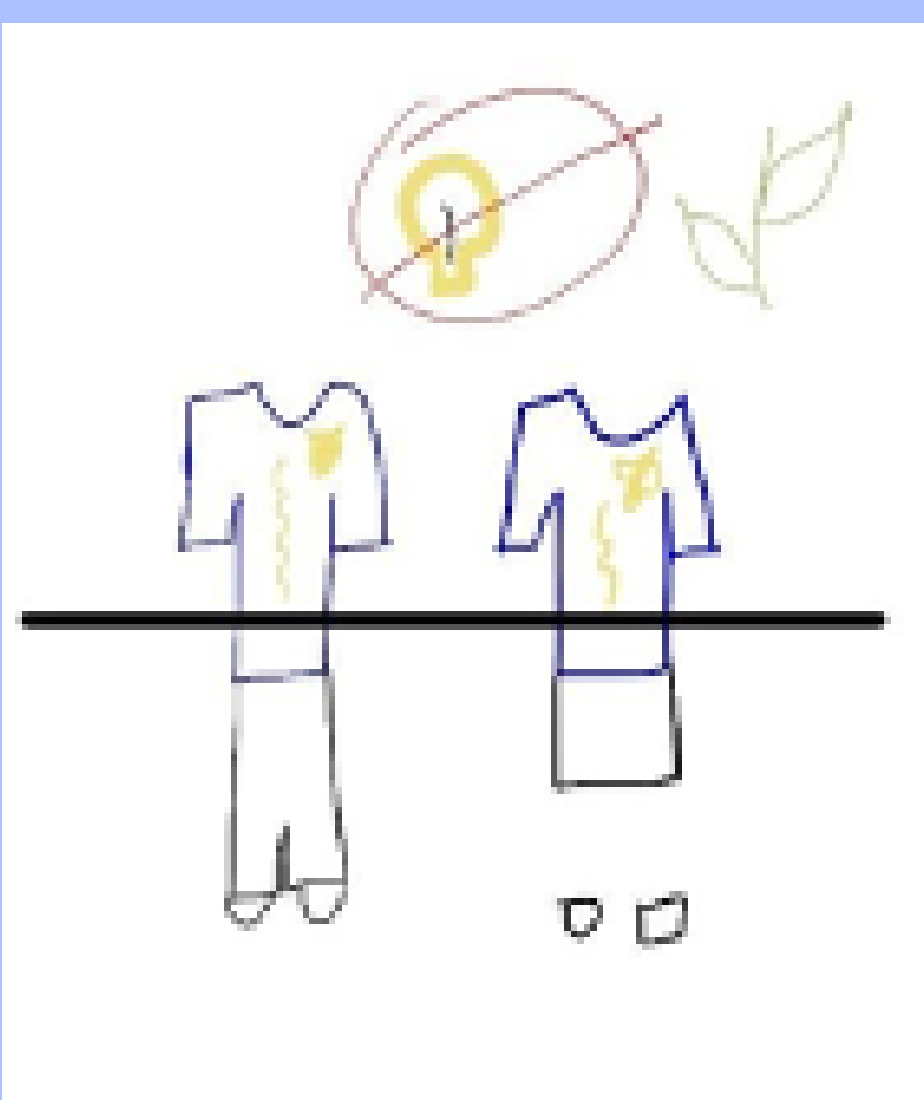
## Ideal FFA Members According to Participants



Martin



Isabella



Amy

## Findings

### Power

*State Officers and State Staff*

"We put these people on **pedestals** because "oh, they're the leaders of Florida FFA, [...] They're celebrities. They're like untouchable"... I think that **prevents a lot of facilitative conversations.**" - Amy

"[...] when they go into these spaces [...] they speak on behalf of a lot of people who don't look like them, they have to consider that **there are a lot of things that they do on their day to day that [are] adverse to their own inclusivity.**" - Martin

### Economics

*Ability to Assimilate into FFA Culture*

"If you don't act a certain way, if you don't talk a certain way, if you don't look a certain way, you are going to stick out no matter what, so anything to help you fit in even more it made me feel more comfortable...**I think it provided a false sense of belonging.**" - Angel

"**I wasn't, you know, a farm grown ag girl who looked like she belongs** [...] so I feel like I was kind of able to almost glide under the radar." - Maria

### Politics

*Presence of Internal Politics and a Conservative Majority*

"Even from a student's perspective, like, you would hear [drama] the state level, [...] everything would always leak [...] so **it is a very toxic environment.**" - Angel

"[...] seeing how current laws are being put into place in terms of equity and inclusion in education. It was probably a choice [...], **a tradition not to highlight it too much, because you didn't want that problem.**" - Isabella

### Social Factors

*Representation, Cliques, Insidious Discrimination, Cultural Differences, and Local Community*

"If they even **see one person that they can identify with, that makes a huge difference** in whether or not they choose to [...] continue getting involved." - Amy

"[...] **there were always the groups that I would be scared to go to** from just like the way they would look at me [...] there were some stares that seemed extra scary." - Maria

"[...] **a personal attack** on who you are **diminishes your experience completely.**" - Amy

"**like a fish out of water experience.**" - Isabella, talking about her first state convention

## Methodology

Qualitative Multiple Case Study

Five participants interviewed (n= 5)

- Recruited with snowball sampling
- Alias Assigned: Amy, Isabella, Martin, Angel, Maria

Interviews averaged 120 minutes

Semi-structured interview guide, artifacts collected

One interview facilitated in person, 4 facilitated through online video conferencing

Field Notes and Reflection Journal

## Conclusions & Recommendations

**Conclusion 1:** The FL FFA Association needs to take action regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives

- Create opportunities for members to explore their identities: global and current events, host at 1890 and 1994 Land Grant Institutions, activities with family recipes or traditions
- Revisit leadership trainings and materials with a critical lens
- Provide materials in multiple languages
- Increase transparency and communication regarding action from board of directors

**Conclusion 2:** Minority members experience insidious discrimination through the gradual appearance of stereotypes, slurs, and ridicule

- Teacher Preparation Programs need to address racism, stereotypes, microaggressions, imagery in classroom/curriculum, proper verbiage and language, and integrating culture in curriculum
- Allow students to express themselves openly (clothing, music, hairstyles)

**Conclusion 3:** More diverse representation is needed in FL FFA

- Use images and examples of POC achievements in curriculum, decor, and marketing
- Invite speakers from various backgrounds to participate

## Word Clouds Encapsulating Participants' Levels of Involvement

misunderstood  
emotionally  
lifestyle overinvolved  
challenging conformity  
unaware everyday cult  
ambitious competition

Angel

career  
community agriculture  
convention award  
public relation  
communication competition  
drama

Isabella

Tractor Driving  
FAMILY Official Dress  
Chapter Degree  
Creed Forestry Animal Agriculture Networking  
Land Judging Greenhand Degree OH Demos  
District Extemporaneous Speaking Creed  
Hands-on Learning Experiences  
Tours Blue Jacket, Gold Standards CPC  
LDEs Champion of Champions Agriculture  
National Convention Federation  
State Degree Livestock Judging COLT  
Meat Judging Chapter Officers  
SLS Showing Steers CDEs  
State Convention  
Sub-District

Amy

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