

Should parents put young children in beauty pageants argumentative essay

[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



Introduction

Child beauty pageants have been around for a long time. Brockman suggests they began in the 1960's, although an article " Child beauty pageants" claimed the first one was staged in a hotel in Atlantic City in 1921, and that since the times of those earlier pageants, the pageant " industry" has grown to feature almost 25, 000 pageants annually in the U. S. alone - a \$5 billion per year business. As well as becoming much more common (and much more costly to enter), those pageants have also become highly controversial in a number of respects. This essay discusses some of the issues involved and explains the reasons why on balance the pageants are a bad thing, in part because they place undue emphasis on artificially contrived appearance, and over-sexualization of the young children (mostly girls) competing. It is for those and other reasons discussed that parents should not enter their young children into Child Beauty Pageants.

Pageants: The Pros and Cons

Although there are undoubtedly a number of positives (the " pros") regarding the entering of children into beauty pageants, it is the negatives (the " cons") that are of the greatest concern, and are therefore discussed first. Some of the more obvious " bad" reasons why mothers enter their young daughters in pageants are as follows, (as supported by Barzey):

Living their own (probably unattained) ambitions through their children;

Gain bragging rights over other parents;

Pushing the children too hard to be " the best".

Seeking personal fulfilment through one's children is by no means uncommon and is not limited to the beauty pageants. Like this writer, many parents will have seen other parents (mainly fathers) becoming almost apoplectic whilst watching their sons on the sports field, because the offspring is not performing up to expectations. It is also natural for parents to want their children to do better than they themselves did and to urge them to do better than their peers. However, the kids do not need to be entered into beauty pageants. There are many ways to strive for and achieve goals without entering the artificial world of the beauty pageant. In "normal" academic or sports orientated competitive environments, it is the child's skills and innate talent that bring the results.

In beauty pageants, those who fail to win may become obsessed at their lack of beauty as perceived by others. In contrast, those who win may owe their success more to contrived appearance than to any inherent attractiveness, and that's not just the girls! According to one estimate, 10 percent of kiddie pageant contestants are now boys, up from 5 percent five years ago." (Chandler). Also many parents go to extraordinary lengths to prepare their children for pageants, which is not normal for the kids. This can be confirmed by published reports, such as an article in the U. K. tabloid newspaper The Sun (Watkins) that Lisa Clutten, beautician and boutique owner, makes enormous efforts in preparing her two sons - Bradley aged 11 and Bailey aged five - for pageants costing her up to £350 (\$560) to enter. Clutten proudly related that the preparations (which begin all of two months before each of the three contests each year) include "manicures, pedicures,

eyebrow waxing and even spray tans.” In addition, her boys are trained for their “talent routines” and are taken on shopping trips to obtain the necessary clothing and footwear. It must surely be hard to spot the “real” Bradley & Bailey by the time they appear on the catwalk!

That insight into the preparation involved preparing Bradley and Bailey for their pageant appearances highlights another undesirable aspect of the whole child pageant scene: the amount of a child’s time that is taken up with either the pageants or the preparations for them. Not only do the competing youngsters have to spend much time practicing smiles and movements, they also have to endure the lengthy process of hair and make-up on the day itself, which may involve hiring a professional to do it properly. It could be said that all that time is actually to satisfy the mother’s ego and ambition, at the expense of the child losing time spent in more “normal” childhood activities and pursuits in the company of their friends.

For the mothers of young daughters competing in these beauty pageants, the preparations can be even more extreme than those described above, in order to create the artificially-matured image that will win the prizes. The pageants in recent years have become increasingly focused on artificiality, where items like false eyelashes and fingernails, artificial tans, wigs and hair pieces, enhanced teeth, and extensive makeup are needed to be successful (Brockman). Maybe the pageants could be acceptable to more people if the “glitz” was reduced and the inherent charm of the young contestants was emphasized instead, perhaps to include an interview in the process, so that the real personality of the contestants could become part of the contest.

Mentioning all that preparation leads naturally to the subject of the cost of participation for those aiming for the top spots for their daughters. The entry fee - which itself can be considerable - is just the beginning. As mentioned above there are all the "artificiality" elements to buy, plus of course the clothing. And not just any clothing will do. For the pageant dress itself, it may well need to be created and made by an experienced professional designer of pageant dresses to guarantee success. Then the right shoes and other accessories are an absolute must. Some mothers may be capable of making the dress themselves. If so, it is important to choose a color that complements the youngster's natural coloring and complexion. If entering more than one pageant within a short time, naturally the same outfit cannot be worn at both! Then there is travel and accommodation to pay for if the pageant is any distance from home. To gain some idea of the costs that could be involved, refer to Appendix 1 to this essay that summarizes the approximate costs of items needed for a "full-glitz" pageant. (Malmsio). Add up all the costs and it is not difficult to see that there are other better and less costly ways to involve your daughter (or son) in enjoyable and probably healthier competitive activities outside of school.

Some mothers push their kids to an extreme degree, which some may view as child exploitation. In some instances those "pageant moms" make their youngsters rehearse for hours at a time, and force their children onto the stage even when the potential pageant star is clearly an unwilling participant (Brockman). For many younger children, they cannot really understand why they are taking part, so - if child beauty pageants are to continue - maybe

there should be a lower age limit, perhaps five years old, on the basis that kids younger than five may well be articulate but cannot be totally aware of what they are doing and all the decisions involved.

Whilst these child beauty pageants are contests between children, one of the most disturbing trends has been the intentional sexualization of the girls competing - essential in today's pageants to stand any chance of winning the prize. Unlike the dressing up games that all young girls enjoyed at home while growing up, today's child beauty pageant contestants are made up and dressed to look much older than their years, so that their make-up, what they are wearing, and even their movement and actions are designed to turn them into miniature young women (Brockman). Although their mothers would not want to put their young daughters at risk, there may well be others who see the girls as being sexually suggestive. One could say that they are not behaving in a sexual manner because they don't understand, but as one former contestant said: " They don't, but other people do." (Brockman).

And the phenomenon is by no means limited to the United States or the UK. The first American style child beauty pageant was held in Australia in June 2011. An article published in the Sydney Morning Herald was entitled " The ugly face of child beauty pageants." (Cannold). It included discussion of what is to me a very real issue: the risk of psychological disorders for pageant participants. There is also a tendency for " serious" pageant competitors to acquire a perceived need to be slim and beautiful and consequently to develop eating disorders. This view was supported by Brockman, who

mentioned studies by Dr Martina Cartwright of the University of Arizona, who referred to it as the “ Princess Syndrome.” Dr Cartwright had found from a 2005 study that former child beauty pageant contestants tended to develop higher levels of “ body dissatisfaction” later on.

This writer also believes that the potential loss of childhood innocence resulting from this artificial world, in which the child participants are made to appear and act as grownups, is an equally important concern. Children should be able to make the most of their childhood years and not be prematurely rushed into a contrived maturity as can happen through these pageants.

Another concern is the practice of offering substantial prizes for the pageant winners, including money, cruise holidays, cars, etc. These are obviously powerful motivators for some mothers, as are the somewhat unconventional - and in this writer’s view misguided - desires for their daughters to acquire poise, stage presence, and presentation / dress sense at a young age. If pageants were banned, and instead replaced by activities that are healthier and are equally disposed towards entrants of both sexes, mothers could not and would not be lured by those glittering prizes to lead their daughters down the wrong paths in their young lives.

A final negative aspect of child beauty pageants is that contestants can so easily lose their self-esteem and feel rejected and even ugly, simply because they fail to win. Rather surprisingly, support for my view in this respect comes directly from Shappert, a self-declared “ Pageant Expert and Personal

Development Coach” who – naturally – is a strong advocate of child beauty pageants. However, in her article “ Beauty Pageants - How Beauty Pageants Affect Girl's and Women's Self-Image and Self-Esteem” she explained that it is normal for a pageant contestant to experience one or more of what she calls “ Warning Signs” that include: “ I’m not good enough because I didn’t win.” “ I’m a loser and worthless because I didn’t win.” “ I’m ugly because the judges didn’t pick me.” “ There’s something wrong with me.” Shappert also stated that “ Basing your self-image and self-esteem on the subjective feedback and approval from a panel of strangers is not healthy.” What stronger negative message about these pageants can there be than those remarks from a professional member of the pageant industry?

Of course these child beauty pageants do have their positive aspects (the “ Pros”). The pageants can be an enjoyable experience for the children taking part, they can help with the child’s self-image and confidence, the kids get to meet other children, and will no doubt in due course overcome any fears they may have of meeting strangers and of appearing in front of an audience. However, all of those things can equally result from other social group activities.

Similarly, the kids competing can be taught to be gracious in victory and to be a good loser. It is also usual for the event organizers to make snacks available that most kids enjoy, such as pizzas and other fast food items. Yet it has to be said once again, those benefits can come from attending many other competitive activities, which don’t require the child to be dressed up and made up by their mothers to be something they really are not.

Conclusions

Whilst there are certain redeeming positive aspects to the burgeoning child beauty pageants industry, the benefits gained can readily be enjoyed by children participating in many other social and competitive pursuits. As has been noted in the body of this essay, many of the real benefits are enjoyed by the children's mothers, who may be in some instances seeking to achieve through their daughters their own unfulfilled ambitions, or are hoping to see their child win a competition for the "bragging rights" with friends and other mothers at the school, or even have their greedy eyes on the many prizes on offer for the winners.

Although the original child beauty pageants that began many years ago treated the contestants more as normal little girls, the present day version has got out of hand, depending heavily on extensive make up, hair treatments, adult posturing and movements, all designed to create miniature versions of young women out of these innocent children. Consequently, because success requires much more elaborate preparation and expensive clothing and accessories, and because entry fees and other costs have escalated, only those with deep pockets can hope to compete at the higher levels of pageant competition. In addition, there are real concerns that the contrived appearance of the girls amounts to exploitation and sexualization of these youngsters. Also, it has been demonstrated that there is a clear risk of the nature of the competitions causing the girls to suffer psychological disorders, including eating disorders and what some call "body dissatisfaction issues."

Overall, there is no doubt in my view that parents should not enter their daughters (or sons) into these beauty pageants, unless and until there is a drastic overhaul of the entire industry, returning to the more basic approaches and standards that existed some 50 or more years ago, when those events were just harmless fun for the young competitors.

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