

University of Cincinnati

Date: 4/2/2013

I, Allison Price, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

It is entitled:

Playing the Ideal: Parenthood and Presentation of Idealized Femininity in youth on "Toddlers & Tiaras"

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Playing the Ideal:

Parenthood and Presentation of Idealized Femininity in youth on “*Toddlers
& Tiaras*”

A thesis submitted to the
Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts

In the Department of Sociology
Of the College of Arts and Sciences

By

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03-20-2013

B.S. University of Cincinnati

May 2010

Committee Chair: Erynn Masi de Casanova, PhD.

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“Toddlers & Tiaras”

ABSTRACT

Toddlers & Tiaras is a reality-based television show on cable, highlighting the methods, goals and socialization of gender roles in childhood beauty pageants. My study selected a portion of episodes to code on a scene-by-scene basis, utilizing a coding system created through literature and previous viewing of the show. Codes included: “Sexuality”, “Presentation of Self”, “Consumption”, “Culture of Pageantry”, “Parenthood”, “Achievement” and “Child Work”. Of these codes, only “Presentation of Self”, “Parenthood” and “Achievement” data was utilized for this research. With the goal of “concerted cultivation”, parents of the contestants put their children into pageantry for education, fun and bonding. However, what is produced is a high-anxiety, high-stress and high-pressure system focused on the contestant’s presentation of self as a standardized and feminized woman. Through competition for total victory over all others, contestants must present themselves as the most beautiful of all, objectifying themselves and separating their appearance from their personality and individuality.

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INTRODUCTION

In September of 2008, a show premiered on the TLC cable network titled *Toddlers & Tiaras* (CBS Entertainment 2013). Featuring child beauty pageant contestants and their families, *Toddlers & Tiaras* gave viewers an inside look into the work and dedication involved with beauty pageants. *Toddlers & Tiaras* has now commenced its fifth season, and has over 2 million viewers a week (Triggs, West, and Aradillas 2011). These viewers will tune into the show for different reasons: perhaps it's the mothers' desire for attention, or the insensitivity of taping a child mid-meltdown (Henson 2011), the sexualization of the contestants (Marcotte 2012), the examples of overall poor parenting (Graff 2012; Velez 2012), or the over the top and outrageous presentation of normal child beauty pageant activities (Triggs et al. 2011). There have been accusations that *Toddlers & Tiaras* teaches girls from the cradle that their main value in the world is their looks (Marcotte 2012), and another concern that such an emphasis on each contestant's looks would be potentially harmful for a child's mental health in the future (Triggs et al. 2011). Child beauty pageants have a "negative connotation", and one involved adult was concerned that others would "say rude things or make rude comments" when she announced her daughter's involvement in pageantry.¹ Most (but not all) families on feature were from poor, rural, Southern areas, and there was a presence of stereotypical lower-class indicators in families: strong accents, ungrammatical speech and obesity, for example (Shire 2012). It seems that most families featured in the show are indeed from a lower class.

Because of the public reactions to the show, reactions that focus on childhood

¹ Ep. 412- "Precious Moments Pageant"

appearance and sexualization, I was prompted to conduct a media study of the show in order to analyze patterns in its representation of gendered presentation in children, parenthood and competition. My research question is: What messages does *Toddlers & Tiaras* convey about parenthood and the gender roles of young contestants on their journey to the crown? In essence, what messages does *Toddlers & Tiaras* convey about the socialization of young minds into gender roles and objectification?

LITERATURE REVIEW

PAGEANTRY AND BEAUTY

Toddlers & Tiaras embarks on a televised view of a pre-established activity: The activities of youth beauty pageants. While the first noted beauty pageant for adults was Miss United States, held in Delaware in 1880 (Ballerino-Cohen, Wilk and Stoeltje 1996), modern pageantry as a whole really began at the first-annual Miss America pageant, in 1921. Pageantry in its beginnings was considered an upper-class activity, yet youth beauty pageants have been considered low-to-middle class activities (Heltsley 2003). Pageantry represents a ritualized performance and scrutiny of appearance of the contestants (Stoeltje 1996). Despite the wide spread of locations (Beauty pageants occur across the world) and times, all pageants do a similar job: “these contests showcase values, concepts, and behavior that exist at the center of a group’s sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender and place” (Ballerino-Cohen et al. 1996:2). Women participating in pageants are likely to come under public scrutiny, comparing the contestants to the “ideal woman”. When being judged on this unseen ideal, women “come to represent that image”, and eventually come to represent the ideal woman

(Stoeltje 1996). In its beginnings, pageantry came under fire by a woman's league, which claimed Miss America was "insulting to womanhood", and pageantry overall has evoked a "morbid fascination" since its inception (Ballerino-Cohen et al. 1996). Protestors in 1968 claimed Miss America "epitomized the objectification of women within a male dominated culture" (Craig 2002:5), which stands to believe that most beauty pageants exist to identify "beauty" in this way.

The 'beauty' portion of the title of the activity puts gender norms and idealized versions of femininity and standards of beauty on stage in a competitive setting. Initially, beauty was declared as something only women could obtain (Banner 1983), which gendered the "beauty pageant". For the most part, standards of beauty (in beauty pageants as well as in society) are Anglo-Saxon (Bordo 1993a) or Eurocentric: Light skin, straight and long hair, thin lips and a narrow nose (Craig 2002). In addition, the body must appear youthful and slim (Banner 1983). Pageants promote a beauty standard, and the ideas that beauty can be measured objectively, and that beauty has an existence apart from the individual (Ballerino-Cohen et al. 1996; Wolf 1991). These are opinions of what is considered "beautiful" in the pageant world itself.

The opinions applauding the glory of beauty do not end at the pageant. It has been shown that attractive individuals have more successful lives (Black and Sharma 2001; Gimlin 2002; Heltsley 2003; Weitz 2011), making beauty a form of currency (Wolf 1991). Beauty could be used narcissistically- where the beautiful woman could advance her own interests behind an attractive façade (Banner 1983), making beauty very powerful. In concordance with that, the "Cinderella myth" states that with a beautiful appearance, any woman can be successful (Banner 1983; Heltsley 2003; Wolf 1991). Not

every woman is naturally beautiful, but with hard work and the proper products any woman can be attractive (Banner 1983; Wolf 1991). In order to be accepted, societies require “work” to be done to the body, and more of this work is required for women (Black and Sharma 2001). Females are more likely to be involved in “display professions” (modeling, acting, escorting, etc), which depend on the individual’s looks (Wolf 1991). It was in the emergence of these careers as legitimate that beauty standards were raised (Banner 1983). “The beauty myth”, as one theorist noted, “is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power” (Wolf 1991: 13). Through the discussion of male’s and female’s roles in the standards and presentations of beauty, gender roles begin to emerge. Because the two genders have different standards of appearance, it is a female standard to be feminine and a male standard to be masculine.

GENDER

Gender is defined as the social, cultural and psychological aspects linked to an individual through certain social categories, male and female. As a master status (a state of being that affects almost every aspect of life), gender is central to one’s sense of self (Lindsey 1990). Susan Bordo theorized gender using Foucauldian theories of power (1999), based on the existence of an “impersonal” conception of power (Power as something that no one individual or group owns, but that is rather a dynamic of non-centralized forces). This concept was designated as “useful” to the analysis of male dominance and female subordination, which is reproduced “voluntarily, through self-normalization to everyday habits of masculinity and femininity.” (253) Gender socialization is present before a child’s birth (Weitz 2004), and throughout the child’s development (Lindsey 1990). In addition, performing gender “wrong” results in

punishment (Lockford 2004). The process of gendering begins in the family and is continued through the child's life, becoming naturalized into their psyche (Martin 2008). Children learn from a young age that clear gender differences can be used to organize the world (Cann and Gernett 1984), with one of the most obvious presence of gender differentiation present in clothing and appearance (Stoeltje 1996). Gender differences and the definitions of gender roles are present throughout society. How gender roles are presented and carried out relies mostly on the individual's presentation of self and opinions surrounding their bodies and gender roles.

PRESENTATION OF SELF

With the knowledge of dichotomous gender roles, we would expect that males and females behave and present themselves differently. This assumption is backed by research and studies. Girls are restrained not necessarily by their clothes, but by how they must act in them (Martin 2008; Weitz 2004). In addition, girls' behavior is corrected to make them quieter and more demure (Martin 2008), teaching them "that looking pretty and pleasing others is more important than having fun" (Weitz 2004: 34). Girls are more interested in what others think of them (Nielsen 1987), and are more influenced by these opinions (Lynn 1976). Most gender research focuses on adulthood and the adult representations of gender. Women smile and show more expression (Brody 1997), are concerned with aesthetics (Gimlin 2002; Silva 2005), and are subordinate in comparison to male's dominant behavior (Bordo 1993b; Lynn 1976; Somerville 1989). Women are conditioned to know that "achievement is considered ugly", and is not something to strive for (Wolf 1991). To be a male is to reject all femininity (Johnson 1975; Lynn 1976) and to be more active and to use more space (Lynn 1976). These behaviors, thoughts and

presentations are the result of socialization and adherence to societal expectations.

Forms of selfhood are maintained through individual surveillance and self-correction to norms (Bordo 1999), and the differences between the genders become naturalized through socialization practices (Martin 2008). Parents are the ones transmitting these social norms with regards to gender, and so the daughter's roles and attitudes are likely related to her mothers' (Rollins and White 1982), holding the mother-daughter relationship to be quite crucial. Children want above all else to blend with their peers, to be similar to and comparable with others (Cook 2004; Neilsen 1987), indicating that conformity is the path to happiness. While individuals wish to be comparable to others, they still wish to be individual, to personalize their presentation.

Behaviors and appearances are related to a specific presentation of the self that individuals wish to demonstrate. According to Goffman's (1959) theory, individuals act in a calculating manner, working to express themselves in a given way to give a certain impression to others, any given viewer or audience. Sometimes the individual is unaware of this, but if the individual is consciously acting and filling a set role, they know full well that they are acting in a certain way for acceptance. With regard to females, this is largely constructing an appropriately feminine presentation of self (Bordo 1993b). There exists a front and a back region for presentations- the front is where the audience interaction comes in, and the back is where support and help is garnered from others, but no members of the audience are allowed to intrude. Because Goffman's theory holds presentation in such a high regard, first impressions are crucial. Because first impressions are so critical, the individual is concerned about other's opinions and wants to give off their best possible presentation.

To present their best, the appearance of the body can be modified. A favored hobby of young girls is the activity of dress-up, and through it they wish to emulate adult appearance as well as the responsibilities and choices of adulthood (Martin 2008; Oppliger 2008; Pugh 2009). Occasionally, the choice to dress up includes the wearing or purchasing of ostentatious clothing. This has been shown to remove attention away from the wearer's personality and personal beauty (Cook 2004), "an exercise in self-esteem harmlessly heightened by glitter makeup and teeny skirts" (Downes 2006: A24). When young girls are dressing up in gaudy clothing and attempting to emulate adult behavior, this results in a phenomenon known as "age compression", or "getting older younger". This leads to the accusation that children are being treated less as children and more as miniature adults (Elkind 2001). One opinion regarding age compression is negative: "as a society, we need to slow down and let little girls be little girls" (Oppliger 2008: 38). Dress-up, while perceived as play, is a form of bodily modification, under the same heading as makeup, hair styling and other actions.

Looking to the source of body modification, sociologist Chris Shilling (2003) theorized the body as a project. This theory states that the use of healthy practices, make-up and other bodily modifications are a way to change the human body, to improve and make the body appear healthier. Investing in one's body through projects can make the individual feel better, can assure them they are giving off the best presentation of self they have the ability to. Through modification of their bodies, individuals are able to move closer to an "inherently inconsistent and impossible to meet" standard for beauty (Gimlin 2002). Feminists theorize that women are the ones responsible for their own "enslavement" in the practice of body modification (Bordo 1993a). It is up to the female

to “control” her body, but the desire to do so stems from many factors. Men’s desires and a culture that subordinates women’s desires to those of men, sexualizes and commodifies women’s bodies, are the main risk factors associated with the internalization of the ideologies of body control (Bordo 1993b).

Treating the body as a project is one way of controlling the body, participating in “beauty maintenance” to maintain appearance and conformity to the beauty standards (Wolf 1991). While following these standards, the individual is allowed to reflect her own identity (Bordo 1993b; Weitz 2011), creating an “individual look through consumption of mass produced products” (Black and Sharma 2001: 109). For example, one body modification is tanning the skin. There is a theory surrounding tanning and justification- the “seduction frame” indicates that tanned skin will help the individual look more physically attractive, improve self-esteem and self-confidence (Vannini and McCright 2004). Tanning, as part of a larger “package”, goes with a “concept of self-expression”, a way the individual chooses to present themselves (Vannini and McCright 2004). The female modifying herself to make herself more attractive to the male gaze seems to be the result of self-objectification (Moffitt and Szymanski 2011).

OBJECTIFICATION

The “ideal spectator” for a female body is male, and so the ideal female body is created to flatter him (Lockford 2004). Because of this, women are judged and assessed based on their physical attractiveness (Benokraitis and Feagin 1995), by a heterosexual male-dominated culture (Heltsley 2003). To be feminine could be described as “learning to please visually and sexually through the practices of the body” (Bordo 1993b: 182). The process of oppression by the dominant (white male culture) is a “seduction” strategy,

which is the use of sexual objectification masked as admiration (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). This process, in its extremes, is known as objectification, when the body is separated from the individual, existing solely for the pleasure of others (Benokraitis and Feagin 1995; Moffitt and Szymanski 2011; Oppliger 2008).

When the individual is exposed to objectification for too long, the sentiment can be internalized. Self-objectification is the result of internalization of these objectifying external cues (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Gurung and Chrouser 2007; Moffitt and Szymanski 2011), and can lead to an obsession with physical appearance (Lockford 2004). Women will give attention to their own appearance as a strategy for helping to determine how others will treat them. Because of the repeated exposure to the external pressures of objectification, women come to experience their efforts to improve their appearance as natural (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). External cues usually take the form of the male gaze and judges. The male gaze is the “visual inspection of the body”, a sort of sexualized evaluation grounded in the roots of heterosexual male culture (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Judges can be literal (judges at a dance competition or beauty pageant, for example), or figurative (fathers, employers, and anyone who allows the male viewer in their decisions of worth). Women are declared women only if judged as such by a man (Morgan 1991). This understanding and dependence on the judgment of others can lead to the creation of an environment that either inadvertently or purposefully produces objectification.

Environments that produce objectification practices have been defined as Sexually Objectifying Environments, with a specific set of characteristics: (1) Traditional male and female gender roles exist, (2) attention is drawn to the female’s physical

attributes, (3) a high probability of male contact exists, (4) women have little power in the environment, and (5) there is approval and encouragement in the male gaze. An example of a Sexually Objectifying Environment would be certain restaurants, strip clubs, college cheerleading, and dance competitions (Moffitt and Szymanski 2011). In dance competitions, one author noticed the teams of dancers being rewarded for their “sexier” outfits by the panel of judges (Oppliger 2008). The competitive dance culture rewards the sexualization of these female competitors with titles and accolades, rewarding not only their sexualization but also their tendency toward competitive behaviors.

COMPETITION

Youth beauty pageants are, in essence, competitions, and result in a ranking of appearance and personality of the competitors. People believe that formal competition is “rational and operational”, and is quite effective in sorting individuals into hierarchies (Stoeltje 1996:18), with the most important being the divide between victor and loser. Competition can come in one of two forms- competing to win (to dominate others) and competing to excel (to surpass personal goals) (Hibbard and Buhrmester 2010). Competition has a gendered position to it. Because they rely on aggression and competition (stereotypically masculine traits), modern competitive sports evoke masculine gender roles (Clement-Guillotin and Fontayne 2011). In a classroom setting, one study found that girls with boys were more competitive than girls with girls (Moely, Skarin, and Weil 1979). Boys are socialized toward goal-directed behavior, such as competing to win (Letendre 2007). Girls are socialized to be cooperative over competitive (Price 2008), and to mask competitiveness and aggressiveness, and are less

comfortable in competition than boys (Hibbard and Buhrmester 2010; Price 2008). Competing to win indicates that other competitors must lose. As such, the individual striving for the victory must suspend their empathy for their competitors. Because empathy is seen as a feminine personality trait, it stands to reason that competition is perceived to be masculine in nature (Hibbard and Buhrmester 2010; Letendre 2007), especially when absolute victory is the only goal. Youth competitiveness, as in most socialization (gender-related or otherwise), can be maintained and socialized through their parents.

PARENTHOOD

As indicated earlier, gender socialization would be nowhere without the involvement and teachings of parents (Lindsey 1990; Rollins and White 1982). Most of the families represented in the show had markers of lower-class status, such as strong accents and ungrammatical speech. However, Lareau (2000) noticed that the use of adult-run activities is part of the “concerted cultivation” idea common among middle-class parents. Concerted cultivation indicates that parents will enroll children in activities to transmit important life skills for children. These activities create labor for parents. Poor and working class families do not typically participate in adult-run activities- activities simply occur, with very little pre-planning (Initiated by children and their peers). Beauty pageantry would seem to be a middle-class activity, because of the high level of adult involvement. These adults participate in a certain type(s) of parenting, raising their contestants the best way they know how.

There exist multiple types of parenting. These include: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, stage and intensive. The first three were defined by Nielsen (1987).

Authoritarian parents do not allow their children to have any free will, while permissive parents do. Authoritative parents do allow their children some liberties, but for the most part control the relationship. The practice of being a 'stage mother' involves a parent treating their child as a part of their extended self, and relates to women who have made a career of sorts out of mothering. To be a "stage mother" is to "bully or dominate a child because of the fantasy a mother has" (Nelson 2001: 443). To be called a "stage mother" is to be insulted and to have your parenting style called into question, something the designated "stage mothers" do not understand- they are simply doing as they should to be a good mother (Nelson 2001). Intensive parents will rely on expert opinions and professionals to determine knowledge because they do not trust their knowledge is enough (Shirani, Henwood, and Coltart 2012), and will spend "tremendous" time, energy and money in the raising of their children (Hays 1996). The use of Intensive parenting is viewed as a method of child rearing that is "self-centered, expert-guided, labor-intensive, and financially expensive" (Hays 1996:8). These types were found in the show, as well as a sort of mentality that the parents were living vicariously through their children.

Children are but blank canvases prepared to have any identity portrayed upon them by their parents (Cook 2004), meaning some parents can and will attempt to project their own goals and desires onto them. These parents will also celebrate their children's achievements as their own. This achievement by proxy notes the use of the child in their parent's goals and achievements for the future (Tofler, Knapp, and Drell 1999). It is through the desire for achievement that there is a noted presence of pressure.

PRESSURE

Involvement in extracurricular activities is related to parental support and

encouragement (Anderson et al. 2003; Nelson 2001), but it is the application of too much support that causes the involved children to feel pressured. Indications of a high-pressure parental-child system include high anxiety, perfectionism and rigidity, and can lead to a weakened self-concept (Hyson et al. 1991). The more outstanding the individual child, the more pressure is exerted (Tofler et al. 1999), and the more parental pressure, the less likely the child is to have the desire to participate (Anderson et al. 2003; Kanters and Bocarro 2008). Parents will express disappointment in their child's performance, writing off their achievements; and believe they are motivating their children for improvement, but their children can receive the attention differently than their intentions, and can feel pressured (Anderson et al. 2003). Children may feel that parental love is contingent on winning, which is "unhealthy" (Tofler et al. 1999). The question here is not what makes a good parent, but what representations of parenthood are present in the show.

METHODS

I studied the show's episodes, which I accessed through the online video service Netflix. Only seasons one through four were available at time of data collection. I decided that selecting 25% of the episodes from each season should provide an adequate sample. I selected a proportion over a set number because of the variation in episode count per season. According to television show tracking website TV.com, season one has 10 episodes, season two has 19, season three has 17 and season four has 21. Using the method of selecting 25% of episodes from each season, I analyzed three episodes from season one, four from season three, and five each from seasons two and four, bringing the total of sampled episodes to 17.

To select the episodes, I first chose the first episode of each season (because it tended to feature a larger pageant and therefore higher stakes and more extreme behavior), then randomly chose additional episodes to add up to the total mentioned above. I wanted to ensure the episodes were spread out throughout the season, so as to get the best view of the production of the show and the families in focus as the season went on. I randomly drew episodes, re-drawing the entire selection if I was unsatisfied with the spread.

My selection process yielded the following episodes, here given with titles, air dates and viewing dates: (Each episode was viewed on Netflix.com between February 7 to February 15, 2013)

- “American Regal Gems” August 12, 2009; viewed on February 14, 2013
- “Arizona Gold Coast” December 29, 2010; viewed on February 10, 2013
- “Circle City Stars and Cars” June 29, 2011; viewed on February 9, 2013
- “Crown Beauties” December 28, 2011; viewed on February 12, 2013
- “Darling Divas” April 14, 2009; viewed on February 9, 2013
- “Fancy Faces” January 12, 2011; viewed on February 15, 2013
- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals” February 10, 2010; viewed on February 14, 2013
- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant” September 16, 2009; viewed on February 11, 2013
- “Le Maison de Paris” June 2, 2010; viewed on February 10, 2013
- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy” July 27, 2011; viewed on February 15, 2013
- “Precious Moments Pageant” September 7, 2011; viewed on February 13,

2013

- “Southern Celebrity Ohio” February 9, 2011; viewed on February 9, 2013
- “Southern Majestic Pageants” January 27, 2010; viewed on February 12, 2013
- “The Chitlin’ Strut” Feb 17, 2009; viewed on February 12, 2013
- “Universal Royalty National Pageant” Jan 27, 2009; viewed on February 8, 2013
- “Universal Royalty Pageant” July 22, 2009; viewed on Feb 8, 2013
- “Universal Royalty: the Ultimate Showdown” June 15, 2011; viewed on Feb 13, 2013

CODING PROCESS

In order to organize my findings, I devised a coding system to code actions and interviews in the show. I used previous knowledge from the show’s messages and the background literature to formulate an initial coding system, reproduced below. Topics are in bold and examples are underneath.

- **Sexuality**
 - Discussion of ‘sexiness’
 - Flirtatious actions such as winking, blowing kisses, bottom or hip shaking, kissing lips
 - Clothing that reveals the midriff or contains short skirts/shorts
- **Presentation**
 - Use of make-up, hair extensions, nails, etc
 - Discussion of clothing or changing of clothing

- Transformative effect of the stage
- Perfection of the body, a princess presentation of self
- **Culture of pageantry**
 - Discussion on conformity or standing out, comparison of child to others
 - Discussion of judges, what they are looking for
 - Presentation of how things simply are in the pageant community
 - Presence of competition
 - Child/Parental reactions on pageantry activities
- **Consumption**
 - Purchasing of goods or services
 - Discussion of money, employment, or cost
 - Comparison of the child to others with regards to consumption
 - The purchasing of goods for future use, such as photographs
- **Parenthood**
 - Parent-child interaction
 - Parental pressure or obligation on the child
 - Interactions between parental bodies
 - Feelings and opinions the parents have for their children
- **Future**
 - Discussion of parent's goals for the child's future versus the child's
 - Typing of the type of future goals: Career-based, education-based, pageant-based, other
- **Child Work**

- Discussion and display of practice
- Educational experiences of pageantry
- **Achievement**
 - Reactions of parents/family to the child's successes
 - Child's and parent's pinions on attainable goals, victory
- **Open**
 - Any overarching theme I did not think of

After creating this initial system, I viewed three episodes and adjusted the coding scheme to better fit the actual data. I revised the coding scheme to be clearer and more inclusive, and followed this revised scheme for the remainder of my data collection. Below is the final resulting coding scheme, with topics in bold and examples and subcategories under.

- **Sexuality**
 - Discussion of 'sexiness'
 - Flirtatious actions such as winking, blowing kisses, bottom or hip shaking, kissing lips
 - Clothing that reveals the midriff or contains short skirts/shorts
- **Presentation of self**
 - Use of bodily modifications (hair, makeup, clothing, etc)
 - References to the transformative effect of the stage (on-stage versus off-stage behavior)
 - When the contestant's behavior or presentation is commented on or corrected

- **Culture of pageantry**
 - Discussion on conformity or standing out, comparison of child to others
 - Discussion of judges, what they are looking for
 - Presentation of how things simply are in the pageant community
 - Presence of competition
 - Child/Parental reactions to pageantry activities
- **Consumption**
 - Purchasing of goods or services
 - Discussion of money, employment, or cost
 - Comparison of the child to others with regards to consumption
 - The purchasing of goods for future use, such as photographs
- **Parenthood**
 - Parent-child interaction
 - Parental pressure or obligation on the child
 - Interactions between mother and father
 - Feelings and opinions the parents have for their children
 - Discussion of parent's goals for their child's future
- **Child Work**
 - Discussion and display of practice
 - Educational experiences of pageantry
 - Discussion of the child's futures, according to the child
- **Achievement**
 - Reactions of parents/family to the child's successes

- Child's and parent's opinions on attainable goals, victory

After data collection, these themes were narrowed down and consolidated into three overarching ones: Presentation (Including aspects from Sexuality and Culture), Parenthood (Including aspects from Child Work) and Achievement (Including aspects from Consumption). I narrowed my field of study based on insufficient evidence from certain codes (Such as Sexuality), and for a narrower view on what I determined to be important. In the next section, I summarize and present the information obtained through the selection and coding of episodes.

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

On average, 3 contestants were featured per episode. The average age of the contestants was 5.5 years, and ranged from 15 months to 11 years. Because of the average young age of contestants, on-screen interviews rarely featured the contestants, and mostly featured adults. The vast majority of contestants were female, although there were two cases of male contestants. If a pageant did have male contestants, they were in a separate judging category. Each contestant had a support network, an involved adult or two, to foster their pageantry. These involved adults are predominantly mothers, but could also be fathers, grandmothers, godmothers, and aunts. For the sake of clarity, I will use the term 'involved adults' instead of 'parents'. These involved adults sometimes used professionals such as stylists or coaches to supplement their own expertise.

Professionals of the pageant world, such as hair stylists or makeup artists, are

professional hairdressers and stylists, eager to make an extra few dollars in child beauty pageants. Some professionals are pageant contestants' involved adults, using pageantry styling to help support their hobby.² Coaches are modeling coaches or gymnastic instructors that are knowledgeable in the methods surrounding child beauty pageants and are willing to teach their skills to competitors. For the most part, costs of these services were not mentioned, save for one coach that charged \$100 for a two-hour session because "she really knows her stuff."³ Because some of the families were relatively new to the pageant world, coaches were utilized to bolster the adults' minimal knowledge on the subject matter.

Every episode was structured the same way: First, a focus on the contestant in the few days before the pageant and then on the pageant day, which was itself broken into portions. Every pageant studied had a Beauty portion, and at least one other portion (Casualwear, Swimwear or Talent, for example) to give the judges multiple opportunities to assess contestants before the crowning. At Crowning, the day's judges declared their winners and contestants' and parents' reactions were shown on-screen. This was the formula for every episode and every pageant under study.

APPROACHES TO PAGEANTRY

There were two types of pageantry: Natural and Glitz. Natural pageants only allowed the bodily modifications of "clear lip gloss",⁴ or very minimal makeup.⁵ In two

² Ep. 418- "Crown Beauties"

³ Ep. 204- "American Regal Gems"

⁴ Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"

⁵ Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"

cases the contestants began competing as Natural contestants,⁶ and although their involved adults had sworn their children would remain Natural, they had eventually crossed to the other side. The other side is the side of the Glitz- described by participants as “intimidating”,⁷ “enjoyable”,⁸ “fake”,⁹ “transformative”,¹⁰ and “total-package.”¹¹ Through Glitz, the goal was for contestants will look like “live dolls”,¹² and meet an unseen yet wholly agreed-upon standard of what it is to be a total package contestant. Some involved adults try to keep their contestants “as natural as possible in a glitz pageant”,¹³ while others are “open-minded” to whatever it takes to make their child total-package.¹⁴ As to what made a child truly ‘total package’, that could be found in the list of bodily modifications these contestants went through, including: spray tanning, fake eyelashes, razors, waxing strips, hairpieces, rows of fake teeth known as flippers, press-on nails and above all, makeup.

GLITZ AND THE MODIFICATION PROCESS

To be a “total package” glitz girl is to modify one’s body. I will discuss later what these modifications mean to the contestant’s presentations of self, but first I must define what the contestant’s involved adults are putting their contestants through. To a lesser extent (An estimated 25% of the time), some of the contestants themselves are asking for these processes. For the most part, however, the contestants are merely complying with

⁶ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

⁷ Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

⁸ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

⁹ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”

¹⁰ Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹¹ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

¹² Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹³ Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”

¹⁴ Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”

their adult's wishes, and allowing themselves to adopt the identity of the "total glitz" girl.

There is a modification of the contestant's skin through artificial tanning. Spray tanning is a relatively cold process (a liquid is sprayed onto the contestant which makes their exposed skin appear darker, and then the contestant is air-dried, usually through the use of fans, which makes the contestant cold),¹⁵ deemed as "very necessary"¹⁶ for competition in the Glitz pageant. There was at least once instance of spray tanning in every episode of the show, and no representations of alternative methods of tanning. Justification of this bodily modification was equally split at five counts each of conformity to others¹⁷ and the fact that bright stage lights will "wash out" a contestant.¹⁸ An involved adult indicated that pale contestants are scored lower because being pale is an "unattractive feature."¹⁹ The viewing of pale skin as unattractive goes in line with Vannini and McCright's theory (2004) of the "seduction frame": Individuals will participate in tanning to be more attractive. These contestants do the same- tanning because all other contestants are, and so their appearance must be in line with their rivals'. It is through the conformity to others that hair, and indeed everything else about the contestant, is modified.

Eyelashes were frequently modified, typically with fake eyelashes glued onto the existing ones, which occasionally caused discomfort for the contestant, as demonstrated by the cringing or the resulting tears.²⁰ In addition, there was one count of a contestant

¹⁵ Ep. 204- "American Regal Gems"; Ep. 407- "Miss Sugarplum Fairy"

¹⁶ Ep. 312- "Fancy Faces"; Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

¹⁷ Ep. 301- "Le Maison de Paris"; Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"; Ep. 312- "Fancy Faces"; Ep. 412- "Precious Moments Pageant"; Ep. 418- "Crown Beauties"

¹⁸ Ep. 101- "Universal Royalty National Pageant"; Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 204- "American Regal Gems"; Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"; Ep. 418- "Crown Beauties"

¹⁹ Ep. 412- "Precious Moments Pageant"

²⁰ Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"

getting her eyelashes dyed, a more permanent modification.²¹ The most common justification was that fake eyelashes helped the contestant's eyes look "bigger, brighter and better" on stage.²² While eyelashes are promoted and sought-after, other hair was not as lucky. Most bodily hair, such as leg hair, was shaved off,²³ and eyebrows were tamed, using either waxing,²⁴ tweezing,²⁵ or shaving.²⁶ Eyebrow grooming was a concern to one parent that did not modify her child's eyebrows,²⁷ and another commented how 'wild' they were pre-modification.²⁸ Eyelashes, eyebrows and bodily hair do not account for the most important aspect: the contestant's head hair.

The look of the contestant's hair was very important- even though the hair spray involved in the process made the contestant uncomfortable²⁹ and damaged their hair.³⁰ In hair the line between boy and girl contestants was the most clearly defined- boys simply needed a comb through the hair,³¹ perhaps a haircut before the pageant.³² In fact, hair is the only bodily modification that boys participated in at all, forcing one director to note how "unfair" it was to compete the boys against the girls, since girls must be "more polished" than the boys.³³ To obtain that polish, the girls involved in pageantry use rollers, curling irons, and most commonly, hair pieces to make their hair full enough for the proper pageant updo.³⁴ The opinions on pageant hair were relatively uniform- it

²¹ Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

²² Ep. 101- "Universal Royalty National Pageant"; Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 312- "Fancy Faces"

²³ Ep. 215- "Southern Majestic Pageants"; Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

²⁴ Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"; Ep. 310- "Arizona Gold Coast"

²⁵ Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"; Ep. 407- "Miss Sugarplum Fairy"

²⁶ Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 215- "Southern Majestic Pageants"

²⁷ Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

²⁸ Ep. 310- "Arizona Gold Coast"

²⁹ Ep. 401- "The Ultimate Showdown"

³⁰ Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

³¹ Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"

³² Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"; Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

³³ Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

³⁴ Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"

should be big or “jacked to Jesus”.³⁵ The youngest contestants expressed discomfort over the artificial hair by crying and fussing,³⁶ and the hairpiece is necessary for thin hair³⁷ or simply for competition with others.³⁸

In addition to a stunning and full head of hair, contestants must also have a winning smile. The contestants’ teeth were expected to be white, straight and perfect. Contestants with good-looking teeth simply whitened theirs.³⁹ One contestant getting this modification done did not want to, but her involved adult insisted “everybody else will be whitening their teeth, so I guess I just have to whiten, too.”⁴⁰ However, because most of the contestants were of the age where baby teeth were being lost, some contestants did not have perfectly straight teeth. Contestants with imperfections in their teeth make use of a flipper, a row of artificial teeth, put on over the child’s natural teeth. One involved adult commented that flippers look like horse teeth,⁴¹ but others applaud their use for correcting misaligned and small smiles.⁴² Having perfectly aligned and whitened teeth is a mature bodily standard, something reserved for adults. It is through the desire for an adult smile that the contestant will emulate adulthood.

In one such emulation of adulthood, pageant contestants (especially full-glitz ones) have manicured nails. Typically, fake nails were applied on top of the child’s nails, stuck on temporarily for the pageant.⁴³ It is presented as simply a part of pageantry, and no justifications were presented for this behavior. There was, however, a note of

³⁵ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

³⁶ Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

³⁷ Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

³⁸ Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”

³⁹ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut” Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

⁴⁰ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”

⁴¹ Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

⁴² Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”

⁴³ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

confusion. One involved adult, simply to see how they would look, gave her young child stick-on nails. The adult's friend cried- "It looks weird! She is 15 months old and she has humongously long claws!"⁴⁴ This indicates there is in fact a bottom level of age appropriateness with regards to the use of stick-on nails, and perhaps even a bottom level of age appropriateness with adult emulation overall.

Still another emulation of adulthood, makeup was another full-package necessity, one that was not wholly justified. One involved adult lamented their contestant did not have "the perfect pageant face", ⁴⁵ which indicated that not only that their child needed makeup, but that she was not beautiful or comparable to the other contestants without it. Contestants express happiness over their makeup results, such as proclaiming they feel like a princess⁴⁶ or admiring themselves with their makeup on.⁴⁷ The stylists of the pageant world indicate it is up to the child how much makeup is put on,⁴⁸ as proven when a contestant walked away from receiving her final touches.⁴⁹ For the most part, contestants are amenable to the application of makeup, because makeup is such a major part of the pageant day process. There is a belief through involved adults that if the child and family are not willing to go "all out", there is no sense to compete at all.⁵⁰ To be "total package" is to have makeup, and to be total package is to have their best possible chance at being a victor.

In the process of makeup and hair styling, one involved adult stated that doing her

⁴⁴ Ep. 312- "Fancy Faces"

⁴⁵ Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

⁴⁶ Ep. 301- "Le Maison de Paris"; Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"; Ep. 412- "Precious Moments Pageant"

⁴⁷ Ep. 215- "Southern Majestic Pageants"

⁴⁸ Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"

⁴⁹ Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"

⁵⁰ Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"

own contestant's hair and makeup "should be interesting",⁵¹ indicating perhaps that her skills were not as good as those of a professional stylist. Another involved adult would not allow her contestant to have a stylist or a coach because she feels she can do everything involved with it herself.⁵² However, the permeation of stylists and other pageant professionals does indicate that most involved adults feel inadequately knowledgeable. Much like intensive parents, most pageant adults will assume their knowledge is insufficient and will rely on experts (Shirani et al. 2012) to adequately display proper feminine behavior and appearance.

It is the involved adults of female contestants performing (or hiring others to perform) these modifications on their female children (the only modifications performed by males include hair cuts and styling), and this agrees with the literature that women are socialized to be more interested in aesthetics (Gimlin 2002; Silva 2005). It is difficult to pinpoint how much modification is of the contestant's will, and how much is of the involved adults'. When considering that most gender socialization occurs through the adults and parents of the child's life (Martin 2008), I conclude the attitudes surrounding appearance and standards of beauty can be (and on the show, they are being) transmitted from parent to child and internalized in the contestant's minds over time. This follows the feminist theory that it is up to the female to "control" her body. These desires to do so stem from outside sources, which are then internalized (Bordo 1993b). It is through the ideology of bodily control that the desire to modify comes about.

Through the modification of the contestant's bodies, Shilling's body as a project theory (2003) comes through. The modifications- the hair, spray tanning, make-up,

⁵¹ Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"

⁵² Ep. 209- "Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant"

manicures- they all help the contestant feel healthier and more confident. Individuals will use mass-produced products to create an individualized look (Black and Sharma 2001), and the individual will modify their own body to reflect their own individualized identity (Weitz 2011). These modifications help ensure the contestant is giving off their best presentation- something critical to victory. The contestant's presentation is a voluntary and conscious decision- they wish to look in this very specific and calculated way to be judged the best. Goffman (1959) theorized that the individual could be conscious of their decision to be presenting their best selves, and that is the case with these contestants. In addition, the biggest reasoning behind bodily modification overall is the opinion that "everybody else is doing it". This relates to the theory that conformity to others is something children wish to strive for (Cook 2004; Neilsen 1987). Even though it is not the child who is demanding these modifications, they are allowing themselves to be modified and presented in a certain way. While the use of bodily modifications allows for a custom, individual expression, conformity is rampant in the show, with big hair and perfectly made faces. If the focus is not on the individual contestant making their own choices of their expressions, appearance and modifications, then what are these contestants vying for?

EMULATION

The toddler playtime of dress-up can take a more serious and legitimate tone in pageantry. Occasionally, the contestants chose certain celebrities or careers to emulate in tribute: Prince,⁵³ Tina Turner⁵⁴ and a Vegas show girl,⁵⁵ for example. One contestant in

⁵³ Ep. 418- "Crown Beauties"

⁵⁴ Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"

⁵⁵ Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"; Ep. 412- "Precious Moments Pageant"

her full pageant gear said proudly, “I feel like Sleeping Beauty! No, I feel like Cinderella!”⁵⁶ Two separate adults note that pageantry makes their children look older than they should be- one says: “It looks like a 20-year-old face on a 7-year-old body”.⁵⁷ Another adult lamented there was much negativity in pageants, because an unseen other may think “we’re dressing them up to look a lot older than what they are and sexualizing them and things like that, and I don’t agree with it. I don’t think we try to make her look older. Obviously, six-year-olds don’t wear fake hair and have fake teeth and makeup, but it’s fun. It’s dress up.”⁵⁸ Dress-up is a favored hobby of female toddlers, yes, but when it evolves from wearing oversized high heels (Martin 2008) to the use of a miniaturized Vegas showgirl outfit, perhaps emulation is not severe enough of a word. What these contestants are participating in is more than dress-up.

Pageantry is a place where Elkind’s theory on “age compression” (2001) is applicable. Taking into consideration the bodily modifications contestants undergo, and the wearing of outfits to simulate adult careers, it certainly seems there is more than emulation occurring. What these contestants are participating in is a full-on dedication to the adult way of life, a reflection and acceptance of the glamorous beginnings of adult beauty pageants. At least five pageant contestants did aspire to be Miss America some day⁵⁹, with one involved adult (wishing on behalf of her 15 month old child) noting she wanted to name her child “America” when she was born. “I wanted her name to be “Miss America””.⁶⁰ Yes, contestants involved in this world wish naught but the best. However,

⁵⁶ Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

⁵⁷ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”

⁵⁸ Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

⁵⁹ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 312- “Fancy Faces”

⁶⁰ Ep. 312- “Fancy Faces”

their use of bodily modifications is dedicating themselves to be treated as “miniature adults” (Elkind 2001), rather than young contestants.

While the discussion of what the contestants go through for modification is entertaining in its own way, it is only the background for the actual meat of the show, the pageant day itself.

PAGEANT DAY

A typical pageant day begins very early in the morning with the bodily modifications that must be done directly preceding competition (such as hair, makeup and nails), and pageants had two to three portions involved. These parts include: Beauty, some form (or multiple forms) of Casualwear and occasionally Talent. At the conclusion of the portions, judges submit their opinions during crowning. In the following sections, I describe and define the portions.

BEAUTY

Beauty was declared the most important by involved adults,⁶¹ and was the most prevalent since it was present in all episodes, and always took place first. As they spoke of expected behavior, two contestants noted how ‘boring’ Beauty was,⁶² since it required a slow and smooth walk,⁶³ a poised and graceful demeanor⁶⁴ and a beautiful smile⁶⁵ to succeed. Occasionally, contestants added their own moves, such as the blowing of

⁶¹ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 312- “Fancy Faces”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

⁶² Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

⁶³ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”; Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

⁶⁴ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

⁶⁵ Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”

kisses,⁶⁶ but still kept themselves demure. This relates to Goffman's presentation of the self (1959), because these contestants are consciously acting in a set, demure way, for the approval of the judges. For the two male contestants featured, behavior on stage was much less regimented, allowing the males more freedom of movement- including interacting with the audience.⁶⁷ This relates to Martin's preschooler study (2008), in which she noticed that girls were expected and corrected to be more demure than their male counterparts. Young males were allowed to use more space on the playground (Lynn 1976), just as they were allowed to use more space on the stage. The fact that female contestants were expected to be quiet and demure while the male contestants were allowed (relatively) free movement reflects on the subordination of females (Bordo 1993b; Lynn 1976; Somerville 1989), even in this established female-dominated realm.

Behavior was only half of the contestant's presentation onstage, the other portion being attire. Male contestants wore ties and tuxedos, while their female counterparts wore rhinestones and feathers on their gaudy dresses. These dresses had a fitted bodice and a frothy skirt, much like a ballerina's tutu, which gave the contestants the appearance of being an upside-down cupcake. These dresses, so ostentatious and extravagant, lose the wearer's personality and personal beauty (Cook 2004). While the clothes were relatively restrictive, it was nothing compared to how the female contestants were expected to act in them, as reflected in Martin's preschooler study (Martin 2008). Shoes were white with white socks, and contestants typically wore some form of jewelry (earrings, bracelets, necklaces- but not tiaras) to add more sparkle and shine to their attire. One involved adult called her contestant's dress a work of art that was likely worth more than all of the

⁶⁶ Ep. 101- "Universal Royalty National Pageant"; Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"; Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"

⁶⁷ Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"; Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

clothes in her closet,⁶⁸ and the prices of such a work of art ranged from around \$1,000⁶⁹ to \$4,000.⁷⁰ Involved adults shared the opinion that a dress could “make or break” a contestant,⁷¹ an opinion that caused one adult to go so far as using duct tape to properly secure her child into the dress.⁷² Because every female contestant wore the same type of outfit, and everyone had similar hair and shoes, there was an effect of conformity, of definite uniformity. It also appeared that the contestants’ aim in the Beauty portion of the pageant was to be poised and demure individuals that adorned their bodies with sparkling gems and smiles, something to be admired rather than interacted with. The fixed-body walk and the lack of personality in the female contestants indicate objectification. The contestant’s self and body are held separately, the body existing for the pleasure of others. Through the discussion above, I determined that Beauty was where the femininity of these pageants shone through. However, Beauty was not the only portion in the show.

CASUALWEAR AND TALENT

Casualwear is an umbrella term I chose to cover portions with different titles and themes, yet all with similar premise: An “energetic and upbeat modeling” of the outfit the contestant wore.⁷³ Because there were more acceptable ranges of movements, I found many examples of dancing, some stripping⁷⁴ and one count of self-spanking (the contestant in question was coached by her involved adult to “spank her heinie”, and when the contestant did not, the involved adult took the child’s hand and performed the action

68 Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”

69 Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

70 Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

71 Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

72 Ep. 312- “Fancy Faces”

73 Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”

74 Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

for her)⁷⁵ in these portions. The dances took many forms, with 15 instances of hip shaking, two commands for the children to ‘shake your booty up there’ by involved adults,⁷⁶ and a comment from a judge that routines involved in casualwear can sometimes be “too much”.⁷⁷ While the appearance of contestants was much less uniform in the casualwear portion (contestants could theoretically wear whatever they want), the behavior appeared to be relatively the same- some form of dancing routine. This behavior was continued in the swimwear portion. Swimwear was the most uncommon of the portions (only four pageants had them), and of the contestants, 39% were shown wearing a two-piece suit with revealed midriffs. One involved adult was hesitant about putting her contestant in a two-piece swimsuit, but once approaching the remainder of the contestants, noticed almost every other contestant had a bikini on, and so the involved adult’s hesitation was unjustified, because “almost every other girl” had a two-piece swimsuit on.⁷⁸ While in their swimsuits, contestants stripped off their cover-ups,⁷⁹ and some danced, shaking their hips⁸⁰ in their swimsuits. Behavior in the swim and casualwear portions was relatively similar, although the attire on display was drastically different. With the addition of routines and choreography, it appeared as though the aim of casual and swimwear was for the pageant contestants to entertain, versus to simply be observed. The most obvious avenue for entertainment, and the most under-featured of all portions, is Talent. The talents on display included dancing, gymnastics, singing and

⁷⁵ Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

⁷⁶ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

⁷⁷ Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

⁷⁸ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

⁷⁹ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

⁸⁰ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”

occasionally some unique abilities (Such as playing guitar,⁸¹ pizza-throwing⁸² or magic⁸³). Judges were looking for difficulty and execution of talent, having taken into account the child's age,⁸⁴ and one judge joked most of the contestants he had seen he would tell to not quit their day job,⁸⁵ implying perhaps these contestants' and their displayed talents were not, in fact, good. Still, the purpose of the Talent section is not to be determined as good, or to present their talent the best of all. The emphasis on Talent and Casualwear overall was to interact and entertain, which stands in contrast to Beauty.

When looking between the two types of portions- Beauty and Casualwear/Talent, the difference in gender roles and norms of behavior are dependent on behavior. As the Beauty portion stands, it represents many characteristics of femininity. Contestants are restrained by how they must act (Martin 2008), are expected to smile (Brody 1997), and treat themselves as an object for other's pleasure (Moffitt and Szymanski 2011). In addition, the gender lines between contestants with regard to clothing is clearest- girls wear dresses, boys wear tuxedos. This follows the theory that the most noted aspect of gender differentiation is through clothing (Stoeltje 1996). Some contestant's low tolerance and appreciation for Beauty indicate resistance to the thought process that pleasing others is more important than having fun (Weitz 2004). These characteristics all have to do with the female contestants and do represent aspects of femininity overall, because to be feminine is to learn "to please visually and sexually through the practices of the body" (Bordo 1993b: 182). The Casualwear portions are more representative as a masculine idea. Contestants are encouraged to use more space on the stage (Lynn 1976),

⁸¹ Ep. 204- "American Regal Gems"

⁸² Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"

⁸³ Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"

⁸⁴ Ep. 204- "American Regal Gems"

⁸⁵ Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"

and are not separating their personalities from their bodies- engaging the audience with active routines and choreography. Behavior in the casualwear and talent portions are not divided by gender lines, but the behavior featured within them are decidedly more masculine than feminine. However, because pageantry is, at its core, a competition, there is a decidedly feminine idea looming across these portions. Literature has shown that girls, not boys, are more interested in what others think of them (Nielson 1987), and are more influenced by these opinions (Lynn 1976). In the next section, I look to see how these opinions by others get heard by the contestant in the form of embroidered sashes and shining crowns.

CROWNING: TO ACHIEVE AND TO FAIL

Crowning was the conclusion, the portion that summarized the results of the day, the results of who emerged the victor. Two pageants had a very equal policy with regards to crowning- every contestant left with some title and crown;⁸⁶ however the vast majority of pageants had the policy of every contestant for themselves, where it was possible to leave with nothing. Helpers at crowning were usually former beauty pageant contestants,⁸⁷ which reflected the desire of the contestants that wished to continue pageantry until they achieved such a high honor. These helpers handed out gifts, sashes, crowns and, occasionally, cash.⁸⁸ There are two types of awards: Sides and Overalls. Side awards are optional, and oftentimes the victory of obtaining a side award did not influence a contestant's happiness and well-being as much as the obtainment of an overall award. Although there is not as much glory associated with side awards,

⁸⁶ Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"; Ep. 301- "Le Maison de Paris"

⁸⁷ Ep. 310- "Arizona Gold Coast"

⁸⁸ Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"; Ep. 215- "Southern Majestic Pageants"; Ep. 312- "Fancy Faces"

something must be said for the influence bodily modifications had on such awards. For example: the most common side award was ‘Most Beautiful’, found in six pageants. This award was very easily skewed by the effects of makeup or tanning. The ‘Best Hair’ awards (4 instances) went to participants who used artificial hair and copious teasing. ‘Best Eyes’ awards (3 instances) were influenced by the fake eyelashes, and the contestant’s so-called ‘Best Smile’ (2 instances) could have been wholly artificial, nothing but a flipper the contestant had put in. Most side awards are resulted from bodily modifications these contestants put themselves through. And it was true that most of the time when contestants won multiple side awards, they also placed well in the overall titles. These overall titles mostly took the guise of ‘Divisional Queen’ within the contestant’s age division (For example- 0 to 2 or 3 to 4) (7 instances), and then ‘Mini Supreme’ for multiple age divisions (0 to 4, for example) (4 instances), and then the ultimate goal, the one every contestant was vying for: The ‘Ultimate Grand Supreme’, the title which, if obtained, indicated the contestant was the highest-scoring contestant in the entire pageant (7 instances). Traditionally, a contestant winning ‘Divisional Queen’ could not then go on to achieve a ‘Supreme’ title, and so most of the time, contestants did not want to hear their name called attached to the ‘Divisional Queen’ title. Contestants not fortunate enough to hear their names attributed to the overall titles would hear less favorable ones. Most involved adults did not consider losing an option. When their contestant’s name was not called in their age division, the assumption was they pulled for a higher title.⁸⁹ After all- “Everybody wants their daughter to win,” according to one involved adult, “You wouldn’t enter a pageant if you didn’t want them to win.”⁹⁰ This

⁸⁹ Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

⁹⁰ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”

differs from the opinions surrounding adult beauty pageants, which state that participants are not solely interested in victory, but also the glamour of the experience and the positive status associated with the event (Stoeltje 1996).

However, it appears that competition is much more at the core of youth beauty pageants (especially those on feature on the show), because the hope and goal for victory appeared to be part, if not all of the motivation surrounding pageantry and the competition within. Involved adults would willingly do “whatever it takes” to win,⁹¹ which mostly involves spending plenty of money and investing a lot of time. One involved adult only supported pageantry as long as his contestant won,⁹² another adult stated it was every contestant’s intention to “win and win big,”⁹³ and another made it clear that they “only like to win, and that’s what we do.”⁹⁴ It was not only the involved adults with these opinions- three contestants stated confidently in interviews that their favorite part of pageantry is winning.⁹⁵ It should be stated that the “winning” on demand here is not “competing to excel” victory, but “competing to win”, as theorized by Hibbard and Buhrmester (2010). In “competing to win” competition, all others must lose in order for the victor to win.

Such a focus on victory calls into question the statement made by two pageant directors that their pageants focus on healthy and fair competition.⁹⁶ This follows the belief that formal competition is rational in its definition (Stoeltje 1996). Given their high

⁹¹ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 312- “Fancy Faces”; Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

⁹² Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

⁹³ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

⁹⁴ Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

⁹⁵ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

⁹⁶ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

dedication to absolute victory, it is no surprise that contestants ⁹⁷ and their involved adults ⁹⁸ were found to be very competitive. In fact, one contestant that was not competitive was called out by her involved adult for her abnormality in the pageant community. ⁹⁹ Because involved adults were repeatedly referenced as being “more nervous” ¹⁰⁰ than their contestants, this indicates that adults have a higher investment in competition than contestants. It seems the involved adult influences the competitive drive of their contestants. In addition, the larger the pageant ¹⁰¹ or the newer the contestant, ¹⁰² the more competitive they tended to be. The competitive nature of pageantry does not appear to follow traditional gender roles- traditionally, boys are socialized to be goal-oriented and competitive (Letendre 2007), and girls are socialized away from competition (Hibbard and Buhrmester 2010; Price 2008). The fact that contestants in a competitive setting are, in fact, competitive, is not a frighteningly shocking realization.

With this level of conflict, contestants had the will to “stand out”, to be remembered and therefore rewarded in the eyes of the judges. ¹⁰³ Judges were viewed as hard to read ¹⁰⁴ and all-seeing, ¹⁰⁵ causing one involved adult to fret “I hope the judges do not notice any imperfections that I do,” ¹⁰⁶ which also indicates the high standards of perfection involved adults have for their contestants. The judge’s decision was placed above all others, although there were a couple of involved adults who did ask the judges

⁹⁷ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

⁹⁸ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”

⁹⁹ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”

¹⁰⁰ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

¹⁰¹ Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”

¹⁰² Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

¹⁰³ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

¹⁰⁴ Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”; Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”

¹⁰⁵ Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

¹⁰⁶ Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

what exactly they were thinking in not rewarding their child.¹⁰⁷ Their complaints did not change anything, indicating the high prestige and respect for these judges and their calls. One involved adult did not care for the judgment of their child, not appreciating a system that could declare their child “not cute.”¹⁰⁸ However, this opinion is not shared by the vast majority of involved adults, and most are supportive of the criticism and judgment of outside others. While nearly all of the judges are female, they are enforcing male-created standards of beauty, and so utilize the male gaze (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997), objectifying these contestants. Pageants, as a whole, hold the individual’s beauty and appearance separate from their personality (Ballerino-Cohen et al. 1996), and the child pageants on display in the show are no exception. Contestants in pageantry (mostly female) are judged and assessed and ranked according to their physical attractiveness (Benokraitis and Feagin 1995). This uses the “seduction strategy” of feminine oppression, because the objectification of these contestants is marked as admiration (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997), and objectification overall is rewarded in accolades and acceptance.

Contestants and involved adults thought they deserved certain titles for various reasons: Money spent,¹⁰⁹ hard work or practice,¹¹⁰ or a contestant’s uniqueness¹¹¹ are things that help the contestant’s victory become more of a necessity than a desire. In addition to these reasons behind certain victory, two contestants¹¹² and two involved

¹⁰⁷ Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”; Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹⁰⁸ Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹⁰⁹ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹¹⁰ Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹¹¹ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”

¹¹² Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

adults¹¹³ were insistent they would win something: “It’s a lot of pressure,” one contestant said, “because my mom does think I’m going to win.”¹¹⁴ Anderson (2003) theorized the presence of parental pressure would eventually force the child to lose the will to perform their pressured activities, and Tofler (1999) indicated how unfortunate it was some children felt their parent’s love was contingent on victory. Despite the majority’s pressure for absolute victory, four involved adults espouse the idea that “she’s a winner to me”, which reflects a sort of victory that was not communicable through sashes and crowns- a victory of adult support, of individual viewing and internal successes.¹¹⁵ For the most part, the contestants’ opinions of their own behavior and relative performance must be bolstered by sparkling crowns and embroidered sashes to dictate to them that they did well- as with two contestants who would not hear reason from their involved adults, insisting they did not perform well simply because they did not obtain an overall supreme title.¹¹⁶ A loss of an overall title may result in the involved adults “writing off” their perceived achievement, leading the child to feel pressured to win versus to simply do well (Anderson et al. 2003). There is noted presence of parental and adult pressure on the contestants.

So much is the pressure from parents to succeed that merely the possibility of failure is enough to make involved adults and contestants nervous and apprehensive for how their crowning ceremony is going to proceed. A general sentiment is the one that adults are typically more nervous or anxious than their children.¹¹⁷ One contestant

¹¹³ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

¹¹⁴ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”

¹¹⁵ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”

¹¹⁶ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”

¹¹⁷ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

claimed if she did not win, she would trash the hotel room,¹¹⁸ and another stated if she lost, she would “slap the winner and take the money.”¹¹⁹ Other adults are concerned as well, because their children are: used to winning,¹²⁰ in fierce competition,¹²¹ performing poorly,¹²² or will get upset upon their failure.¹²³ One involved adult said “I drove too far for her not to win,”¹²⁴ while another quoted how much money, time and effort put into the pageant, and how let down she would be if after all that, her child did not win.¹²⁵ With the emphasis on time, money and effort put into these contestants, the involved adults are demonstrating their dedication to concerted cultivation (Lareau 2000).

However, they are moving the emphasis: from individual life lessons to total domination.

Reactions to domination or defeat are two sides of the same coin. When a contestant wins, she appreciates the big, sparkling crowns or array of trophies,¹²⁶ she feels better about herself and her abilities,¹²⁷ feels more beautiful,¹²⁸ or personable,¹²⁹ and she also has a support network of caring adults to back her up. “The most exciting thing about winning a pageant is just knowing your daughter is the best, and that’s what’s addicting about it, is to know that I made her look like that, and I won,”¹³⁰ “I think it’s just a high for her and for me,”¹³¹ and “when [the child] brings home the crown, it’s just

¹¹⁸ Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

¹¹⁹ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”

¹²⁰ Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

¹²¹ Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”

¹²² Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”

¹²³ Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹²⁴ Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹²⁵ Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

¹²⁶ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

¹²⁷ Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”; Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹²⁸ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

¹²⁹ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”

¹³⁰ Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹³¹ Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

like my crown,”¹³² three involved adults claimed. In addition, involved adults try on their children’s crowns,¹³³ showing a high level of shared achievement. What is interesting to note is that even though the supporting adults to the contestants will share in the child’s victory, they will not share in their defeat. I had no record of adults taking their child’s failure as a personal responsibility, blaming instead their stylists’ choice of hairstyle,¹³⁴ the child’s exhaustion,¹³⁵ or simply the nature of pageantry¹³⁶ to justify their contestant’s shortcomings. Contestants were miffed over winning Divisional Queen¹³⁷ or taking home Grand Supreme (the second-highest title over the entire pageant) over Ultimate Grand Supreme¹³⁸. Additionally, the title of ‘Princess’ is referred to as both a “consolation prize”¹³⁹ and “nothing”¹⁴⁰. In one episode, two families saw the 5th out of 12 spot differently: one claimed it wasn’t a bad title and another stated: “I don’t care. It’s not first.”¹⁴¹ Still, two saw failure as a positive- a learning experience. “You’re not always going to win, you’re not always going to get first place,” said one involved adult,¹⁴² “You need to take the constructive criticism, work on it, and use it as a learning experience,” says another.¹⁴³ The contestants desired absolute and external victory above internal opinions, vying for the “supreme” titles and crowns, and their parents and involved adults wanted the victories and titles even more.

¹³² Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹³³ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹³⁴ Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

¹³⁵ Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

¹³⁶ Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”; Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹³⁷ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”

¹³⁸ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”

¹³⁹ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”

¹⁴⁰ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”

¹⁴¹ Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹⁴² Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”

¹⁴³ Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”

PARENTHOOD: THE ROLE OF INVOLVED ADULTS

I mentioned already the role of parental and involved-adult pressure in the show. Involved adults will influence their contestant's behaviors and practice schedules, willing the contestants to achieve total victory. But not all adult-contestant interaction was so demanding. There were varying interactions between involved adult and child: negative behavior from the contestants would result in a choice¹⁴⁴ or removal from the pageant,¹⁴⁵ adults kept their contestant's spirits up during the long pageant day,¹⁴⁶ there are arguments¹⁴⁷ and disagreements,¹⁴⁸ support¹⁴⁹ and teasing.¹⁵⁰ There was an instance of a child feeling left out and wishing her involved adult interacted with her more at the pageant,¹⁵¹ lending credence to the overall theme of the program that pageantry is a parent-contestant bonding experience. One involved adult noted that the pageant would bond his wife and daughter together "for their whole lives,"¹⁵² and others agreed.¹⁵³ In fact, that is the major reason (4 counts) for adults to get their contestants involved in pageantry in the first place,¹⁵⁴ with the next most-common reason for initiation (2 counts) being a successful future.¹⁵⁵ Other involved adults proclaim that pageants educate their contestants in many ways: They gain confidence,¹⁵⁶ self-esteem,¹⁵⁷ expressiveness,¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ep. 401- "The Ultimate Showdown"

¹⁴⁵ Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"

¹⁴⁶ Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"; Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"

¹⁴⁷ Ep. 204- "American Regal Gems"

¹⁴⁸ Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"; Ep. 403- "Circle City Stars and Cars"

¹⁴⁹ Ep. 316- "Southern Celebrity Ohio"

¹⁵⁰ Ep. 101- "Universal Royalty National Pageant"; Ep. 209- "Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant"

¹⁵¹ Ep. 418- "Crown Beauties"

¹⁵² Ep. 217- "Gold Coast California Grand State Finals"

¹⁵³ Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 412- "Precious Moments Pageant"

¹⁵⁴ Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"; Ep. 209- "Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant"; Ep. 418- "Crown Beauties"

¹⁵⁵ Ep. 101- "Universal Royalty National Pageant"; Ep. 312- "Fancy Faces"

¹⁵⁶ Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"; Ep. 201- "Universal Royalty Pageant"; Ep. 209- "Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant"

¹⁵⁷ Ep. 104- "The Chitlin' Strut"; Ep. 110- "Darling Divas"

extroversion and focus¹⁵⁹ for a few examples. One involved adult performed in pageants in her youth and wanted her child to begin them because pageants taught the adult “how to be a lady at such a young age.”¹⁶⁰ The use of extracurricular activities to teach “important life skills” to children follows Lareau’s concerted cultivation theory (2000), a middle-class ideal for the use of activities for education’s sake. It must be noted that the “concerted cultivation” approach also includes a significant amount of labor by the parents, which can be noted through the multitude of adult-contestant interactions throughout the show and the “whatever it takes” mentality with regard to work and money. When the decision to begin pageantry was made is of special note. For instance, six involved adults decided before their contestants were born that their children would be put into pageantry,¹⁶¹ and an additional three involved adults decided to begin involvement after birth but still before the contestant could make the choice herself.¹⁶² The conscious decision of the contestant themselves to become involved was rare, only occurring once in the episodes under study.¹⁶³ This indicates a lack of control in the contestants involved in pageantry and the presence of others making choices for their present and future for them.

The aspirations of the contestants are relatively similar- most hope for a future on the stage, or to be rich and famous. Thirteen contestants wished to be a performer of some sort in their future, and two wanted to be a model. There were 16 counts of

¹⁵⁸ Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”

¹⁵⁹ Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”

¹⁶⁰ Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹⁶¹ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 312- “Fancy Faces”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹⁶² Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”; Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”

¹⁶³ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”

contestants wanting to be rich and famous, to be on the stage and to have their appearance and behavior under scrutiny. One director did note her pageant had talent scouts and casting directors in attendance, and that “being involved in pageantry has led to a lot of exposure for children.”¹⁶⁴ Another child was being pushed into acting classes, and her coach indicated she was being provided an opportunity by her parents,¹⁶⁵ an opportunity such as the dream of a movie deal to provide for the entire family.¹⁶⁶

Parental opinion is relative and perhaps not necessarily related to actual observation of skill or ability. In addition, there was a case of a break between the parental opinion and what they told their child- in an interview, the adult was concerned over her child’s decent performance, yet when the adult was shown with her child, the adult rewarded the child’s performance with a hug and positive comments.¹⁶⁷ This is related to Goffman’s presentation of self theory (1959), because the parents’ true opinions are stationed firmly in the backstage, while they present themselves with an open and loving air in the front. Adults would ensure their contestant is having fun,¹⁶⁸ and would use coercion to will their child to perform.¹⁶⁹ At least eleven involved adults expressed their feelings of pride,¹⁷⁰ while other adults would feel uncertainty¹⁷¹ and determination¹⁷² while comparing their child to others.

¹⁶⁴ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”

¹⁶⁵ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”

¹⁶⁶ Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”

¹⁶⁷ Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”

¹⁶⁸ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”

¹⁶⁹ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”

¹⁷⁰ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 204- “American Regal Gems”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”; Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹⁷¹ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”

¹⁷² Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”; Ep. 310- “Arizona Gold Coast”

Parental opinion of their contestants has many different forms. One contestant was proclaimed by her involved adult to be “everything I could dream for in a pageant girl”,¹⁷³ and another adult called his child “Daddy’s little queen”.¹⁷⁴ Despite these positive opinions, there was also a noted presence of pressure in these contestants’ lives and these involved adults’ relationships. Adults pressure and push their children to achieve.¹⁷⁵ Also, adults and contestants are competitive with one another. One pageant had a child as well as an adult competition, so the adult and contestant were directly competing with each other.¹⁷⁶ In addition, two adults performed their contestant’s routine, claiming the adult could do it better than her.¹⁷⁷ For the most part, parental opinion is positive in nature, however, pressure, criticism and dedication to winning spoil the niceties somewhat. Anderson (2003) theorized that even the best of intentions by involved adults can be perceived incorrectly by contestants as pressure, and could lead the contestant to lose the will to perform. While there is the presence of pressure, there is also a general feeling of stress and nervousness permeating through the pageant.

A common sentiment is “my mom is more stressed out than I am”, as stated by the contestants.¹⁷⁸ It is not a random occurrence when an involved adult is more stressed or nervous than their contestant. One involved adult wondered “Why am I doing this to myself? I keep thinking we could be having fun doing something else,”¹⁷⁹ indicating perhaps the stress of the pageant is not worth it. This stress likely stemmed from the competitive nature of the pageant. With every contestant vying for the same title, not

¹⁷³ Ep. 312- “Fancy Faces”

¹⁷⁴ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”

¹⁷⁵ Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹⁷⁶ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”

¹⁷⁷ Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 418- “Crown Beauties”

¹⁷⁸ Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 316- “Southern Celebrity Ohio”; Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”

¹⁷⁹ Ep. 407- “Miss Sugarplum Fairy”

every contestant is going to go home the victor. This resulted in a high-pressure, high-anxiety and high-cost system that may have (at the time), appeared not worth it. Indeed, pageantry could be claimed as “a load of crap” (This was the opinion of an involved adult who stated his contestant should have won because of the amount of work he put into her performance).¹⁸⁰ Parental opinions on pageantry and competition overall are varied, but for the most part, are positive.

Some involved adults note that once their child is on the stage, their involvement is finished,¹⁸¹ but I question the validity of this statement. I noted eleven counts of adults prompting, helping or overall following along when their child was on stage.¹⁸² One adult does this to prevent her child from “getting lost on stage”,¹⁸³ and two note that they act ‘crazy’ in one form or another.¹⁸⁴ Two were grateful they prompted their child because their motions prompted their child’s relative success,¹⁸⁵ and two contestants wanted their adults to leave them alone and to not prompt.¹⁸⁶ One of these girls proved to her adult that her success was her own by performing much better in the second event (without her adult’s help) as opposed to the first (where her adult was offering her help). The adult felt “if I would have just shut up during beauty, she would have done that good.”¹⁸⁷ Parental involvement does not end at the stage- stage mothering, as it’s called, occurs in many cases of contestants, at least once in every episode. The process of stage mothering first results from a lack of trust between the adults and contestants- the adults do not think

¹⁸⁰ Ep. 412- “Precious Moments Pageant”

¹⁸¹ Ep. 104- “The Chitlin’ Strut”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”; Ep. 217- “Gold Coast California Grand State Finals”; Ep. 401- “The Ultimate Showdown”

¹⁸² Ep. 101- “Universal Royalty National Pageant”; Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”

¹⁸³ Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

¹⁸⁴ Ep. 110- “Darling Divas”; Ep. 215- “Southern Majestic Pageants”

¹⁸⁵ Ep. 201- “Universal Royalty Pageant”; Ep. 403- “Circle City Stars and Cars”

¹⁸⁶ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”; Ep. 301- “Le Maison de Paris”

¹⁸⁷ Ep. 209- “Gold Coast OC Spring Pageant”

their contestants can survive the independence of the stage alone, and so take it upon themselves to assist any way they can. The desire to assist stems from the truth that these adults are treating their contestants as part of their “extended selves” (Nelson 2001).

The show had several overarching themes and emphases, although no narration was provided. Emphasis on looks, stressors of pageantry, and relations of the parent-child dyad- these were all themes presented in the show. I have provided some insight into the aspects of the show, using literature, and in the next section, I will delve deeper into what I determine as central to the core of beauty pageants and *Toddlers & Tiaras* overall.

DISCUSSION

GENDER

As indicated in the introduction of the Results section, pageantry has a female majority. The vast majority of participants, involved adults, organizers and professionals are female. Bordo (1999) mentioned individual women voluntarily reproduce their subordination (and conversely the domination of men), through self-normalization. While it is true that practices on the show represent femininity much more than masculinity, the world of *Toddlers & Tiaras* is female-driven that domination is for the females. Although the females hold domination, there is still a lack of power. While power is not “held” by any one group of individuals, it is up to the judges and pageant organizers to determine what is sought in each contestant. Because pageantry is at its core a competition, the judges are the ones declaring who is the victor, and so are the most power-holding individuals in the society. The judges reward contestants for their feminized beauty, and

are basing their assessments on the ever-critical first impression of the contestant's presentation of their gender roles, as socialized into by adults and peers.

Even though children are socialized into clear gender differences (Cann and Gernett 1984) and the performance of gender incorrectly results in punishment (Lockford 2004), in the pageants gender lines are blurred. This alteration of traditional gender roles is not present in all aspects of pageantry (presentation, objectification, emulation- these are all traditionally-gendered), but it is in some, such as in the aspect of competition. Competing to win means that all other contestants must lose, which means the individual striving for absolute victory must suspend any natural empathy toward their competitors. For this reason, competing to win is traditionally masculine (Hibbard and Buhrmester 2010). Competitors can strive for victory and can will themselves to be the prettiest in the land, because the looks and processes associated with getting a body ready for pageantry is so wholly feminine.

The femininity of the process of preparations for pageantry is enough to explain why male contestants are uncommon (Because to be male is to reject all femininity (Johnson 1975)). The femininity in the presentation of the contestants (To be feminine is to please others through your appearance (Bordo 1993b)), the modifications they undergo, and the way they behave on the stage- it permeates deeply into the female-dominated pageant culture. The female-dominated pageant world follows mainstream ideologies, which state that women are responsible for their own "enslavement" to the feminine ideal (Bordo 1993a). Women must "control" their own bodies through modification and maintenance (Wolf 1991), but the reasons for doing so began externally, even though they are internally held after some time (Bordo 1993b). These

female-run, female-participating and female-dominating cultures are still ascribing to male standards of beauty and appearance. The “beauty myth”, as described by Wolf (1991), is about men’s institutions and not about women. Through beauty pageantry in general, contestants come to represent the “ideal woman” and are judged according to this wholly unseen ideal (Stoeltje 1996), much like the contestants on the show, comparing themselves to the idealized “total package” contestant. However, much like the standard for beauty, the standard of pageant perfection is impossible to meet and varies slightly from pageant to pageant, judge to judge (Gimlin 2002). Although females run and participate in this culture, male standards and male gaze are still present, and objectification by the male gaze occurs.

Thanks to the presence of male gaze and other factors, I determined that the pageants in the show qualify as “Sexually Objectifying Environments” (Moffitt and Szymanski 2011). Traditional male and female gender roles exist (The female contestants act demure in their Beauty walk while the male contestants are allowed more freedom of movement). Attention is drawn to the female’s physical attributes (The contestants are judged based on their physical appearance, separate from the individual’s personality). There is a high probability of male contact (If the judges are not male, there is certainly the heterosexual male gaze referenced before). Women hold little power (The contestants and involved adults, which represent the majority of the women involved, are at the will of the judges, and if the judges in power do not feel as though the contestant is worthy, then victory will not be rewarded). And finally, there is approval and encouragement in male gaze (These contestants are dressing themselves up as miniature women, vying for

approval in the male gaze of the judges). Pageantry is a sexually objectifying environment, and the presentation that goes into it is also a very feminine one.

Women and girls pay attention to their appearance and use it as a strategy for determining how others will treat them (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). This strategy holds true in pageantry. Contestants modify their appearance, and present themselves in a very specific and calculated presentation of self in order to receive the best attention from the judges. These modifications always occur in the backstage of presentation, away from the prying eyes of the judges and audience (Goffman 1959). These modifications of the self are not for their own benefit- they are to make themselves more attractive to the male gaze found in the judges. Therefore, pageant contestants are objectifying themselves, internalizing the external views of themselves and focusing on their physical appearance. Through their self-objectification, these contestants find their efforts to improve their appearance as natural (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). The contestants need these modifications, the makeup, the hair, etcetera, to be accepted. This self-normalization to unseen standards of appearance is a feminine idea (Females are more influenced by the thoughts and opinions of others (Nielson 1987)), and so for the most part, pageantry does hold up the traditional gender roles and feminization of young female contestants.

Pageantry supports the beliefs and surroundings of traditional gender roles, and the space is highly female-dominated. The methods of pageantry (pleasing others visually with the contestant's form) are wholly feminine, according to Bordo (1993b), and the emphasis on beauty and appearance certainly follow female gender roles (Gimlin 2002; Silva 2005). When only looking at bodily preparations and behavior, it would appear the pageants featured are a feminine space. However, the activity itself is not feminine. There

is too much of an emphasis on competition and victory. Competing to win is masculine (because in order to win, all others must lose and so the contestants must suspend their feminine empathy to crave victory (Hibbard and Buhrmester 2010; Letendre 2007)), and because of socialization girls in general shy away and are less comfortable in competitive settings (Hibbard and Buhrmester 2010; Price 2008). Given these gendered statements, the competition aspect of pageantry is masculine in nature. Even though pageantry supports the feminine form and behavior on-stage, it promotes masculine behavior of competition and aggression off-stage. To relate to the terms of Goffman (1959): The front region is feminine (The presentation of the body, the behavior and nuances on-stage), but the back region is masculine (The underlying theme of the necessities of victory and competition). This gender disparity could eventually create some blurred gender lines in the lives of these contestants.

While some gender lines are blurred through pageantry, most are bolstered and supported through the socialization. Gender socialization is present through the child's development, beginning early (Lindsey 1990; Martin 2008). Like the contestants who became involved in pageantry before their first conscious decision, socialization of gender starts before birth (Weitz 2004). Parents and involved adults are most traditionally the ones transferring gender roles (Rollins and White 1982), and so the mother-daughter bonding that pageantry brings about is very important.

PARENTHOOD

Involved adults in these contestants' lives fulfill a crucial role in gender and societal norm socialization, and that power is not to be taken lightly. Parents and involved

adults in pageantry fall under the categories of authoritative, intensive and stage. Nielson (1987) defined an authoritative parent as one that does not allow their children to have free will. Because of the early involvement of these contestants, I determine these contestants may not have the choice given to them of whether or not to begin a life of pageantry. A 'stage mother' is defined as one that treats her child as part of her extended self, and these are mothers that have made a career of sorts out of the public sphere of mothering (Nelson 2001). The adults on the show are certainly public about which child is their own, and through pressure and perceived support are treating their child as part of themselves, hoping and wanting shared victory. Intensive parenting is defined by the use of professionals and experts because parents do not see their knowledge as sufficient (Shirani et al. 2012), and such parents will spend much of their own time, money and effort on their child (Hays 1996). Notes of both are present in the show. Adults use stylists, coaches, salon professionals and photographers to bolster their own inferior base of knowledge. In addition, parents drive long distances, attend practices and take their child to salons or purchase goods themselves, and work on the presentation of their contestant. To be a fully-involved parent in pageantry is to be an intensive parent.

Because of the presence of intensive parenting on the show, there is a high-pressure environment. Parents put in a lot of work, money and time to make their contestant a winner, and so the desire to win is more than a hope, it is a requirement. When winning is held above the child's own personal satisfaction, a high-pressure system emerges, where the child can be emotionally hurt if success is not obtained. It did occur during the show that contestants who did not win as much as they were hoping felt upset,

angry or disappointed. It is through the pressure of their parents that children were socialized into these feelings and opinions.

Parents and involved adults participate in pageantry in order to teach their contestants life lessons. This follows Lareau's concerted cultivation theory (2000), a wholly middle-class idea. However, as established in the Introduction, most families on the show are from a lower class. So, these lower-class families using the idea of concerted cultivation indicates a desire to emulate the middle class ideas and standards. Typically, a lower-classed individual poorly imitating middle-class activities is basis enough for stigma. (I hold that the imitation of concerted cultivation is poor for these families. The focus is too much on victory, on being the absolute best, not on relative change in personality or traits.) Perhaps some of the controversy surrounding *Toddlers & Tiaras* as a whole does stem from this misappropriation of middle-class ideals in parenting.

CONCLUSIONS

It is through the guise of entertainment that *Toddlers & Tiaras* educates about socialization of gender roles, objectification and competition. The adults interviewed on the show portray the information that without their makeup, hair style and gaudy dress, these contestants are unfit for presentation to the judges. These contestants hold the internalized belief that they are not good enough for the judges without their modifications. These opinions could spread to their everyday life, allowing themselves to internalize the opinion that the contestants are not in control of their body. With the role of the judges, the external "other" telling them their worth, the contestants will fail to

internalize their personal opinions of self-worth, relying wholly on the judges' and others' opinions. Without modification, the contestant's body is free-flowing, playful and energetic- a child. Once the expensive and fancy dress is on, their hairpieces and makeup applied, the transformation is complete. In later seasons (three and four), the show began displaying a "Before" and "After" shot, demonstrating the sheer amount of difference between the two presentations. The show's opening cuts together several contestants in similarly done faces, emphasizing the conformity of it all. These contestants wish to stand out, to be remembered, but their wishes often go unheeded. Female contestants are held to an unseen ideal of beauty, and are encouraged to (and rewarded for) modifying their body to fit that ideal, created in the base of a masculine culture. Due to the nature of pageantry, which holds beauty as an objective ideal held separately from the individual, objectification is all but guaranteed. The presence of competition for victory's sake is the only aspect of masculinity, the one out-of-place gender role in an ocean of femininity and appropriate socialization of females.

Through intensive parenting, the parents and involved adults hold victory to be critical and required based on how much work the parents themselves put into the competition. In the lens of the camera, the parent's pressure comes off as monstrous, their desires for victory appalling. The mothers and involved adults are painted as the villains, with the website of the show having a dedicated playlist for "Nightmare Moms" (Discovery 2013). The contestants are occasionally co-conspirators in their own enslavement, but are mostly portrayed as the victims. These contestants emerge from under the tyrannical thumb of their adults, rising and taking home that crown or title. The contestants themselves, even if they do not win, are considered the heroes. However,

much of these opinions of hero/villain come from the producers of the show, and have no basis in the reality of their relationships and interactions.

In the future, I would appreciate a look at real life pageants (I am concerned the pageants and activities focused on in the show are sensationalized for cable TV), to go behind the scenes of Natural-type pageants to see if the competition is as rampant. It is my theory that because Natural-type pageants do not include the costly bodily modifications and dresses, they are not breeding grounds for intensive high-pressure parents. However, I am limited by the production of *Toddlers & Tiaras*, which wants to keep its two million viewers satisfied with extreme behavior and parenting.

The role of this show is to magnify an extreme group of individuals, on the sidelines of reality. One small subculture being portrayed through the guise of entertainment puts emphasis on their realities, the culture they live and grew up in. Although the families of youth beauty pageant contestants represent a small subset of human society, it is still a part of society and a group of individuals worthy of study.

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