

Child beauty pageants

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A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood (Carson). Children are the fastest-growing segment of the beauty pageant market, with annual children's competitions attracting an estimated 3 million children, mostly girls, ages six months to 16 years, who compete for crowns and cash (Schultz & Murphy).

Beauty pageants have become large, lucrative businesses in the United States, and at the expense of the innocence and welfare of the children. Child pageant competitions have skyrocketed despite of the negativity it has taken from anti-pageant media, and protestors. According to the Pageant News Bureau, the child beauty pageant is a billion-dollar industry producing an estimated 3, 000 pageants that draw 250, 000 entrants a year. Because of the way child beauty pageant promote materialistic values such as looks and glamor, and improper body perceptions, it can be viewed and perceived in many different ways.

It has been and always will be a controversial topic. Beauty pageants started in the 1960's, however, child pageantry evolved much earlier than that when an art and historian critic by the name of John Ruskin got an idea to honor young girls and their innocence by creating the May Queen Festival. The winner would be crowned queen for the most "likeablest and loveablest" of all young maidens. One of the first festivals was held in England in 1881. From then on, these festivals became popular and quickly spread to North America where it was strongly accepted and of course, there were the few that wanted nothing to do with the pageants.

These festivals soon became into baby parades and better baby contest, which the winner was awarded a prize for their looks and costumes. The first baby parade, held in Asbury Park, 1893, was probably the most famous of all parades. It drew 30, 000 spectators. The better baby contest didn't attract too many spectators but was the most organized of all baby events. It started small in 1854 and didn't reach its peak until 1913. The " Little Miss America Pageant" contest in New Jersey, 1961, is considered the first child beauty pageant.

Today, as protests continue to grow in number, child beauty pageants remain and are increasing at an alarming rate. So long as child beauty pageants are around there will always be controversial issues regarding the way children are being provocatively paraded to the public. For the majority of the society, it is said that in order to put a stop to the lifelong negative effects of beauty pageants on young children, state laws need to be established, putting minimum age requirements and event restrictions on beauty pageants throughout the United States (Crandall).

Child pageant contestants that dress up in risque costumes can suffer negative consequences. Striving for the prize and the desperate need to be number one can alter a normal schedule of a child. A participant has to have the discipline to endure grueling hours of practice, but children who are too young to understand that concept, are being fed sugar candy and caffeinated beverages to keep up and stay awake. And instead of spending time with other children and having playtime or doing homework, they are on a strict timeline of practicing and preparing for upcoming competitions.

Travel times to and from performances that are long and wearisome can also disturb a child's sleeping pattern. Another negative concern for a child beauty contestant, especially a female that is going to pay so much attention to her looks and know she is being assessed for it, is very prone to develop eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia (Grosaru). We live in a world today that, unfortunately, looks are prioritized. Media hype, celebrities, magazines, and television shows are partly to blame, but the home is where it begins.

Parents need to enforce that real beauty is found within themselves, not from the makeup and gowns that these children are strutting in. With all the glitz and glamour that is being sashayed on platforms for television shows, unwanted attention may also be attracted from the public, such as pedophiles. Jon Benet Ramsey was a child beauty queen who was murdered in her home basement the day after Christmas, on 1996. Police have yet to solve this 16 year old case. It is believed that Jon Benet had attracted attention from an unrelated male who broke into her home and murdered her.

When child participants of beauty pageants are entered, parents need to assess what effects it will have on the child, be it negative or positive, the outcome should leave the child with a positive experience that reflects what pageants ought to be. Child beauty pageants can be a very positive experience for many. The majority of organizations that are held are usually organized, fun for all, and fair. There are some things that children can acquire from taking part in pageants.

Children may have problems with shyness and be reserved, but being involved in child pageants can encourage high self-esteem and confidence as they perform in large crowds and strangers. A child contestant can get comfortable enough that it can carry through a handful of other activities such as music and dance recitals, and public speaking. Pageants can be fun for most children, it can create life-long friends between contestants, and there is always food and activities for them. While child beauty stars focus on their performance, the real deal behind all the makeup and costumes is the prize, the main reason for it all.

Prizes come in all shapes and sizes, some worth more in value which can come in forms of a car, scholarship money or savings bonds. Sometimes prize money can be large enough that it can be part of a source of income for some families. Most often than not, to compete for the larger prizes, families have to travel far to vie for it. Travelling can be a positive experience for children and family members. However busy the contestants and parents will be for the competition, seeing new places for the first time is always a fun and exciting affair.

Getting to know and meeting new people from a different background can also be interesting. It can help to improve a child's social skills by learning how to meet new friends and communicate with adults as well. There are many benefits that a child can take from doing pageantry, and whether it is from establishing a career, personal development, communication skills, or confidence, learning life lessons, along with having fun with makeup and fashion can be a fun, eventful time for a young person's life. Why is child pageantry such a big issue for those not involved in it?

For one thing, there is a fascination that comes in looking at children dress up in costumes, made up to appear like real live Barbie dolls. Kids' pageants allow us to jump into a world that we love, hate, and love to hate. While we feel slightly sick as we watch kids with misspelled names compete in tiny outfits and do dances that would make certain adults cringe, we love to see the madness (Anonymous). We have an unhealthy fascination with child beauty pageants that feature young girls from the age of 3 strutting their stuff on stage and being dolled up to the max (Brooks).

Child beauty stars are not just the center of attention; their mothers are a fascination among television viewers. People watch the different types of mothers that make child beauty pageants even more engaging. There are middle-aged American mothers who are overweight, living their dreams through their children, mothers who are former beauty queens and mothers who enter their children for the fun of it. According to an article, part of the appeal of children's pageants is that we can watch the contestants and parents become completely delusional about their success.

We watch bad dancers and off key singers present their 'talents' as their parents either scream with joy or cringe. We also watch mothers dance in the background along with their children. We cringe as kids cry when their eyebrows get tweezed, and we sneer as moms complain about how their kids were cheated by the judges. We rejoice when kids do well in competition, and laugh and smile as parents do crazy things to ensure their children do well (Anonymous). With fascination, comes for concern.

When children are being promoted on television, dressed provocatively, what one parent perceives as ok might not be same for another. Many parents

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believe that by putting their child in a pageant, the road to stardom is paved. Parents should proceed with caution and put everything in moderation when deciding to enter their child in pageantry. As child beauty pageants gain popularity, so does concern. Things can get out of hand really quickly if the child's best interest is not on hand. It is the job of the parent to reassure positive self-image and dignity to their child.

A child's self-worth is not something a pageant should determine. Child beauty pageants cater to ages 0-18 years old and both to girls and boys. It is most common to see girl toddlers up on stage but not unusual to see boys to participate. However, boy entrants don't usually compete in the same categories as the girls. Child competitors come from all over to participate. According to an episode of Good Morning America, it was said that an estimated 10% of child beauty contestants are now boys, up from 5% five years ago.

There is also a growing amount of fathers getting involved in the action. Fathers see it as a bonding experience with their child and to support what their child loves. Like with females, males are also predisposed to the negative effects of child pageants. Future insecurities can also develop if little boys get too concerned with how perfect they need to be for competitions. According to a women's issue article, some people feel little girls shouldn't compete in beauty pageants because pageants foster the idea that beauty is more important than brains.

However, letting boys compete in pageants doesn't even the playing field. It creates more kids with a warped impression of their self-worth (Harris). There can also be gender confusion. By being put on the spot with makeup

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(to cover blemishes), hair and glitzy costumes, a boy might confused his role of masculinity by thinking that since he is allowed to do such girly things on stage, that it is considered normal, beyond the pageantry realm. In reality, little boys shouldn't wear lip gloss and sequined jeans. Children mock and mimic everything they do and see.

Boys need to learn how to be boys, but by putting them in glitzy pageants, their demeanor outside the pageantry may reflect what they do in those events. When boys and girls are conditioned to do things and dress a certain way, they do it without a doubt, even if others see it as inappropriate behavior, the child may perceive it okay. By educating children and parents more about child beauty pageants and raising the awareness of its pros and cons, pageants may be more accepted and appreciated by everyone. The pageant life may not be for everyone.

Before entering a child into a beauty pageant, a parent must determine if the overall cost of the contests are affordable. There are several factors that can influence on how much a pageant can cost. There are two types of beauty pageants for children. One is glitz and the other natural. Glitz pageant focuses mainly on beauty. Children wear heavy make-up, costumes covered in rhinestones, heels, false teeth, nail prep and hair styled professionally.

According to Dorothy Poteat, director of Southern Elite Pageants based in Chapel Hill, N. C. , the very low end of the spectrum is between \$400 to \$500, minimum, per glitz pageant. The midrange is \$1, 500, but some parents have dropped \$3, 500 or more in preparations for one big day. On the television reality show “ Toddlers and Tiaras” parents have confessed to spending more than \$30, 000 to support their children in pageants, not

uncommonly resulting in massive debt or the loss of the family home (Mora). But in natural pageants, children are judged by their natural beauty and are encouraged to act their age.

This type of pageant is inexpensive because there is little or no makeup worn, no decorated outfits, and no acts to pull off. What both pageants may have in common is both types will have opportunities to compete on high levels such as state-wide, country wide competitions and ultimately international competitions (Leong). Although local and abroad pageants have been around throughout the years, there hasn't been a study with enough statistical evidence to suggest the long term consequences of pageant involvement (Park).

Chairman of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Dr. Philip Brock, states that direct participation and competition for a beauty prize conveys messages relating to emotional and psychological development that could lead to anxiety, depression and body-concept disorders of a child. There is also the sexualizing of children. Parents think that sexual content in beauty programs will just come and go over their child's head, but in reality, the child is being taught what kind of behavior and image will get them noticed.

The American Psychological Association released a report in February of 2007 that young girls exposed to hypersexualized media leads to fewer girls pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, math, and diminished sexual health. It is also reported that it's not just young girls who are being affected by these sexual images they portray. Boys and adult men are also learning to value women only for their sex appeal, which the report says can

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lead to increased incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and increased demand for child pornography.

According to Martina M. Cartwright, Ph. D., a registered dietician and adjunct professor in the University of Arizona's department of nutritional sciences, these high-glitzy pageants for children often have little to do with the children and much more to do with satisfying the needs of their parents. Children who are too young to sit up don't really have a say into what they want, so they become victims to these psychological disorders because the parents are blinded by the public attention and money involved by the accomplishments of the child, in spite of the risk that's involved for that child. Parents need to do what's best for their child and know what best for their interest.

Because of the way child beauty pageants promote materialistic values such as looks, glamor, and improper body perceptions, it can be viewed and perceived in many different ways. As long as child beauty pageants continue to be around, controversial issues will arise from parading children in provocative costumes. There is enough unnecessary focus on superficial beauty in this culture. Competitions are supposed to be fun and a learning experience, but when they cross the safety line, they should be changed or completely removed before more innocent children are prey to the dangers of child beauty pageants (Singer).