

AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S MEANINGS OF THEIR COMPETING IN
BEAUTY PAGEANTS AND WHAT PART THEIR FAMILIES HAVE PLAYED

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DEDICATION

To God, My Mother and My Father, Tony, Fongis, Grandpa Sang,
Uncle Johnny Fong, Sirena, Carmen, Terry, Connie, Larry, Cecy,
Richard Guy, Rex Holt,
and My Best Pal Grandma Amada Ramirez.

God Bless Texas!

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to explore women's meanings of participating in beauty pageants and what part their families have played in influencing their decision to participate. The life stories of 14 women that have had experience as a participant in a beauty pageant at any point in their lifetime were utilized to provide family therapists with an understanding about this subsystem and their families. The objective of this study was not to show that pageants are good or bad, but to simply lend an understanding of this group of people from their perspective, why they participate in pageantry, and how their families have influenced them.

The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by hand by the researcher. Themes that emerged from the interviews were as follows: (1) Bonding with Children, (2) Bonding with Spouse, (3) Bonding with Extended Family, (4) Formation of Friendships, (5) Support from Outside the Family System, (6) Thriving, (7) Lack of Support from Family System, and (8) Lack of Support from Spouse. Family therapists are challenged to serve all members of society. Therefore, Family therapists may benefit from the information regarding family influence, as well as other information gathered from this study, because

very little is known about pageant systems other than from a historical, feminist, ethnic, and cultural perspective.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When society thinks of beauty pageant contestants, negative connotations may come to mind because their concept of beauty pageant contestants is very much governed by the information available to the community. The information about beauty pageants and the women who participate in them is filtered through the lenses of historical, ethnic/cultural, and feminist ideologies. The history of beauty pageantry tells us that this subculture had its roots based on the idea that beauty in the form of a spectacle could prove profitable (Russell, 2005). The likes of P.T. Barnum and the creators of such pageants as the Miss Chinatown U.S.A., Miss India USA, Miss America, and Miss World are all pageants that linked the promotion of commodities with beautiful women. Where members of society, such as the participants, its organizers, and their corporate sponsors may support this idea as a positive one, other members of society may find this subject to be debated and even protested (Russell, 2005).

Some individuals in society may agree that beauty pageants are merely money making spectacles at the expense of women who choose to be paraded and judged for their physical features. However, there are members of society that contend that beauty pageants are a means to express the acculturation, assimilation, cultural, and ethnic pride of a people (Wu, 1997). Beauty pageants like Miss Chinatown U.S.A. and Miss India USA are examples of beauty pageant systems that encourage their participants to have

thorough knowledge and capability of expression of cultural heritage while maintaining the ability to express their devotion and progress to the United States (Wu, 1997).

Pageant systems exist locally and globally. Large pageant systems, like Miss World, have the ability to attract major national and international sponsorship because of the marketing tool that is created by promoting the appeal of the product in conjunction with the pageant winner's beauty appeal. Companies that produce beauty-enhancing products, like cosmetics and items that promote hygiene, are likely sponsors for large pageant systems. This may be viewed as positive by some members in society, but for others it is not a negotiable issue. In such situations, groups who oppose the concept of beautiful women being used to promote the selling and consumption of goods, especially foreign goods, take action by forming a protest against the pageant, the pageant organizers, the contestants, the sponsors, and those who support any of the mentioned afore hand (Russel, 2005).

Some feminists have argued that beauty contests are ideological regimes that reinforce dominant constructions of gender and idealized forms of femininity (Lieu, 2000). It is important to note that the origins of the beauty pageant can be traced back to the public plays and scenes put on by the early day suffragists. These suffragists would dawn sashes with political slogans written on them. Through the passage of time, the sashes that were once emblazoned with political rhetoric were now embroidered with the names of the pageant participant's city or state. This major disconnect between women utilizing pageantry to educate the community as well as promote their ideas and goals on stage is

now replaced with a type of pageantry that put women on stage to be judged not for their ideas but for their physical beauty (Watson & Martin, 2004).

As the beauty pageant world evolved, so did feminists and their ideals.

The objective of this study was not to show that pageants are good or bad, but to simply lend an understanding of this group of people from their perspective, why they participate in pageantry, and how their families have influenced them.

Statement of the Problem

There is little information available regarding women's personal meaning for competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. Pageant participants have been studied and written about through a historical, feminist, ethnic and cultural lens. A voice has not been given to pageant participants to better understand the reasons they compete in beauty pageants and the influence their families have had on their decision to compete. Family Therapists can benefit from understanding the influence the family has on a participant's decision to compete in pageantry. Family Therapists need to be cognizant of the various subcultures that exist in the pageantry world and the manner in which these subcultures interact with the contestant's family.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study will be to explore women's meanings of participating in beauty pageants and what part their families have played in influencing their decision to participate. The life stories of 14 female participants that have had experience as a participant in a beauty pageant at any point in their lifetime will be utilized to provide

family therapists with an understanding about this subsystem and their families. Family therapists are challenged to serve all members of society. Therefore, Family therapists may benefit from information gathered regarding how the family influences the participant's decision to compete, as well as other information gathered, because very little is known about pageant systems other than from a historical, feminist, ethnic, and cultural perspective.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions will be explored:

1. What meaning does competing in beauty pageants have for women?
2. What part do women believe their families have played in their competing in beauty pageants?

Interview Questions

The following questions will be posed during interviews with the participants:

1. Tell me the story of how you got interested in competing in pageants.
2. What part has your family played in your competing in pageants?
3. What personal meaning does competing in pageantry have for you?
4. What reaction did your family members have to your winning or losing the pageant?

Methodological Approach

Phenomenological research assumes that individuals assign different meanings to a phenomenon, which invites participants to describe their own experiences in a unique

way. Research in this tradition focuses on gaining understanding through recognizing both the distinct and the shared essences and experiences of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990). Phenomenological researchers help participants express their experiences and what they perceive to be their inner truth about the phenomenon (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008). In the spirit of phenomenological research, the participants will share their life stories of their beauty pageant experiences with the researcher by voluntarily consenting to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Definition of Terms

Miss America Pageant System: Contestants must be a citizen of the United States, between the ages of 17 and 24. Must be of reasonably good health to meet the job requirements. Contestants who desire to compete for a National title must compete and win their local state title.(<http://www.missamerica.org/competition-info/become-a-contestant.aspx>)

Miss USA Pageant System: Contestants must be at least 18 years of age and under 27. Contestants may compete more than once in the preliminary (state) competition but may only compete in Miss Universe and Miss USA once. Miss Teen USA may compete in Miss USA but only after her reign has ended and after she has reclaimed her state title. Contestants may not be married or pregnant. They must not have ever been married, not had a marriage annulled nor given birth to, or parented, a child. The titleholders are also required to remain single throughout their reign.
(<http://missuniverse.com/missusa/competition/index>)

Pageants Used in this Study (Miss United America and Miss American Elegance Pageant Systems): Contestants may compete at any age beginning at age 14. Mother and Daughter may compete together and against each other if they so desire. Contestants may seek out at-large titles. There are no limitations regarding the contestant's weight or height. Contestant's will not be asked to resign if they become pregnant during their reign and may compete during their pregnancy. Contestants may be married and compete in the Ms. or Mrs. category or both if they choose.

(<http://www.unitedamericapageant.com/Enter.html>)

(<http://msamericanelegancepageant.com/main.html>)

At-Large Title: Contestant does not have to compete at a preliminary pageant in order to compete at the National level. The contestant can choose any city or state with which she has an affinity such as through residency, birth, or family of origin.

Assumptions

The researcher will assume that

1. The participants will respond honestly and willing share their insights and experiences.
2. The participants are willing to talk about their families with the researcher.
3. The researcher will be able to set aside her own experiences in pageantry and any preconceived ideas and beliefs about the families and participants who compose and participate in the pageantry system.

Delimitations

The following delimitations applied to this study:

1. The sample was limited to 14 women who had competed in Miss. American Elegance Pageant System, and The Miss United America Pageant System.
2. The participants in this study will consist of women who have had previous pageant experience.

The Researcher as Person

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach when collecting and analyzing the data for this study. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Qualitative researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry and seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The researcher will undertake a phenomenological approach in collecting the participant's stories. To be successful in obtaining the participant's point of view the researcher will bracket her own past experiences in pageantry and not express her own experiences or inner truth. Interfering in the process of the research is a way of controlling the freedom to express naturally the truth that each individual has inside (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008).

The researcher is a 43-year-old female born and raised in El Paso, Texas. She is a graduate student enrolled in the Family Therapy program at Texas Woman's University. The researcher has a long past of competing and judging various local, state, and national

beauty pageants. Her family of origin had a great impact on her decision to compete in pageants during her early adulthood. The researcher and her maternal grandmother had a very special bond because of the researcher's participation in beauty pageants. This being the case, the researcher also wonders what the relationship beauty pageant contestants have with their families and how their families have impacted their decisions to compete. It is the hope of the researcher that family therapists will benefit greatly by learning about the relationship this subsystem, comprised of beauty pageant contestants, shares with their families since very little is known about them from this perspective.

Summary

The purpose of this study will be to explore women's meanings for competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. Society may view beauty pageant participants in an unfavorable light because they have been studied through the lens of history, feminist ideology, and as representations of ethnic and cultural identity. Society has not been given the opportunity to gather a systemic insight into the lives of pageant participants and their families of origin to truly understand what pageant participation means to them and their families.

The participant's life stories in pageantry will be captured by following a qualitative and phenomenological method. Using a phenomenological approach in collecting stories will allow the participants to tell their experiences in the world of pageantry from their perspective. The researcher will remain cognizant of her own past experiences as a pageant contestant and judge and do her best to bracket any preconceived notions about

the participants and their stories. Being cognizant of past pageant experience will be both a task and a reality to the researcher as she takes on the role of becoming part of the data collection instrument as participant-observer.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study will be to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families played. The main task of this study is not to determine the value of the knowledge already gained, but to challenge the current point of view. This study will analyze life experiences from the perspective of the women who had past experiences competing in beauty pageants and the interactions their families played in an attempt to understand the meaning for their participating and being a part of this subsystem. Family therapists interact with a myriad of family dynamics since all family systems are comprised of different people with different personalities and interests. Pageant participants are people who are a part of our society and deserve for their voices to be heard to assist family therapists in understanding this subculture. At the present time, very little is known about beauty pageant systems from a Family Therapy perspective. The information that is readily available has been presented from a historical, feminist, and ethnic/cultural perspective as evidenced by the following literature review.

History of Pageant Development

History and mythology have offered examples of physical beauty contests throughout time. It was not until the mid-19th century that the beauty pageant really started to come into its own as a distinctive and increasingly important form of competition (Russel,

2005). The early-day pageant organizers saw business potential in promoting beauty as a spectacle. Although the idea was a good concept to gain income, they had a difficult time getting female contestants. In 1854, P.T. Barnum, a man famous for founding the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus, had the idea of gathering women to be judged by a live panel as a form of entertainment. Due to the social atmosphere of the time, Mr. Barnum could not attract any respectable women to take part in this type of contest (Russell, 2005).

Mr. Barnum cleverly thought of a different way to turn his idea into reality. He decided to promote his contest through the use of daguerreotypes (an old form of photograph) of the contestants. The use of daguerreotypes allowed the images of the women to be seen and judged without their physical presence being necessary. Although society at the time was not ready for women to be judged in person, it became socially acceptable to judge and promote beauty via photographs. This idea grew in popularity and by the end of the 1800s every newspaper throughout the United States was holding some form of photographic beauty contest (Russell, 2005).

The physical presence of women at the beach was a contributing factor to the evolution and progress of beauty pageants. Members of society were able to accept women's decisions to partake of public bathing by associating bathing in public with hygiene. This idea was introduced by society's elite who attended famous spas as a form of good hygiene. The elite's actions facilitated society's ability to move away from the

perspective of relating vice and lack of responsibility to the women who chose to go out to public beaches in swimsuits (Russell, 2005).

The shift in public sentiment toward the female form being displayed in public opened the door for women to compete in pageants. This also opened the doors for the likes of P.T. Barnum and others who would come to recognize the opportunities afforded by linking beautiful women and commerce. For example, the committee of the Miss United States pageant saw a link between beauty and making a profit and held the first Miss United States pageant in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware in 1880, with the intent to attract publicity and tourism to the resort (Russell, 2005).

Throughout pageant history, promoters followed in the footsteps of their predecessors and other systems emerged as a result of following the concept of combining beauty and commerce. Some systems were nationally recognized, like the Miss America pageant, and some were only known to local communities, like the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. system. Both of these pageant systems are able to trace their origins to innovative business schemes, which would intertwine beautiful pageant women and tourism. The *Miss America* pageant was the brainchild of several Atlantic City and New Jersey hotel owners who, in 1921, were seeking a means to prolong the summer resort season. They devised the pageant as a promotional event to extend the summer tourist season beyond the traditional closing date of Labor Day (Watson & Martin, 2000). On September 7, 1921 the first Miss America pageant consisted of only eight participants with Margaret Gorman, a fifteen-year-old school girl from Washington, D.C., being crowned the very

first Miss America. This innovative scheme that began with only eight participants evolved into nationwide phenomena viewed by millions of people (Watson & Martin, 2000).

Following a similar path as those who created the Miss America pageant, the founders of the Miss Chinatown pageant believed that the concept of promoting the image of Chinese American women as a unique blend of Eastern Culture meets Western Culture. The founders believed this would serve as a good method to educate the broader American public about this unique community system while simultaneously achieving the goal of attracting tourists to Chinatown (Wu, 1997). While the pageant organization promoted a positive concept of Chinese American identity to encourage self-pride and cultural awareness for the contestants and community, they also consciously promoted an exotic image to fulfill the expectations of white tourists (Wu, 1997). The pageant was usually attended by Chinese Americans and the proceeds from the event helped fund the annual Chinese New Year Parade which attracted hundreds of thousands of non-Chinese people. In addition, pageant contestants served as models for advertisements for the festival and their presence at various New Year events helped attract tourists. These tourists helped the Chinatown economy flourish as they spent their dollars while patronizing Chinatown stores and restaurants (Wu, 1997).

Where some pageant systems have thought it savvy to combine beauty pageant contestants with their business practices, other members of society have vehemently opposed the idea. For example, when India hosted the Miss World pageant in 1996

feminist groups protested the pageant because of the link created between beauty and capitalism, not because of the moral threat it posed. The General Secretary of the All-India Democratic Women's Association was opposed to the pageant taking place because of the belief that the women participating in the pageant would be sponsored by major cosmetic companies that would profit by using women to represent an unacceptable face of global capitalism (Russell, 2005).

Large pageant systems like Miss World have the ability to attract major national and international sponsorship because of the marketing tool that is created by promoting the appeal of the product in conjunction with the appeal of the pageant winner's beauty.

Companies that produce beauty-enhancing products, like cosmetics and items that promote hygiene, are likely sponsors for large pageant systems. For example, the Miss World pageant held in 1996 was heavily sponsored by the Godrej Soaps Company. The National Secretary of the Bharat Ajanta Party responded negatively to the soap company's sponsorship believing the winner of the pageant would be promoting consumerism by promoting foreign goods (Russell, 2005).

Ethnic and Cultural Perspective of Pageantry

Pageant systems, like any other functioning system, take on a life and meaning of their own. Where some individuals in society may take on the perspective that beauty pageants are merely money making spectacles at the expense of women who choose to be paraded and judged for their physical features, others contend that beauty pageants are a means to express the acculturation, assimilation, cultural and ethnic pride of a people. An example

of this perspective can be taken from the sentiments expressed by June Gong, the first young woman to win the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. Beauty Pageant in 1958. Miss Gong communicated that her experience in the contest felt more like one of ethnic representation and not one of physical beauty. Having grown up in Miami, Florida, Miss Gong did not have the opportunity to be exposed to many Chinese families. Through her participation in the pageant, Miss Gong was able to come in contact with the largest community of Chinese people outside of the motherland and learn about China's people and her own ancestry (Wu, 1997).

Miss Gong was chosen the winner because she fit the ideal image of an acculturated Chinese American blend that the promoters of the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. pageant system intended to create. The pageant organization wanted to create the fascinating image of a beauty queen that would convey the look of combining China's beauties with modern American qualities. The promoters of the pageant also argued that the pageant symbolized a cohesive sense of identity among Chinese Americans that would be recognized across generations as well as throughout the United States (Wu, 1997). The pageant organizers thought this possible because the pageant would engender the desire for the participants to learn more about their culture, thus, opening the means of communication between the younger and older generations creating a family oriented environment. Moreover, the pageant organizers wanted to demonstrate that Chinese Americans were becoming assimilated to American society as demonstrated by their

participation in a beauty pageant - an event that was gaining momentum and popularity in the post-War era (Wu, 1997).

Some members of the Chinese American community agreed and supported the ideas of the organization, while others thought quite the contrary. Critics of the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. pageant argued that the participants in the pageant did not represent the real women who resided in San Francisco's Chinatown community (Wu, 1997). The organization wanted to promote eloquent and well educated women as a means to promote respect for the community. The critics saw the pageant participants as representatives of a bourgeois mentality because the majority of the contestants came from wealthy families that had little knowledge of the Chinatown ghetto scene. In reality, the majority of the women who resided in Chinatown were working-class individuals. The critics of the pageant identified these women as hard workers with full-time jobs and families. These women did not have time for leisure or to dedicate time to primping their physical selves to create an outward beautiful appearance (Wu, 1997).

The pageant organizers answered the critics concerns by arguing that the pageant was a means to create upward mobility for the participants. There were also people in the working class community that supported the pageant and the opportunities it provided for the women who participated in them. They used the life changing experience of Rose Chung, Miss Chinatown 1981, to show their perspective of how beauty pageants provide opportunities for its contestants. Rose Chung was raised in a single-parent home where she took care of her four siblings while her mother worked long hours as a seamstress.

Besides winning a crown, Miss Chung also won scholarship money and trips throughout the United States, Canada, and Asia. Because of her personal abilities while serving as Miss Chinatown U.S.A, she became a well-known and respected celebrity in the Chinatown community. Later she became the President of the San Francisco General Hospital Chinese Employee Association (Wu, 1997).

San Jose, California was the host city of the 1999 Miss India USA pageant. San Jose is considered the center of northern California's technology industry. It is heavily populated by South Asian immigrants that form a part of the Silicon Valley's work and residential community (Mani, 2006). Mimicking the objectives of the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. pageant, the Miss India USA organization also hoped to accomplish the goal of generating a sense of community, citizenship, and an understanding of the migration of a group of people that share the same national and ethnic identity. The Miss India USA pageant's roots can be traced to Indian festivals held since 1974 in New York's Central Park. These festivals, which would showcase dance performances and fashion, evolved into the Miss India New York pageant in 1980. Like the Miss Chinatown U.S. A. pageant, community owned businesses began to sponsor the organization which allowed it to grow out of Central Park and into five-star hotel ballrooms (Mani, 2006).

In order to compete in the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. pageant, the contestants had to abide by the requirements created by the organization. These requirements were essentially that participants be of Chinese ancestry, able to converse in their native dialect, and practice the ancient virtues of respecting their father first, their brother

second and their husband third (Wu, 1997). In similar tone, the Miss India USA pageant required participants to be racially legible as Indian and maintain what the Indian community considered to be feminine modesty. The Miss India USA pageant places great emphasis on the participant's performance on stage and does not reward the behavior of showing of too much skin. The Indian community does not approve of the cheap display of women as evidenced by the exclusion of a swimsuit competition in the pageant (Mani, 2006).

Both pageants shared the concept of keeping virtues and values that were key to their community's belief systems as well as sharing the desire to be a part of mainstream America. These small-town pageants invite the audience to recognize their achievements as a community as they live vicariously through the pageant participants successes. These participants represent the community that has educated, shaped, and formed them. As the participants excel in life, the community of which they are an extension, does as well (Mani, 2006).

The goal of the organizers and contestants of the Miss Chinatown USA and Miss India U.S.A. pageant systems were to demonstrate their abilities to assimilate to American culture while retaining and making public their ethnic and cultural identities. These community pageants appeal to a sense of America, the nation. The contestants of the Miss India USA are an example of this notion as they embody the secular idea of India yet are devout patriots of the United States (Mani, 2006). While some pageants as these focus on a people being a part of a nation, other pageants go a step further and

strive to be a part of a global system. An example of this is the Miss India pageant being managed by Femina magazine, one of the most widely circulated women's magazines in India (Parameswaran, 2005).

Femina magazine is responsible for managing the Miss India pageant and receives thousands of applications from various women in India who wish to vie for the title. Of the thousands of women who apply, three hundred are chosen to be reviewed and of those three hundred interested parties, a mere twenty are chosen from the nationwide pool (Mani, 2006). This venue is popular because the three finalists are automatically appointed as India's representatives in the Miss World, Miss Universe, and Miss Asia-Pacific pageants (Parameswaran, 2005).

The Miss India pageant began in 1965. Since then, the standards of finding a pretty face have changed to finding a contestant that has a high level of finesse and class, which is required of a person worthy of international notoriety. For these reasons, the participants of the Miss India pageant must be competent in indigenous and international products as the winner will endorse the products supplied by the sponsors of the show (Mani, 2006). When India as a nation takes the stance of competing globally in the pageant world, it makes a statement to the world that India is going through a major phase of transition. It is evolving from a quasi-socialist economy to a nation capable of producing and selling global commodities (Parameswaran, 2005).

The Miss World pageant was greeted with mixed sentiments by the people of India when it was held in their country in 1996. The majority of the articles posted in the

media were favorable ones as the people of India wanted the Miss World pageant to be held in their country as a matter of national prestige and personal enjoyment. It was a cue that perhaps the middle and upper classes had moved on from their traditional ideals of modesty to emulate the beliefs and values of a Westernized world (Russell, 1997).

Indian women crowned as global beauty queens could demonstrate their ability to excel in the modern Western world while maintaining their patriotism to India. She could cherish her Indian heritage while simultaneously participating in the trendy consumption of global lifestyle products (Parameswaran, 2005). The media would give winners of global beauty pageants the same recognition and value that was reserved for their top business leaders and bureaucrats. The victories sustained by these beauty queens were often compared to the victories many of their military father's had accomplished in their careers of patriotic service to their country. The newspapers and various forms of media would showcase the ability of the military father and his beauty queen daughter to bring a good name to the people of India (Parameswaran, 2005).

The readers of the sort of media being produced about global pageant participants lies within India's middle-class and the elite. The media spouted all of the positive attributes and contributions the global winners of pageants had provided for India, however, the media failed to report the everyday struggles of the Indian population. Millions of India's population live below the poverty level and struggle for everyday basic needs such as running water, food, and shelter (Parameswaran, 2005). Those who criticize the media's idolization of global pageant contestants fear the middle-class and elite will become

numb to the harsh realities the majority of India's inhabitants have to face on a daily basis. The critics believe the bourgeois sentiment will push aside the country's goals to create positive national development and social justice and thoughts of a global lifestyle consumption and software production will fill its place (Parameswaran, 2005).

Feminist Perspective of Pageantry

Some feminists have argued that beauty contests are ideological regimes that reinforce dominant constructions of gender and idealized forms of femininity (Lieu, 2000). As a society, it may be common place to think of the concept of a beauty pageant when the words "women" and "pageant" are mentioned in unison. However, this was not always the case. Prior to 1921, the American people had no idea what a beauty pageant was. Historical evidence supports the idea that beauty pageants came about as a response to promoting commercialism. However, it is also important to note that the origins of beauty pageants are also rooted within the woman's suffrage movement.

In 1910, women suffragists, much like feminists and feminist supporters of today, took to the streets to take a stance on women's rights. Suffragists would dawn sashes emblazoned with words such as "Votes for Women" and take to city parks and other public venues to perform skits and scenes depicting iconic women in history in order to educate society of the various roles that women had undertaken throughout time (Watson & Martin, 2004). The suffragists' primary goal of producing a pageant was to place women at the forefront of society giving them a place in history and civic life. It was this tactic that helped the Nineteenth Amendment be put into place (Watson & Martin).

In 1920 a new type of pageant seemed to catch the public's eye. The participants of this pageant dawned sashes much like the suffragists of 1910. However, unlike their suffragist counterpart's sashes which promoted political slogans and values, the new pageant participant's sashes were adorned with the name of the city or state the participant represented. This pageant was what we now know to be the iconic Miss America Pageant. Critics of the Miss America Pageant note that women suffragists wore sashes and produced venues of entertainment in order to promote their ideas, goals and political values. The women suffragists promoted solidarity among women as a way of encouraging feelings of liberation in the female population (Watson & Martin, 2004). In the critics' eyes, the Miss America Pageant was promoting values that were contrary to the women suffragists' beliefs. The suffragists saw the pageant as pitting woman against woman in a contest where they would be judged by men and seek male approval based on their physical self and for their abilities as a person. Critics of the pageant believe that the sashes stating the city or state of the participant strip the participant of her identity as she is seen as a symbol of a point of origin and not as a person (Watson & Martin).

On September, 1968, about 200 feminists went to Atlantic City, the host city of the 1968 Miss America Pageant, to hold a protest against the pageant organizers and its participants. The Women's Liberation Front marched on the Atlantic City boardwalk chanting anti-pageant slogans and allegedly conducted such rituals as crowning a live sheep and throwing various items such as bras, hair curlers, and cosmetics that symbolized suppressive practices imposed on women into what they deemed to be a

freedom trash can. The protesters refused to speak to reporters and although their presence was physically and audibly made known to the community, the pageant continued without consequence (Martin, 2001).

The pageant has been targeted as a place for demonstration by radical feminists because, in their perspective, the pageant represents the epitome of exemplifying women's roles as passive decorative objects. The protesters of 1968 wanted society to recognize women's need for liberation. Earlier protest efforts to bring attention to serious issues affecting women such as education, equality in pay, and the workforce, resulted in failure (Martin, 2001). As the pageant entered the 1970s, conflict between the Miss America pageant and feminists remained. For example Miss America 1972 was harassed and even had her life threatened by various feminists as she traveled throughout the country to promote the pageant. In 1974, the National Organization of Women protested the pageant by marching up and down the boardwalk chanting and labeling Miss America a degrading, mindless boob-girlie symbol (Martin, 2001).

It is important to note that it is not fair to make the generalization that all feminists protest the Miss America Pageant system, as evidenced by an article submitted to Texas Monthly magazine, where a woman who considers herself to be a feminist openly admits that she and her friends look forward to, and plan to, watch the Miss America Pageant together every year. These women created a pageant watching party - a custom, to gather together every year which only they attend. No men are allowed as it is a time for female bonding (Dingus, 1998).

These self-proclaimed feminists give readers of the article tips on how to create a Miss America watching party. They offer ideas on which types of food to serve and also state they made it a habit to put out a loaf of white bread as a political symbol of how the pageant seemed to cater to all white women until 1984 when Vanessa Williams, an African American woman, won the crown. As a tribute to Williams, these women served chicken breasts, rump roast, and tongue to memorialize the scandal that followed the dethroning (Dingus, 1998).

It may be easy to generalize and presume that all pageants promote the same ideal of robbing the participants of their identities by disallowing their ability to promote their own ideas, goals, and political values. The review of the literature thus far has demonstrated how women's identities of self are devalued when they are turned into objects to promote commerce or are pitted against one another and judged for their aesthetics. However, Native Americans have held pageants in their tribal communities that do not conform to the expectations and standards promoted in what Native Americans refer to as "non-Native American competitions" (Roberts, 2002).

Organizers of Native American powwow princess pageants insist that their pageants provide new metaphors for the ways women negotiate cultural, personal, and sexual identities. These organizers focus on the idea that the women are agents in making of meaning and not merely presentational symbols. The organizers list various factors which they contend distinguish their pageants from other forms of pageantry. Among these distinguishing factors are: Native contests have little to do with physical beauty. There is

a ritual aspect in the departure of a reigning contestant and powwow princesses linguistically represent themselves. They are not muted by masters of ceremonies like non-Native pageant participants (Roberts, 2002).

Unlike other beauty pageants, Native American pageants do not subscribe to the Western ideal of physical beauty. Native American pageants tend to focus more on community, identity, ritual, efficacy, achievement, and representation (Roberts, 2002). When a contestant decides to compete in a non-Native pageant, the norm is for the contestant to find a local business in her community to sponsor her. This sponsorship creates a certain perspective to the participant that her physical appearance is a link to representing something bigger than herself. Powwow princesses are also led to believe that they represent something bigger than themselves. However, the promoters of Native American pageants believe that the manner in which their pageant participants reach this conclusion differs from contemporary pageants, like those seen on television, because their participants arrive to this status in an active, not a passive manner. This conclusion is achieved via the Native American community actively supporting all of the participants equally which allows meaning to be made by each contestant rather than the audience creating their own meaning beforehand (Roberts).

The Native Americans give ceremonial meaning to the departure of a reigning contestant. This event is commemorated by a gift giveaway that is a culturally symbolic of the generosity of a people and a community. This giving of gifts represents a show of relationships which is greatly valued in this cultural system. This value of community is

so greatly valued that the family of an honored person, the departing contestant, saves up goods for the entire year so that the contestant is able to distribute the goods to every person who attends the departing ceremony (Roberts, 2002). It is this ceremony the perspective of the Native Americans serves as the making of meaning for the outgoing royalty. The pageant allows the family not only save and store items to share themselves as a family with the community, but also, the ceremony reinforces that the outgoing queen is a symbol of her tribe, her people (Roberts, 2002).

The Native American pageant contestant winners are referred to as powwow princesses. The winner of the pageant travels to various powwows around the country during the year of her reign. The contestants vary from 18 to 25 years of age and must have knowledge of their tribal traditions. Among one of the most important traditions of all tribes is that of the powwow. Her commitment to the powwow is viewed as her extension of her Native American identity. The majority of females, age 18 to 25, attend powwows for the purpose of pursuing potential romantic partners. They do not have to partake of the structured and time-organized dancing segment of the powwow. (Roberts, 2002). The powwow princess shows her maturity level and loyalty to her people by making the dancing segment of the powwow a priority and not looking for romance. She is discreet about her relationships and believes the powwow is for her people. She is an extension of these people and the values being conveyed by the act of a community convening and sharing in this celebration (Roberts, 2002).

Unlike other pageants that utilize only the master of ceremonies to present the show, Native American pageants utilize both the master of ceremony and the contestant's own words and actions. The master of ceremonies in the Native American pageants is a woman. This is not the norm in contemporary pageants as the master of ceremonies is customarily a man. The Native American contestants are free to express themselves as their own person and are not muted by the master of ceremonies, such is the consequence in other pageants (Roberts, 2002).

Summary

The review of the literature has found that beauty pageants can trace their roots to different points of origin depending on the perspective that society wants to take and believe. On the one hand, the literature states that beauty pageants first came into existence as lucrative business schemes to attract tourism to resort towns after the summer season had come to an end (Russell, 2005). This idea then evolved into a promotional device, as evidenced by the creation of the Miss Chinatown U.S.A. pageant that attracted people to shop and understand the cultural aspects of a people who were trying to assimilate to the American culture (Wu, 1997).

Some ethnic groups opted to utilize beauty pageants as a way to market their culture to sell their cultural products. Others, like the Miss India pageant, wanted the American public to know that they had arrived as a people in the Silicon Valley and were representative of a changing world of technology (Mani, 2006). This ethnic group also used beauty pageants to symbolize their moving from a national market in commerce to

one that was recognized globally, as evidenced by the Miss India pageant contestants becoming a part of the Miss World pageant system (Mani, 2006).

The ethnic groups who chose to compete in pageantry and commerce globally were not truly supported by all members of their own groups. Many of these pageants were protested because of the pageant's choice to attach meaning to global consumerism through the women of their ethnic group's promotion of various products (Mani, 2006). The literature also discovered that pageants were not only protested because of this link of commerce and the beauty of women. Other pageants were protested by feminist groups on the grounds that beauty pageants were demeaning to women because of the manner in which women were displayed as objects and not given an opportunity to voice their own goals, ideas, and political values (Watson & Martin, 2004).

It is interesting to find that the review of the literature found a connection between those who protest pageants and their contribution to the formation of them. The literature review found that in the early beginnings, women suffragists would wear sashes and perform plays in public that addressed the various roles women played in society (Watson & Martin, 2004). The sashes worn by beauty contestants of today mimic those of early suffragists, however, the difference lies in the fact that the sashes of the suffragists were emblazoned with political statements. The ones worn by beauty pageant contestants today are embroidered with the name of the city or state the contestant is representing. Where pageantry may trace its roots to the actions of the suffragists, the

suffragists would agree that the purpose behind their pageant and the ones promoted today are very different because of the meanings being constructed (Watson & Martin).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss (a) research design, (b) sampling procedure, (c) participants, (d) the researcher as a person, (e) interview procedures, (f) data analysis, and (g) protection of human participants. The researcher has taken a qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing the data for this study. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Qualitative researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry and seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

A phenomenological researcher assumes that individuals assign different meanings to a phenomenon, which invites participants to describe their own experiences in a unique way. Research in this tradition focuses on gaining understanding through recognizing both the distinct and the shared essences and experiences of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990). Phenomenological researchers help the participants to express their experiences and what they perceive to be their inner truth about the phenomenon (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008). In the spirit of phenomenological research, the participants have shared their life stories of their beauty pageant experiences with the researcher by voluntarily consenting and participating in an in-depth semi-structured interview. The participants were asked open-ended questions which allowed them to express themselves

with greater candor and freedom regarding their perspectives of being involved in the world of pageantry. In-depth interviews were utilized to give the participants a voice in describing their own unique life experiences.

A phenomenological research paradigm guided this study's underlying design and implementation. A phenomenological tradition assumes that individuals assign different meanings to a phenomenon, which invites participants to describe their own experiences in a unique way. Research in this tradition focuses on gaining understanding through recognizing both the distinct and the shared essences and experiences of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions were explored:

What meaning does competing in beauty pageants have for women?

What part do women believe their families have played in their competing in beauty pageants?

Procedure

The researcher began the process of inquiry by seeking the permission of the Internal Review Board at Texas Woman's University. Only after approval was received did the researcher formulate a plan to assist her in deciding which pageant systems she would contact to inquire of their willingness to participate in this study. The researcher's ability to travel to the location where the pageant venue was being held as well as the probability that

the individuals participating in the pageant would fit the demographic requirements necessary for this study were taken into consideration before contacting the pageant directors for their permission to speak to potential participants of the study.

Due to the researcher's prior experience in pageantry, the researcher had knowledge of pageants where participants would compete to win state and national titles that could provide her with potential participants for her study. The researcher wanted to attend pageants where individuals competing for state and national titles would be present in order to gain the perspectives of women from different parts of the country. These pageants were located in: Florida, Georgia, Texas and Chicago. The researcher contacted pageant directors in all four states to explain the purpose of the study and asked for their permission to inform the pageant contestants about the research being conducted.

It is important to understand that the pageants under review for this study are not the type of pageant competitions with which the general public has become familiar. Pageants that are televised annually across the world such as The Miss America Pageant and The Miss USA Pageant are not the type of pageant systems from which the participants of this study were chosen. For example, according to the Miss America website, the requirements to compete are as follows:

- Be a United States citizen.
- Be between the ages of 17 and 24.
- Meet residency requirements for competing in a certain town or state.
- Meet character criteria as set forth by the Miss America Organization.
- Be in reasonably good health to meet the job requirements.
- Be able to meet the time commitment and job responsibilities as set forth by the local program in which you compete.

The Miss USA Pageant has similar requirements. According to their website

- 51 contestants participate in their competition each year
- Miss USA contestants must be at least 18 years of age and under 27 years of age by February 1st in the year they hope to compete in the Miss Universe or Miss USA competition. Miss Teen USA candidates must be at least 14 and under 19 years of age by February 1st in the year they hope to compete in the Miss Teen USA competition.
- Contestants may compete more than once in the preliminary (state) competition but may only compete in Miss Universe and Miss USA once. Miss Teen USA may compete in Miss USA but only after her reign has ended and after she has reclaimed her state title.
- Contestants are not required to have a coach.
- Contestants may not be married or pregnant. They must not have ever been married, not had a marriage annulled nor given birth to, or parented, a child. The titleholders are also required to remain single throughout their reign.

Contestants who desire to compete for a National Title such as Miss America or Miss USA must compete and win their local state title. The pageants used for this study offer “At-Large” titles that allow the participant to represent her state at a national pageant or represent her city at a state pageant by simply contacting the pageant director to make sure that the state or city title is available. If the title is available, she may have it after paying her fee. If the state or city title is already taken, then she may represent her state or city by taking a different title name that is affiliated with her state or city through affiliation of her work, school or birth. For example, if the state of Texas title is already taken, the participant may choose to be Miss California if she went to school there or if any other tie binds her emotionally or otherwise to that state.

Greater opportunity to compete is further created by allowing the participants of these pageants to compete more than once at all levels. For example, if a participant competes at

the state level and loses, she may still go on to compete at Nationals under the name of another title. For example, if the participant competed for the title of Ms. Texas and lost, she may go to Nationals as another state that she has an affinity with. If all states are taken, then she may compete under a regional title. For example, if Texas is already taken at a National competition, the participant may compete as Ms. Gulf Coast. The title does not improve or lessen the chance of winning. From past pageant experience, the researcher has seen situations where the loser of the state competition goes to Nationals to beat the person who took the opportunity of a state crown away from her. As part of the researcher's knowledge though past pageant competition experience, it is always within the spirit of competition of these pageants for the loser, otherwise known as the "runner up" to go to Nationals to try to beat the person who took the title away from her at the state competition!

Unlike the pageants shown on television, the pageant systems under review in this study allow women of all ages, sizes, and marital status to compete. The pageant systems under review afford the opportunity for mother and daughter to compete in the same pageant system together as age is not a factor. Mother may be competing under the Ms. or Mrs. Category and her daughter may be competing under the Miss, Ms., or Teen category. If the mother and daughter choose, they are allowed to compete against each other in the same category. Women who are mature in age may compete in such categories such as Lady, Woman or the Elite category.

Both the Miss America and Miss USA feature the swimsuit competition as a segment of the pageant that is chosen to be telecast. As stated by one of the requirements found on the Miss America website, the participant must be in reasonably good health to meet the job requirements. The pageants used for this study celebrate women of all sizes. These pageants do not feature a swimsuit competition. This is replaced by a fashion wear competition where each participant chooses an outfit of her choice to model before the judges and audience. The participant is judged in how comfortable she appears in the outfit and modeling style.

The pageants used for this study also allow women who would like to compete regardless of their marital status. These participants may choose to compete for themselves under the Ms. Category or they may choose to compete in the Mrs. Category. The United America System, a system chosen for this study, allows women to compete in both the Ms. and Mrs. Categories if the contestant so desires. The only condition to be met for this is that the contestant must pay an extra fee. Unlike the Miss America and Miss USA pageant systems, the systems chosen for this study will not ask the participant to renounce her title and crown if she becomes pregnant. If the participant becomes pregnant during her reign, she is allowed to complete her year and keep her prizes. Both pageant systems chosen for this study allow women who are pregnant to compete if they so desire as the purpose of these pageants are to choose winners based on how comfortable the contestant is with herself, they seek out what real, everyday people to represent their systems.

When a queen has completed her reign in the Miss America and Miss USA pageant, she performs her final walk and crowns her successor. The process is the same in the pageant systems utilized for this study. However, women who compete in the type of pageant systems used in this study are eligible to win special crowns and titles such as “Ambassador” or “Life Time Queen”. These crowns and titles are given at the discretion of the pageant director and the pageant’s board for those participants who exemplify the true meaning and spirit of that pageant system. These titles and crowns allow the women to continue to represent their pageant system indefinitely. These women attend the pageant each year to help with such things as choreography, orientation, and fund raising. The women may continue to use their “Ambassador” or “Life Time Queen” to continue to participate in community events such as parades or presentation of her platform to community agencies. In very rare circumstances, the pageants used for this study may honor a participant in such a way that parallels the commemoration of athletes in the sports world. Pageant Systems used for this study may choose to “retire” the name of the participant’s title and category indefinitely. This type of queen is honored in the sense that she no longer has to compete and may represent her system indefinitely. It is important to note that many other pageants such as the ones chosen for this study exist. Due to the timeliness of this study the first two that agreed to participate were chosen.

Of the four directors contacted, the director of the United America Pageant System from the state of Texas gave her consent for the researcher to present information about the study to contestants in her pageant system where the contestants would be competing for a

state crown and title. The United America Pageant System also holds a National competition. The researcher attended the state competition as it was timelier for the research to be conducted. The researcher also received permission from the director of the American Elegance Pageant System in Chicago, Illinois. The American Elegance Pageant System holds both a state and national pageant. The researcher attended the National Competition where contestants were vying for a national title and crown. The researcher attended the national competition because it was timelier for the research to be conducted. Attending the National Competition also provided the researcher with a more diverse population of women because the women in attendance represented different regions and states of this country.

The researcher financed all aspects of this study on her own. This included airline tickets, car rentals, food and hotel rooms in Austin, Texas and Chicago, Illinois. The researcher traveled via airplane to Austin, Texas to interview pageant participants at the United America Pageant system first. The participants of the United America Pageant System were not staying at the hotel where the researcher had made her reservation for accommodations. It is common for the types of pageants used for this study to be held in the host hotel where the participants are asked to stay. On this particular occasion, The United America pageant participants all stayed at the same host hotel and the pageant venue was held at a separate location in Austin which frequently hosts weddings, plays and other large group celebrations.

Some of the United America Pageant participants had attended a meet and greet the night before the pageant was to be held and others simply arrived early at the pageant venue where the early morning orientation was held. The United America Pageant is held over the course of two days. The first day consists of a meet and greet for those pageant contestants who wish to attend. The researcher was not present at this event. On the second day of the pageant, the contestants must attend orientation, opening number rehearsal and a personal interview with the judges. During the orientation process, the participants wore banners emblazoned with the name of the Texas City which they represented. These banners were distributed during orientation by the Director, who was assisted by former Queens and Queens which were going to pass on their title to their successor. The Director reviewed the rules of the pageant and provided information about the sponsors and prize packages that would be awarded to the winners.

After the Director had completed the orientation process, she took it upon herself to introduce the researcher. The researcher then went up to the podium from where the Director had been conducting the orientation and provided information to the participants about this study. After describing the study, the researcher distributed the recruitment flyers to all pageant participants (Appendix A). Potential participants were informed that they would receive \$20.00 as compensation for their time, and that their participation was in the study was voluntary. Potential participants were informed that they could ask questions at any time during the interview and that they could withdraw at any time during the research process without penalty. The researcher made certain that the potential

participants understood that they could keep the \$20.00 even if they chose to end the interview early. The potential participants were told that if they wished to participate in the study that the researcher would be sitting at a large round table in one of the spare rooms not being utilized by the contestants for the entire day of the pageant. If they were interested in being a part of the study all they would need to do is come by the room.

The setting at the United America Pageant was very fast paced as participants zoomed in and out of rehearsals to dressing rooms. The potential participants were constantly participating in some event which contributed to the production of the pageant to be presented that same evening. The women who were competing for the state crown were very much involved in rehearsals and getting ready for the pageant to take time to be a part of the interview process. However, women who were former queens that were on hand to assist with the pageant or to relinquish their crown had time and made themselves available to be a part of the study.

The women involved at The United America pageant who chose to participate in this study were former queens in this pageant system. They came to the interview room at their convenience throughout the pre-pageant preparations. Before the commencement of any taping, the participants were shown the consent form for them to review and sign. The participants were informed that a space at the end of the form was created for them to provide their address if they would like to have a copy of the summary of the results mailed to them. The participants kept one copy and the researcher kept the other. The researcher answered any questions the participants had before signing the consent form (Appendix C).

The participants were again informed that they could terminate involvement in the interview at any time without penalty and of their ability to ask any other questions regarding their involvement in the interview at any time. The participants consented to call the researcher if they thought of something else they would like to add after being interviewed and also consented to having the researcher call them if the researcher needed clarification of something stated during the interview.

The participants and the researcher reviewed the demographic sheet (Appendix D) together. The researcher wrote down the participants' responses to fill in the information requested in the demographic sheet (Appendix D). The participants were told that the interview would begin when the tape recorder was turned on. Upon completion of gathering demographic information, the researcher began to ask the interview questions. The participants were interviewed only once with each interview lasting between 20 minutes and 45 minutes. Each participant was interviewed individually. All of the participants were given a counseling referral sheet (Appendix F) to access services if they felt a need to process any feelings after the interview was conducted.

The researcher traveled to Chicago, Illinois to seek out potential participants for this study at the American Elegance Pageant. The participants at this competition traveled from various states to vie for a national title and crown. The American Elegance Pageant is three days in duration. The American Elegance Pageant process begins with a meet and greet for the contestants on the first day. This is followed by a full day of orientation, and rehearsals. Interviews with the judges are held on the second day. The pageant culminates with the

presentation of the pageant production in front of a live audience and the crowning of the new queens on the third and final day. The researcher did not attend the meet and greet with the participants. However, the researcher stayed at the host hotel where all of the contestants, former queens, and director were staying as the hotel also served as the venue for the competition.

The researcher attended the early morning pageant orientation on the second day of the pageant. The director and the researcher met before the director was to provide the contestants with the itinerary of upcoming events. The director told the researcher that she could take the podium after the orientation process was complete. The researcher then went up to the podium from where the director had been conducting the orientation and provided information to the participants about this study just as she did at the United America Pageant.

After describing the study, the researcher distributed the recruitment flyers to all pageant participants (Appendix A?). Potential participants were informed that they would receive \$20.00 as compensation for their time, and that their participation was in the study was voluntary. Potential participants were informed that they could ask questions at any time during the interview and that they could withdraw at any time during the research process without penalty. The researcher made certain that the potential participants understood that they could keep the \$20.00 even if they chose to end the interview early.

The potential participants were told that if they wished to participate in the study, the researcher would be in a small meeting room used for business meetings on the first floor

of the hotel. This room was provided free of charge to guests of the hotel on a first come basis. The hotel was hosting a wedding simultaneously with the pageant. The business meeting room was therefore available as neither the pageant nor the wedding guests were in need of a business type meeting room. The potential participants were informed that the researcher would be available the entire time of the pageant and would also be available before and after rehearsals to accommodate those who would like to participate in the study.

Due to the variable schedule to be followed by the contestants of a national pageant, the researcher conducted interviews in the small meeting room, and also in the contestants' private hotel rooms. Conducting interviews in the contestants' rooms made things easier for the participants because they were able to rest and be comfortable after attending a long day at rehearsal. Some of the interviews were conducted in the morning, others in the afternoon and evening depending on when the participants had time to get away or be done with rehearsing for the pageant. Staying at the host hotel with the potential participants for a longer period of time than that spent at the United America Pageant made the potential participants more accessible and readily available to participate in the interview process.

Before the commencement of any taping, the participants were shown the consent form for them to review and sign. The participants were informed that a space at the end of the form was created for them to provide their address if they would like to have a copy of the summary of the results mailed to them. The participants kept one copy and the researcher kept the other. The researcher answered any questions the participants had before signing

the consent form (Appendix C). The participants were again informed that they could terminate involvement in the interview at any time without penalty and of their ability to ask any other questions regarding their involvement in the interview at any time. The participants consented to call the researcher if they thought of something else they would like to add after being interviewed and also consented to having the researcher call them if the researcher needed clarification of something stated during the interview.

The participants and the researcher reviewed the demographic sheet (Appendix D) together. The researcher wrote down the participants' responses to fill in the information requested in the demographic sheet (Appendix D). The participants were told that the interview would begin when the tape recorder was turned on. Upon completion of gathering demographic information, the researcher began to ask the interview questions. The participants were interviewed only once with each interview lasting between 20 minutes and 45 minutes. Each participant was interviewed individually. All of the participants were given a counseling referral sheet (Appendix F) to access services if they felt a need to process any feelings after the interview was conducted.

Interview Questions

The following questions were asked during interviews with the participants:

Tell me the story of how you got interested in competing in pageants.

What part has your family played in your competing in pageants?

What meaning does competing in pageantry have for you?

What reaction did your family members have to your winning or losing in pageantry?

Sampling of participants continued until the researcher recognized that the information had become redundant. The researcher recognized that data saturation had been attained when no new themes or recurring patterns had been derived from the information provided by the participants. This objective of attaining saturation was fulfilled by repeatedly comparing data already collected to new data (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2002). The researcher conducted In-depth interviews with fourteen women who have had past experience in pageantry to accomplish the goal of reaching saturation in this study.

Data Analysis

There are many methods of analyzing qualitative data, one of those methods is coding. According to Saldana, some individuals think that coding is bad while others swear by its effectiveness. The researcher's opinion is that Saldana's "The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers," empowers the reader to follow her own instinct by allowing the researcher to choose coding as a way of analyzing qualitative data if the researcher believes that this is the best way to analyze the information for her study. The researcher of this study followed Saldana's steps in coding the information provided by the participants via in-depth semi-structured interviews because the researcher believed that she possessed a majority of the seven personal attributes that are necessary to process coding and be a good qualitative researcher. According to Saldana, the seven attributes

are as follows: organization, perseverance, ability to deal with ambiguity, flexibility, creativity, rigorously ethical, and extensive vocabulary. (Saldana, 2013)

Saldana refers to organization as a set of organized skills (Saldana, 2013). The researcher interprets this as having a concrete plan to attain a certain goal. The researcher always remained cognizant that she would have to travel to locations outside of her hometown to conduct the interviews in person. The fact that the researcher had to fly to these locations was also key in her preparation because she had to take into account the confidentiality of the participants as well as measures to prevent the loss of anything necessary to conduct the interviews such as her laptop, tape recorder, flyers, twenty dollar bills, and data sheets.

In order to attain the goal of protecting participant confidentiality and loss of important research tools, the researcher placed all items necessary to successfully conduct interviews into a suitcase with rollers that complied with measurements necessary to carry on and be stored on board all aircrafts. This enabled the researcher to carry her research tools with her and be in possession of them at all times. Carrying research tools in a mobile suitcase also facilitated travelling from room to room to conduct interviews at the American Elegance Pageant.

When planning the actual process of conducting the interview and storing the results, the researcher decided to use numbers to identify each participant in order to provide confidentiality as well as create a system that would connect the participant to the information provided by them during the interview. The researcher would begin the

recording of each individual interview by stating her name followed by the number prescribed to the participant. The numbers assigned were in numerical order from 1-6 and 9-16.

The atmosphere at The American Elegance Pageant was also a bit hectic. Pageant Contestants would zoom in and out of their rooms to rehearsals and lunch and so on. For this reason, Numbers 7 and 8 were not utilized to identify participants because the researcher briefly lost count on which participant number was next in sequence during the interview process as things were so hectic. In order to avoid confusion, the researcher assigned a number, the number 9. The researcher knew she could not have possibly assigned the number 9 in the sequence because she knew she could not possibly have reached such a high number in the sequence she was following.

After each interview, the number given to each participant was placed on the right hand corner of both the consent form (Appendix C) and the demographic information sheet completed at the beginning of the interview process. The researcher also took a red, spiral notebook where she could hand write minor thoughts at the end of each interview with each participant. The researcher continued to identify each participant with the number assigned to them on the consent sheet (Appendix C) and demographic sheet (Appendix D). This number was also placed on the right hand side of the page followed by the participant's name. This was done to help the researcher remember the identity of the participant. The completed consent form (Appendix C) and demographic

sheets (Appendix D) were kept in this red spiral notebook to keep the paperwork together and have better organization.

A second pink and red spiral notebook was also utilized to write more extensive thoughts and feelings the researcher was processing after each interview. The researcher wanted to remain cognizant of potential biases felt before, during and after the interviews because of the researcher's past experiences in pageantry. The researcher had competed in pageant systems where two of the participants were also competitors. The researcher competed against one of the contestants and lost, the other participant was a contestant in a different age category than the researcher. This notebook also reflected such things as how the Researcher felt about the environment she was experiencing before, during and after the interview.

After attending each pageant, the researcher transcribed the information provided during the interviews on her own. The researcher would listen to the words played by the tape recorder and would type them out verbatim. This took a great deal of patience and perseverance as the researcher would have to play, rewind and replay every sentence to make sure she was recording exactly what the participants had communicated during their interviews. This proved difficult at times as some of the Eastern accents of some of the participants proved difficult for the researcher, a native Texan, to understand.

The researcher decided to utilize a dictation device "Dragon Naturally Speaking" in an attempt to facilitate the transcribing process. Dragon Naturally Speaking is a program and device which allows the researcher to listen to the interview and speak the words into

a headphone with a mouthpiece which turns the spoken words into printed text on to the computer page. The researcher found this to be even more tedious as the machine often interpreted the spoken words into gibberish and misspelled words. The researcher used the Dragon dictation device to transcribe three of the 14 interviews conducted. The researcher found the original plan of listening to the words produced by the recorder and going back and forth to make sure that she had recorded every word provided by the participants as accurately as possible a less tedious process.

The researcher transcribed the interviews in the privacy of her home. The researcher did not transcribe any of the information provided in any other place but her own home. The reason for this was to respect the confidentiality of the participants and to facilitate matters for the researcher. By transcribing all of the information at her home, the researcher was able to dress comfortably, rest, eat and take breaks as needed in such a manner that would not be possible if she had transcribed the information in a public place. Taking proper care of self while coding data is a concept that Saldana suggests in his book. The researcher is in accord with this suggestion and has followed this suggestion while coding data and in her everyday life. (Saldana, 2013)

After each interview, the researcher would go back to the pink and red notebook to write down summarized thoughts that had popped out to the researcher while she was transcribing the participants' words to the computer. The researcher used such words as "Self-Confidence," "Fun," "Enjoy the Friendships Built," and "Promoting Her Ideas," to describe the thoughts that came to mind. The researcher made hard copies of the

transcribed interviews. She went through the interviews and highlighted recurring words and phrases which were thought to be of importance for future reference in this study. The researcher followed Saldana's suggestion to begin to coding and formatting information as soon as it is received instead of waiting until the very end. The thoughts that came to mind were not something concrete at this point, but the researcher felt that the thoughts had relevance, Saldana calls this process "Preliminary Jottings" (Saldana, 2013).

The researcher created a list of all of the highlighted recurring words and phrases on her computer. The researcher observed that these recurring words and phrases created a repetitive pattern. An example of this was the word or phrase which alluded to the participants' reasons for participating in pageantry was to have "fun." Although the word "fun" literally appeared in the transcribed data, phrases which insinuated "fun" were coded as such. According to Saldana, sometimes data is coded under the same word not because the same word literally identifies the thought but because there is a commonality between the thoughts and the word used to identify them (Saldana, 2013).

To keep the information organized, the researcher assigned each recurring word or phrase a letter in the alphabet. In the end she had 62 thoughts, which were expressed on the list as (A)-(JJJ). The researcher felt overwhelmed when faced with finding a way to organize the 62 codes and the many comments made by the participants during their interviews. The researcher decided to create and utilize a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to organize the abundance of data collected. This method was chosen because the Microsoft

Excel spreadsheet cells can hold thousands of entries and their accompanying codes (Saldana, 2013).

The spreadsheet was set up in a way to list each participant and the participant's comments as they related to the 62 codes. The names of the participants were not utilized to identify them on the spreadsheet, instead, the researcher reverted to the numbers she assigned each participant and used this as their identifier. The number of each participant was placed at the top of each column. Due to the large number of participants and data gathered, the spreadsheet was split in two. The first sheet was numbered 1-9 and the second page was numbered 10-16. Each row was identified by one of the 62 coded thoughts that stood out to the researcher during the transcribing process. Among these where: "Fun," "Uses Pageantry to Promote Self-Opens Opportunities/Platform/A Voice," and "Time for Self."

After the rows and columns were created, the researcher went through all of the 14 transcribed interviews and placed comments of each participant in the rows under the codes which best described their comments. When all of this was done, the ability to look at all of the data simultaneously proved to be a difficult task due to the large number of codes, 62 in all, with all of the comments. For this reason, it was time for the researcher to transition from First Cycle coding to Second Cycle coding as suggested by Saldana. The goal of Second Cycle coding is not to get to another level in the process of coding data. Second Cycle coding is a review of what has already been coded and restructuring

and reorganizing data that has already been coded with the intent of forming a new strategy to proceed with greater focus on the direction of the study (Saldana, 2013).

The researcher began the Second Cycle of coding with the intent of creating new categories by grouping similarly coded data that had been sorted through and relabeled according to their commonalities. The researcher took to paper and pen again and wrote out all 62 codes to have them at eye's view to compare and contrast. Thinking of new words to use as codes and recoding for a second time was a perplexing task. However, this was to be expected as Saldana pointed out that the ability to deal with ambiguity and exercising flexibility and creativity are necessary attributes for coding (Saldana, 2013).

The researcher sought her advisor's feedback to rename the codes. The researcher also wanted to ensure that good ethical practices were followed when dealing with ambiguity, flexibility and creativity, which is Saldana's final attribute to good coding (Saldana, 2013). After reviewing the new ideas, 6 new codes were produced. These codes were: Different from Other Pageants, Family Support, Bonding, Meet People, Help Community, and Promote Self.

It appeared that during the First Coding, some of the data was "split." (Saldana, 2013) For example, "Mother and Daughter Competing Together," as a reason for competing in pageantry fell under both codes of "Family Support" and "Bonding." At this phase it was necessary for the researcher to sort through the codes once again and decide which were more crucial and which are to be deemed outliers (Saldana, 2013).

According to Saldana, this method of coding is called Axial Coding. By following this method of coding, the researcher was able to group the codes that had similar characteristics together to create four new conceptual categories. These categories are as follows: Bonding, Support outside the Family System, and Doing Something for Self

Research Design

A phenomenological research paradigm guided this study's underlying design and implementation. A phenomenological tradition assumes that individuals assign different meanings to a phenomenon, which invites participants to describe their own experiences in a unique way. Research in this tradition focuses on gaining understanding through recognizing both the distinct and the shared essences and experiences of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. The main task is not to determine the value of the knowledge already gained, but to challenge the current point of view. Phenomenology challenges the way phenomena are understood and the things already known (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008).

Through analysis of the data to be collected from in-depth interviews with women who have competed in pageantry during their lifetime, the researcher hoped to lend a better understanding for family therapists, the influence the family has played in this subsystem. Family therapists may benefit from the information regarding the influence of the family, as well as other information gathered. This is because very little is known

about the pageant system other than from a historical, feminist, and ethnic/cultural perspective as evidenced by the literature review.

Instruments utilized in this study will be the interview questions and the researcher. Two research questions have been developed to guide the purpose of this study. The interview questions have been designed to answer the research question regarding women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions will be explored:

What meaning does competing in beauty pageants have for women?

What part do women believe their families have played in their competing in beauty pageants?

Interview Questions

The following questions will be posed during interviews with the participants:

Tell me the story of how you got interested in competing in pageants.

What part has your family played in your competing in pageants?

What meaning does competing in pageantry have for you?

What reaction did your family members have to your winning or losing in pageantry?

Sampling Procedures

The participants in this study consisted of women who have had previous pageant experience. These participants were women who had competed in the Miss American Elegance Pageant System and the Miss United America Pageant System. The sample for this study will include female pageant participants between 21 and 70 years of age. Pageant participants came from different religious, racial, and economic backgrounds. Participants were from the states of Texas, California, Florida, Georgia, and Illinois. They were selected by contacting pageant directors who allowed the researcher access to their pageant's participants to inform them about the study during the pageant's orientation meeting attended by all pageant participants.

Where the goal of quantitative researchers is to emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, qualitative research seeks to find depth and detail from purposely selected participants. Richness of data through detailed descriptions is what is important. It is not about the amount of data (Carey, 1995). Sampling of participants continued until the researcher has recognized that the information had become redundant. This point of redundancy is given the term data saturation. The researcher knew that data saturation had been attained when no new themes or recurring patterns had been derived from the information provided by the participants. This objective of attaining saturation was fulfilled by repeatedly comparing data already collected with new data that was collected (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2002). In

depth interviews with 14 women who have had past experience in pageantry helped accomplish the goal of reaching saturation in this study.

The Researcher as Person

The subjective nature of phenomenology asserts the need for researchers to recognize their values and potential biases regarding the subject matter (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). I have been involved in the world of pageantry since my early childhood. In order to remain true to the foundations of the phenomenological method of conducting research, it is necessary for me to describe my experiences in the pageant system in some detail and how my family of origin has influenced me to become a part of it. In essence, I am attempting to bracket, or be aware of, previous experiences when listening to the participants' stories conveyed during the interview process. This will be of great importance as the ability to bracket enables the researcher to set aside these preconceptions and intuit from the data (Jasper, 1994).

I became involved in the beauty pageant world at a very young age. I reminisce with great emotion and esteem when remembering the evenings that my Grandma Amada and I would watch the Miss America and Miss USA pageant. My grandmother would make an event out of watching the pageant. She would pop some corn and would bring out an old army blanket that my father had given her. The corn was for eating and the blanket was for wearing as a cape that she would simultaneously drape over my shoulders as Miss America was being crowned on stage. As Miss America would give her first walk and Burt Parks would sing in the background, I too would walk up and down in front of

our box television set. Miss America would wave and I too would wave and move my head side to side as if I had an audience of my own. My audience consisted of a party of one, my Grandma Amada. She would tell me to smile big and would clap her hands loudly as she would say “Vas Hacer Miss America!” Translated to English this meant, “You are going to be Miss America!”

I was a chubby, nerdy kid who was not able to enroll in ballet class at the local YWCA because the teacher said I was too fat and would probably end up breaking my toes. This sense of not belonging made me feel insignificant, and yet a small battle was able to arise within me because my grandmother filled my mind with many positive affirmations. It was this confidence which led me to accomplish my goals of attaining degrees in various areas of study as well as competing in and winning various pageant titles.

Every Thanksgiving, my grandma Amada and I would attend the Sun Carnival parade. The parade is basically the same year after year, however, one year resonates in my mind because of the lesson my grandmother taught me that day. It is a lesson that remains with me until the present day. I remember one of the Sun Carnival princesses vying for the coveted Sun Carnival Queen title going by in her car, waving and smiling at us all. My grandma had such a fun and good heart about her. She waved back, clapping her hands yelling, “Que Bonita Muchacha” (What a beautiful girl). I remember rolling my eyes and saying, “Vieja Chafa” (Cheap Tramp).

My inappropriate comment regarding the princess did not settle well with my grandmother. Instead of reprimanding me, she went where not many go and told me the truth about my statement. She told me not to be mean and jealous because the princess had earned her way up there. She told me not to be this way because the day would come when I too would be driven in a car down Montana Street and I would not want a bunch of people passing judgment on my character without knowing me. My grandmother was correct about my jealous feelings and about how others may view beauty queens. I have heard negative comments and jokes made about beauty queens throughout my lifetime. These comments have been made within ear shot about me or about pageant participants that were around me. These comments were made by people who had no idea about my everyday life and I can only assume they did not know anything about the other pageant participants either.

I have been asked why I have chosen to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. I believe this population deserves to have a voice to be understood from their perspective. When we as a society think of beauty pageant contestants, negative connotations may come to mind. Society may base their perceptions of beauty pageant contestants on the information that is filtered through the lenses of historical, feminist, and political ideologies.

I have written the above about myself, to provide content for this phenomenological study. I will do my best to bracket my biases when deciphering information communicated to me throughout this study. My objective for this study is not to show

that pageants are good or bad, but to simply lend an understanding of this group of people from their perspective as to why they participate in pageantry and how their families have influenced them.

Summary

The purpose of this study will be to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. The stories of 14 women between the ages of 21 and 70 with past experience in beauty pageants will voluntarily take part of in-depth semi-structured interviews which will be recorded and transcribed to look for themes that may arise in their experiences. The themes will then become part of a narrative and be made available to the public in various literary forms. The information will also be made available to the participants if they desire.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. In the spirit of phenomenological research, I conducted 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 women who had previous pageant experience or were in the current position of vying for a state or national title in to allow the participant to freely share and voice their life experiences in pageantry. I have had a lifetime of pageant experience in the capacity of being a former title holder as well as being a judge at various competitions. For this reason, it was important to me to let the client feel as if they could simply let loose and voice their true feelings when answering the questions posed to them. I wanted to do my best to stay true to the essence phenomenological research by assisting the participants in expressing their experiences and what they perceive to be their inner truth about the phenomenon (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008).

The 14 women interviewed in this study ranged from 24 to 65 years old. The totality of the participants were comprised of a combination of women who were in attendance at the United America Pageant System in Austin, Texas and The American Elegance Pageant held in Chicago, Illinois. The 3 participants who were interviewed at The United America Pageant were in attendance to crown their respective successors and give up their Texas titles, they were not competing for a title at the time of the interview.

Of the 3 participants, two were Caucasian and one was African-American. All three participants were from the state of Texas.

The remaining 11 participants were women who were competing for a National title at the American Elegance Pageant. These participants were experiencing the actual process of competing for a National crown at the time the interviews were conducted. I wanted to gain access to as many participants representing as many different states as possible to as to hear the voices and experiences from as many perspectives as possible. By attending a national competition, I was able to hear stories from women representing Georgia, Illinois, West Virginia, and Michigan to add to the stories gathered from the Texas participants. Of the 11 participants interviewed at the national competition in Chicago, 5 were Caucasian and 6 were African American.

I began each interview by asking each participant their information to fill out the demographic sheet (Appendix D). I told them about their right of confidentiality, the cash remuneration they would receive and that they could stop the interview at any time and still keep the \$20.00. To accomplish the purpose of exploring women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played, the following research questions were explored:

What meaning does competing in beauty pageants have for women?

What part do women believe their families have played in their competing in beauty pageants?

In order to answer the research questions, I asked the participants the following questions during the interview process:

Tell me the story of how you got interested in competing in pageants.

What part has your family played in your competing in pageants?

What meaning does competing in pageantry have for you?

What reaction did your family members have to your winning or losing in pageantry?

The responses given by the participants were all recorded and transcribed. When the information became saturated, it was coded and the following categories were synthesized into the following themes: Bonding with Children, Bonding with Spouse, Bonding with Extended Family, Formation of Friendships, Support from Outside the Family System, Thriving, Lack of Support from Family System, and Lack of Support from Spouse

Bonding

In exploring women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played, "bonding" emerged as a theme found in the answers given during the interview process. Bonding seemed to take place between the participants and various individuals. These individuals are best described as the participant's children, spouses, and extended family members. The type of bonding experienced between the women who participate in pageantry and their children are best described as: Teaching

copied skills, Special Parent-Child Time, Child Encouraging Parent, and Parent Encouraging Adult Child.

Bonding with spouses and extended family members occurred when these individuals helped the participant prepare and in some instances attend the pageant itself. Bonding with spouses also occurred while discussing a financial plan to facilitate the participant's desire to compete.

Bonding with Children: Coping Skills

Women who participate in pageantry bond with their children when they teach them how to cope with winning, and losing in life. During the interview process, participant Number 1 and Number 2 shared their thoughts and feelings about how they addressed their winning or losing a while competing in a pageant with their children. Participant Number 1 shared her experience of teaching her two daughters how to cope with losing and winning. Participant Number 1 has a son who has won several pageants in the past and has yet to experience a loss.

They've learned too that, uh, there has to be a winner. One person walks away with that crown, and so they've really learned how to treat that person you know, with respect and still and the same afterwards after they've lost.

Participant Number 2 used her experience in pageantry as a tool to teach her daughters how to cope with their feelings of winning or losing when interacting with other individuals who may have won or lost while competing against them.

But it's a, it's a learning opportunity, it's a time for me to teach them because like ok, look, you win this but you still have to, you still, you cannot gloat, you cannot turn around to your sister queens or your competitors and rub it into their face.

Bonding with Children: Special Parent-Child Time

Women who participate in pageantry bond with their children when they compete in the same pageant system together. During the interview process, participants Number 3, Number 11, and Number 13 all shared that pageantry was utilized as a Segway in assisting them in bonding with their children through the creation of a special time that was set aside only for them. As a cancer survivor, competing in the same pageant together afforded participant Number 11 a very special opportunity.

And she said, no, I found a pageant with age divisions that we both can compete together. Wouldn't it be cool if we did that? And I'm like, uh, no. Are you kidding me? Someone judging me? That's not cool. And then when I thought about it, the difficulty of a teenage daughter wanting to spend three days doing something with her not cool mother, I better do this. So, that was my inspiration.

It was the time to get to spend with my daughter.

Participants Number 3 and Number 13 were also asked by their daughters to compete in a pageant with them and shared their experience during the interview process. Participant Number 3 and 13 shared similar parent-child bonding experiences with their children as they traveled with them to compete together at various pageant destinations. Participant

Number 3 stated the following: “Mom, you should come and go with me and you could be New Mexico as an at large, and we’ll just have a fun mother-daughter weekend.”

Participant Number 13 shared the following during her interview:

They were proud of mom and enjoyed going to appearances and they’ve traveled probably 95% of appearances with me including California and other places out of state, Florida. Oh, it was awesome. There was no boys. We had a hotel room full of girls, and traveled together. It allowed her as an older teen to see young women and older women of all shapes and sizes and backgrounds just having fun together, being together, having fun, and having an identity outside of a man.

Bonding with Children: Child Encouraging Parent

The experience of bonding through parental support was expressed in two different forms during the interview process. The first can be described as Women who participate in pageantry bond with their children when their children support them in their choice to become a pageant participant. Participant Number 11 shared that had it not been for her daughter believing in her, she never would have even attempted to participate in a pageant: “She wanted me to do it and in my mind there is a belief that she saw something in me that I didn’t.”

Participant Number 1 and Participant Number 9 also shared their experiences of feeling support from their children to compete in pageants. Participant Number 1 shared

the following about how her children express support of her decision to compete in pageants:

They are a huge role, they still pick out dresses, even if I'm not competing, they're still picking out dresses and looking for earrings and shoes and you know my husband still orders flyers and takes part in all of it.

Participant Number 1 shared how her son feels about her competing in pageants: Well, my son, he's always telling me you know, what a great job I've done, or, just very encouraging.

Bonding with Children: Parent Encouraging Adult Child

The second way women experienced bonding through parental support was when their parents supported their decision to participate in pageantry at a non-traditional age.

Participant Number 12 shared her feelings of love, support, and stories of adventure that she shared with her parents.

My parents were very supportive of me competing. They've always been supportive of activities that I've been in but actually when I first started competing, they would drive down to where I was competing at the pageant at times that would be a seven-hour drive for them.

Bonding With Spouse: Emotional and Financial Support

During the interview process, pageant participants Number 2, Number 1 and Number 15 all shared that they had bonded with their spouses while competing in pageants.

Bonding came as a result of the participants' spouses helping in the preparation and

attending the pageant. Bonding also occurred during the time the participant and their spouse spent to make a financial plan in order to facilitate the participant's desire to compete. Participant Number 1 had her husband present at the pageant when she was competing. However, Participant Number 2 and Number 15's spouses were not present during the time the women were competing.

Participant Number 2's spouse is in the military. This is an impediment to his being able to be physically present at her competitions. Pageantry has provided Participant Number 2 and her husband the opportunity to bond across the miles as he supports her endeavors to compete both emotionally and economically.

He's very supportive of any dress I need, even with, even this weekend he's at home. He's a PA student right now through the army and so he's at home with our three girls watching them so I can go have this weekend and represent the pageant title.

Yes, anything whether financially, even if we don't have the money he's like, "let's sit down and figure it out, we can do a payment plan" and if we can get a used gown or this, even a pageant trainer he's always, always made it a point for me to follow my dreams because I follow him all around the world.

Bonding with Extended Family

During the interview process, Participants Number 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 14, and 16 all shared that competing in pageantry has afforded them with the opportunity to bond with extended family members. These extended family members were identified by the

participants as: aunts, uncles, grandfather, grandmother, siblings and step-mothers. Of all the Participants, Participant Number 6 formed a special bond with her grandfather due to his support of her competing in pageantry. I find this bond to be extraordinary because it was grandfather, not mother or grandmother, who wanted and supported Participant Number 6's desire to compete in pageantry: "Um, actually it brought me closer to my grandfather. I really didn't, I was a girl and grandpa preferred my brothers, it was Grandpa's and my time. So, I got a little closer to my grandfather."

Participants Number 14 and Number 16 both bonded and felt supported by their step-mothers when preparing to compete in for a pageant title. Participant Number 14 found this important as her biological mother, although supportive, had issues with her competing in pageantry: Um, so, my step side of my family, which my stepmom pretty much raised me, um, they're very supportive, uh, now my biological mother, she is very supportive as well, but she has issues with it.

Participant Number 16 found support and was able to bond with her step-mother during a difficult time in her life. Pageantry has provided a way for Participant Number 16 and her step-mother to bond in a special way which is still evident in their present day relationship.

Um, the one person that I would say was very supportive, ironically, was my then soon to be step-mother who was quite supportive. I remember when she went with me pageant clothes shopping and even made suggestions on outfits that she thought would look good on me and that was very surprising because my parents

were divorced at that point. I will, she is still my step-mother and I will never forget what she did to me and we are very close to this day.

Formation of Friendships: Support from Within the Pageant System

During the interviews, the women spoke with great vigor of the friendships they formed during the time they were involved with the competition. Participants 1,3,4,6,9,10,12,15, and 16 all commented on how the formation of friendships at the pageants they had participated in led to them feeling supported not only in the context of being a pageant participant but also in their everyday life.

Participant Number 10 shared her story of how the participants of a pageant helped her cope through a very difficult time in her life. She shared that her mother was not supportive of her participating in pageants because her mother believed pageantry was not a good thing to spend money on. While Participant Number 10 was preparing to participate in a pageant, a close family member was murdered. She had only attended the orientation offered by the pageant and had met the women she would compete against only once. However, these women, whom she met only once, provided the support that her own family of origin was not able to give.

After the funeral, all the family got to go home together but had to go back to college by myself. I was sitting at home in my room and I checked the mail and when I got the mail I had a package from the Pageant and all the girls had, uh, they wrote me cards and it had cookies and it was just, a little support and just, uh, a nice message from them, and

to me, it just really made me feel great. So, to me, I think that I have that second family in pageantry.

Participant Number 10 shared her feelings further of how the bonding experience at this time in her life will continue to have a positive influence throughout her life.

So, I just feel that they understand me as a person, they understand my goals and it's just an amazing thing to come from a city which is low income, very urban, to be surrounded with so many women who want to do these great things in the world, and they're not getting paid for it or getting any recognition. So, I'm sure that it's something that is going to continue to be a part of my life.

Participant Number 10 experienced support from pageant participants with whom she had only a brief encounter. Participants Number 9 and 16 have experienced continued support from the pageant director of the system in which they competed in previous years and now continue to have a relationship with the director and the pageant by assisting in the pageant's production.

Because I used to be very depressed, very depressed all the time, but now I have this sense of responsibility and you know the sisterhood....Yes, most definitely, it, it extends beyond competition. Her and her mom are right there all the time doing what needs to be done for the young ladies that participate in the pageant.

Support from Outside the Family System

All three Participants share two common traits. All three Participants are of African-American heritage and all three chose "other" when asked of their religious preference.

Participant Number 9 shared how her church pastor produces a pageant at his church for members of his parish and community to take part in. She shared her perspective of how she, as an African American women, experiences pageantry through her own cultural and spiritual lens while receiving support from that same cultural and spiritual entity.

A pastor friend of mine, often throws pageants at church, so the young ladies in the community could get a better feel of pageantry. Something other than what we see on television, you know the Miss America pageant and things of that nature because African American girls, we very seldomly see other African-Americans in the light of being a Queen. So, he was throwing a pageant at his church, he asked me to come by and you know take a look and see if it was something that I would be interested in. I told him that I would. So, when the next year came around, he asked me if I would do it he would sponsor me, give me, you know the money, the resources that are needed to participate, and I did it.

While Participant Number 9 experienced both emotional and tangible support from her church pastor, Participant's 2 and 10 experienced emotional and tangible support from the wives of their church pastors.

I borrowed a gown from the pastor's wife. I got a swim suit from the girl in the dorm room three doors down....My gown was donated from a lady at my church. It was a size 16 and at the time I was about a size 2-4 maybe. So, I just had to use some safety pins and get it pinned into me as much as I could but I wanted to do it anyway.

Thriving

The theme of “Thriving” is much like the theme of “Bonding” in the sense that it is a theme found in all of the participant’s interviews. Participant Number 1 through Participant Number 16 all commented on how they chose to participate in the type of pageants used in this study as a way to do something for themselves. Participants had the following to say about competing in these types of pageants that are not part of the mainstream:

I just really encourage people to take the time out to understand the differences and the different systems that we have. That each system has a different purpose and its winners.” (Participant Number 10).

Um, like, just the girls here, you have a large variety of different races, different, um sizes, definitely different personalities, for sure. So, I think that this pageant is more about making sure that everybody is comfortable in themselves” (Participant Number 10)

What I thought was the greatest thing is I wouldn’t have to be exposed in a swim suit. I would have to be exposed in other ways through interview, personal expression which is speeches.” (Participant Number 11)

Towards the end I actually found pageants that had a range of ages and sizes which I found that to be even more fun.” (Participant Number 13)

The theme of “Thriving” is comprised of different ways in which the women who competed in pageantry fulfilled different aspects of their lives. These different aspects

can best be defined as: Raising Confidence and Self-Esteem, Having Fun, A Way to Give Back to The Community, A Voice, Improving Interview and Communication Skills, Creating Opportunities in Academia and the Business World, Cultural Competency, and Sport.

Thriving: Raising Confidence and Self Esteem

Of the Participants interviewed, Participants Number 1, Number 5, Number 11 and Number 16 all made comments during their interview that participating in pageantry was a way for them to raise their self-esteem and build on their confidence levels. Participant Number 11 shared how participating in pageants has helped her raise her self-esteem and make her feel better about herself, for herself, and her children: “So, I look at pageants as I got the new me, the stronger me, the more confident me. So, pageants opened up a totally different side of me I probably never would’ve went to.”

Participant Number 16 has been participating in pageants since the 1980’s. She shared her evolution of reasons for participating in pageantry and stated that the beginning of her pageant experience was laden with confusion about her identity and the effects it posed on her self-esteem. It is important to note that Participant Number 16 has won a National Title as a plus size contestant and has emceed and judged various pageants.

Um, I had struggled with self-esteem issues growing up, um, I always was told that I was smart. I was always told that I could be anything I wanted to be, except what exemplifies a woman, a feminine side of a woman, the beauty part, taking care of one’s self and exuding femininity in that sense. Um, that was

deemphasized in my childhood growing up. Uh, and I felt like that was a part of me that was missing So, I was discouraged into competing in pageantry until I got of age that I was able to and I started my first pageant age nineteen. Um, I will never forget when I first competed I felt so beautiful. I thought I was on top of the world even though it was my first pageant. I did not win, I did not even place, but I did get an award for the best interview. That's all I needed to hear, is that somebody would give me a chance, and now that was back in 1985.

Thriving: Having Fun

It may seem rather simplistic, but some of the women who participate in pageantry do so because it is something fun to do. Participant Number 2, Participant Number 4, Participant Number 5 and Participant Number 10 stated during their interview that they participated in pageantry because it was something fun to do. Participant Number 2 is married to a man who is in the military. She is a full-time mother and is taking college courses via the Internet. When interviewing her, it appeared that she has a pretty full schedule caring for her children, home and school. It appears that participating in pageantry provides her with some much desired respite from daily life responsibilities.

But I understand that only one person can be truly happy at the end of the pageant and so I look at it as having a good weekend, meeting nice women, having a weekend away from the housecleaning and possibly the homework, sometimes, and um, I get all this new experience meeting new people, and then the icing on the cake is a crown.

While some participants may find pageantry a fun escape from everyday life in meeting new people, and time away from daily chores, others find fun in being able to express their talents and forms of art. Participants Number 4, Number 6 and Number 12 stated during the interview process that pageantry provides for them a captive audience for which they can express their talents freely. Participant Number 6 has fun at pageants because she is a dancer and when she competes in a pageant she is able to participate in the talent category by expressing her dance: "I just like performing. I'm a dancer, so I perform in front of people, and just being on stage again is just is just something that I like doing."

Participant Number 4 shared during her interview that competing in pageantry allowed her to have fun expressing her talent while reaping the much needed benefit of collecting prize money to apply to her studies.

So, I competed in a pageant with the Miss America system and I was able to actually get up scholarship money in order to go to school, and by the third pageant that I competed in, I had enough scholarship money to last me to actually graduate. Um, because I won talent most of the time, and talent was like a thousand to two thousand dollars in scholarship money, which was the biggest issue that I had, was money as far as going to school, so that's how I got interested in pageants.

It is important to note, that where some participants may compete in pageants for the mere sake of fun, others, like Participant Number 4 may participate to have fun but also

take winning and possessing a crown as something very serious. Participant Number 4 shared her feelings that possessing a crown is like having the responsibilities equal to those found in having a job.

I hope that people understand that pageants isn't something, it's a job. When you take on a crown, it's a job. It's not, it's something you signed up for and it was voluntary, but it's a job and it's what you make of it. Whether it's your platform or whether it's just something about other family issues that you want to speak on, but it is a voice, and it is a job and its twenty-four seven. All the time, all the time.

Thriving: A Way to Give Back To the Community

Participants Number 2 and Number 10 shared how taking part in pageantry creates a way for them to give back to their community. Participant Number 2 is a military wife who gave up her opportunity to complete her education as she would have liked in order to travel with her husband and children to the various places he has been stationed around the world. It appears that having a crown is a way for her to draw attention to causes that need to be brought to the forefront in her community while also giving her something to do for herself: "I didn't get to pursue my education like I would have liked and so this, this is a way for me to give back to my community and fulfill a long lifelong dream and have fun."

Participant Number 2 went on to give further example of how as a woman of color she is giving back to her community in her way by using herself as an example of a person who has overcome many of the same obstacles facing her younger counterparts in her

community: “Yes, I came from a rotten neighborhood but look, I wasn’t a statistic. You could do this too.”

Unlike Participant Number 2, who uses winning or having a crown to give back to her community, Participant Number 10 chooses to take the values learned and shared by some pageant participants regarding community service to serve, regardless of possessing a title and crown or not.

I make this joke all the time that I am Miss America without the crown. Like I feel, regardless if I win or didn’t, I’m still going to pursue my platform and I’m still going to be out in my community working and I think that everybody in pageantry has that attitude.

Thriving: A Voice

During interview sessions, Participant Number 3 and Participant Number 10 both shared that pageantry has afforded them a voice that without the pageantry experience, they may not have known they had. Participant Number 3 is a breast cancer survivor. She shared how being a title holder has allowed her to speak out and support those who were once in her shoes as well as increase awareness of breast cancer.

It’s helped me to now be able to help other women who are going to breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, to help them out and I’m doing a clinical directive in California for Lymphedema and I’ll be able to help spread that message, that there is a chance, you can get rid of this awful thing that is a part of breast cancer.

Participant Number 10 shared that she has evolved as a person through her pageant experience. She sees herself as evolving from a person who competed in pageantry to understand and define herself as woman, to what is now a person who now knows who she is and wants to make her opinions and voice heard: It's not so much about me finding my place because as somebody who is up there in age, I believe I found my place. It's just now pageantry is a tool as what can I do to affect change and be a microphone instead of just a voice in in this world.

Participant Number 10 also makes reference to the changes she has seen in pageantry throughout her years of involvement. One of the greatest changes she spoke of is how in her opinion, pageant contestants are now more vocal. Participant Number 10 spoke of how pageant participants in the past were expected to follow a certain pattern of thinking and fit into the same mold. She alluded to the past in pageantry as one that did not truly value the participant's voice and that the pageants that are available to all women regardless of their color of skin or size in current day are more interested in the participant as a whole person and seek out the participants' voices and opinions.

That's why I'm very passionate about pageant ladies no matter where they fall on any type of spectrum or their belief systems, um, to use their voice and be very, um, opinionated, pageantry in the past, a lot of the pageant officials did not want their title holders to be what some would consider confrontational or controversial, very neutral in their answers to everything and I'm finding that evolvement is change, that is evolving, that pageant queens are more animated,

very opinionated about the issues and the causes that is near and dear to their hearts.

Thriving: Improving Interview and Communication Skills

Some of the women who were interviewed stated that honing in on their communication skills was part of their preparation for the interview segment of the competition. By practicing and learning new communication skills taught by pageant directors, coaches and their parents, communication skills for these participants improved. Participants Number 4, Number 5 and Number 12 made reference to how increasing their communication skills for their interviews with the judges at the pageant also served them well when they went out into the real world during job interviews. Participant Number 5 shared how her mother's quizzing her on pageant type questions to help keep her on her toes while preparing for her pageant interview has spilled over into her ability to present herself in a confident manner during job interviews. Participant Number 10 went a step further in explaining how communicating that she should be the one the judges should hire for the job of being the winning title holder is similar to using good communication skills to convince an employer to choose her over all others competing for the same position being offered by that job place.

Uh, but over the course of time, my mom would sit down, she would make me practice. We could be doing anything, she would randomly ask me a question, and so that right there got me prepared to be on my feet. I would not be able to get the jobs that I was able to get and I've had people to commend me on how well that I

...speak when it comes time to....This is why you should choose me to be your title holder and so being able to build that confidence in pageantry interview...it comes right out in a job interview at the same time.

Participant Number 12 also had a similar opinion about how preparing for pageant interviews has also helped her prepare for job interviews in real life.

It helped me with my confidence level because a lot of times you'd have to study for, in the sense for pageants, and as far as being prepared for them and you would have to be able to sell yourself or like you're interviewing for a job when you go before the judges....The interview, I started to enjoy it much more, later, because I started seeing how in other areas of my life the interview portion was helping me and actually helping me for a public speaking class.

Thriving: Creating Opportunities in Academia

Of the women interviewed, Participants Number 4, and Number 12 commented on how participating in pageantry has opened doors of opportunity for them to pursue their academic careers. Participant Number 4 shared that prize money won in the talent segment of the pageant was a fun way to achieve her goal of pursuing her education. For this reason Participant Number 4's comments on how winning the talent portion of the pageant competition was something fun for her to do is also found under the reason that women compete in pageantry for fun segment of this paper. The opportunity to further their education by using money won in pageant competitions was a trait shared between Participants Number 4 and Number 12.

During her interview, Participant Number 12, who is of African-American descent, shared how she competed in a pageant which celebrated the cultural heritage of people of Italian descent. Despite the fact that she is not of Italian heritage, she decided to compete in this pageant because the prize was a big scholarship. The pageant did not require that the contestants be of Italian descent as it promoted itself as a scholarship pageant. Participant Number 12 used her winnings to pursue her academic goals: “It was a huge scholarship and I paid my tuition off for that semester.”

Participant Number 4 shared how winning the talent competition in pageantry decreased the stressors of having to follow a difficult pace in her day to day life by having to work only one job in order to pay for school: “Most of the money that was won was geared towards education and I always had a little extra that was left over aside that I put in my pocket as well, so I had money on the side for myself as well.”

Thriving: Business World

Participant Number 4 shared how participating in pageantry has created opportunities for her in the business world. She shared how pageantry has affected her life by creating the opportunity to thrive in her full-time job as well as in her private business. Participant Number 4 is a supervisor for the TSA in her state. While competing in pageantry she developed a presentation about customer service to present to the judges as her platform. She continued to speak about this platform and in time presented it to her workplace. This platform is now a part of the customer service program implemented by the TSA and

supported by the Federal Government: “So for me, I was able to use something that I felt so passionately about in my workplace whereas before it was just a platform.”

Participant Number 4 went on to say that pageantry has created the opportunity to start her own business in the pageant world: “So pageants mean a great deal to me, believe it or not, it also was my motivation factor in order to creating my business, where I’m actually starting to direct as opposed to being on the stage now I’m directing behind the scenes.”

Participant Numbers 9 and 10 stated during their interviews that competing in pageants created opportunities to work in the entertainment business and be considered a celebrity as well as meeting and participating in events with local celebrities. Participant Number 9 experiences the benefits of being a celebrity herself outside the world of pageantry in finding work as a plus size model. Participant Number 9 shared how her self-esteem was low and she did not feel that many opportunities were open to someone like herself because of her size. Pageantry has opened the door to a different lifestyle where she is celebrated for her size and who she is: “I have always wanted to model, but I was always told that I couldn’t do it because I was plus size, so pageantry, for me, the way I live my life now, the things that I have to do, it has opened up a world of opportunities for me and I am grateful for it.”

Participant Number 10 shared how winning a crown has created opportunities for her to participate in activities with local celebrities.

There have been certain times when I, winning has given me the opportunity to go participate in a parade, or to meet the Mayor, or to do certain events where I meet people who are in a prestigious position and I think for my family that makes them proud.

Thriving: Cultural Competency

Participant Numbers 11, Number 12, Number 13 and Number 16 shared during their interviews that their experience in competing in pageants has changed their ideology about other people's cultures, ethnicities, shapes and sizes. Participant Number 11 was very candid when sharing how her perspective about other people who are not of her same culture, shape or size has evolved through her years of competing and taking part in pageant productions.

I'm much more accepting to all sizes, shapes, colors because everyone has a story. Everyone comes from a different place and once you realize it, figure out where they've come from and how far they've ventured, you can really appreciate the whole person, and if I hadn't done pageants, I wouldn't see that.

Participant Number 13 shared how she has used her competing in pageants as an opportunity to teach her daughter that an overall comradery can exist between women who come from very different backgrounds while also demonstrating the importance of a woman being able to be her own person: "It allowed her as an older teen to see young women and older women of all shapes and sizes and backgrounds just having fun together, being together, having fun, and having an identity outside of a man."

Participant Number 16 was very passionate when expressing her feelings about pageants that celebrate the diversity of the women competing in them.

This pageant, um, today is open to all women, natural born a woman, um, it was born a female and always been of same sex, of that sex, I should say, um, open to all women of all walks of life. No matter what age, what her height, her weight, her nationality is, no matter what she is, or who she is, she is celebrated at this pageant. There are more and more pageants like this one here today that do recognize that beauty comes in all shapes.

Participant Number 12 seemed to share the same sentiments as Participant Number 16 as Participant Number 12 has also competed in pageants that promote diversity as part of its value system.

They are very positive experiences for women, and I enjoy doing those pageants because it gives you the chance, you don't have to worry about fitting into a certain mold or being a certain size, so, um, I'm glad there are more choices now than there were years, and years ago.

Thriving: Sport

Participants Number 4 and Number 12 both stated that pageantry is a sport to them. Both participants share the sentiment that pageants should be seen as a type of sport. Participant Number 4 shared how she won a National Title after competing in the same pageant system for a period of four years. Participant Number 12 attributes her win to perseverance and determination of getting what she wanted:

And, uh, whether people thinks it's a sport or not, if you haven't walked a mile in my heels, then you can't tell me whether it's a sport or not...I think that anytime you compete whether it's a sport or something like pageantry it can bring out the very best and you, spirit, soul and body, and if it's something that improves you and makes you feel better about yourself and adds to the life of somebody else, I think it's an awesome thing.

Lack of Support

In exploring women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played, "lack of support" emerged as a theme found in answers given during the interview process. The participants in this study experienced a lack of support from their family systems and spouses.

Lack of Support from Family System

Participants Number 9, Number 11 and Number 10 all had mothers that were not supportive of their decision to compete in pageantry. Participants Number 9 and Number 11 both share similar experiences where their mother was against their competing in pageantry, but changed their minds as they began to see the positive effects competing in pageantry had for their daughters. Participant Number 9 shared that her mother was happy when she lost her first pageant because her mother believed she had too much work to do. However, her mother changed her mind when she saw that competing helped Participant Number 9's mental health and saw changes in Participant Number 9's depressive state of being.

Well, my mom she was, she was rather happy the first time I lost my first pageant, she was happy because she said I had too much on my plate with being in school and taking care of her because I take care of, I was taking care of my parents at the time and I had the children...But, now I'm expected to win by my mother when I do she is very encouraging now, she was at first, because she sees the impact that it is helped on my life that it has given me a reason to live, I want to say, sorta speak.

Participant Number 11 shared that her mother was not supportive for various reasons, however, Participant Number 11 believed the real reason her mother did not want her to compete was because she did not want her daughter's feelings to be hurt if she failed:

"But in her mind, she was trying to protect me."

Participant Number 11 shared that her mother's perspective changed when she learned what the pageants her daughter was competing in were really about. When her mother learned that the pageant her daughter was competing in was nothing like the ones she has seen on television, she changed her mind and became more supportive of Participant Number 11's competing in pageants: "She saw, wow, there's something to this, and it's more to it than just superficial that you see on TV. I started getting more and more support from the family."

Unlike Participants Number 9 and 11, Participant Number 10's mother and family never became convinced of Participant Number 10's perspective that competing in pageantry was something positive for her. For this reason, Participant Number 10 took it upon

herself to find ways to compete to fulfill her needs. Participant Number 10 found a program which allowed her to work while going to school in order to earn money to pay her fees as she received no emotional or financial support from her family. Her determination has taken her to the point where she travels alone to the pageants and does not seek or want her family's validation.

So, you know, I go, I compete, and it makes me feel good. It's just gotten to the point where I don't even feel the need to get, I guess, input from my family, because, you know, just this is my life and I think that they're realizing that this is something that's important to me and, um, without their validation, with it or without it I'm still going to continue to compete.

Participant Number 14 shared how she continues competing in pageants despite her father's lack of genuine support and criticism of her. It appears that Participant Number 14's father does not understand the different types of titles and crowns offered in competitions. However, Participant Number 14 does not allow for her father's confusion to keep her from doing something which she seems to enjoy: "My dad is not a huge fan even to this day he feels as though I need to grow up and not necessarily, you know it's time to be a big girl and work and do things and he doesn't understand that there's a balance to do both."

Participant Number 16 shared how her family of origin was not supportive of her competing in pageantry. Her father still does not support her decision to compete, but the participant does so anyways.

My father still doesn't get it, not even after all these years he doesn't get it and I guess that's not for me to, um, figure out and for me to understand why it's just I think he was raised in a different era, but I was, believe again that I can pursue anything I want to.

Lack of Support from Spouse

Participant Number 6 made it quite clear that she was not allowing anyone to stand in her way of competing in pageants. She was very assertive in her conversation with me when expressing how she felt about her husband behavior during his past attendance at her competitions. Participant Number 6 stands up to her husband and communicates that she is going to compete and have fun without allowing his attitude ruin her good time: "Well the funniest memory was me telling my husband he couldn't come anymore. Those are my favorite memories."

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

I conducted this study because I wanted to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. In order to achieve this goal I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with women who were contestants in pageants in the past or were currently involved in pageantry at the time of the interview. I have taken a phenomenological perspective during the interview process of this study. As a phenomenological researcher, I wanted to help the participants express their experiences and what they perceive to be their inner truth about the phenomenon (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008).

As a phenomenological researcher, it was necessary to remain cognizant of biases created as a result of my competing in pageants during my lifetime. I am well aware that there are many pageant systems where participants can compete regardless of their age and weight. I have competed, lost and won state and national titles in these types of pageants. I know the meaning I prescribe to my competing in pageantry and I know the role my family has played from my own perspective. My curiosity as to how other women would answer these questions guided my choice of various paradigms to choose a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological tradition focuses on gaining understanding through recognizing both the distinct and the shared essences and experiences of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990).

During the coding process of this study, I began to see certain themes arise from the interviews conducted with the women. The three major themes were: Bonding, Thriving, and Lack of Support. For the purposes of this study, the themes were viewed through a General Systems Theory lens: General Systems Theory is comprised of various concepts such as: Hierarchy, Equifinality, Boundaries, and Interdependence/Mutual Influence. I applied these concepts during the interpretation of the stories shared by the women who participated in this study.

Hierarchy

General Systems Theory poses that there is a layering of systems within any human system. Subsystems also exist that are smaller parts of the same system. In addition, suprasystems, or larger systems have an overarching influence on human systems (Whitechurch & Constantine, 1993). The pageant world in and of itself is a system that functions as a part of our everyday life in our everyday environment. In the context of General Systems Theory, the myriad of individual pageants that exist are the subsystems that form a part of the larger pageant culture system. Miss American Elegance, Miss United America, Miss America and the Miss USA Pageant systems are all examples of subsystems that collectively form the whole pageant system even though they differ in requirements that must be fulfilled in order for the participants to compete.

Suprasystems that come into play in the pageant culture are economic (i.e. scholarships), political (i.e. feminist perspectives), and cultural (i.e. pageants based on geography or ethnicity). While conducting the interviews, I discovered that some of the

women who participated in this study came into contact with the economic, political and cultural components that make up the suprasystem. Two of the women competed in pageants to facilitate the process of achieving their goals of attaining a college education. The first participant, Participant Number 4, utilized her scholarship winnings to simplify the everyday task of attending school. Were it not for winning in pageantry, she would have had to take on two jobs in order to pay her tuition. Pageantry allowed her to focus on her studies and work only one job: "So I end up working only one job and going to school full-time and actually taking scholarship money that I had won from the pageant to pay for school."

Participant Number 12, who is of African-American descent, experienced both the economic and cultural components of the suprasystem when she won a scholarship offered by a pageant celebrating the Italian community. The pageant did not require that the contestants be of Italian heritage to compete or to win. The pageant marketed itself as a scholarship pageant which Participant Number 12 took full advantage of. Participant Number 12 shared that both she and the audience were very surprised at her victory. Although the audience was slow to react to her win, she was awarded her crown, sash and her scholarship.

In my opinion, Participant Number 12 and the people who took part in the pageant benefitted by Participant Number 12's winning. The participant benefitted by winning an opportunity to pursue her academic desires. The people in attendance at the pageant that day, regardless of the role they played, had the chance to experience a woman of color

winning a scholarship by a pageant system who wanted to promote cultural diversity by dedicating the pageant to women of Italian heritage and inviting women of all cultural backgrounds who wanted to improve their chances in academia to compete: “I won a pageant in a town that, um, I was the only woman, like I was, in this pageant. It was a huge scholarship. I paid my tuition off for that semester.”

Equifinality

Equifinality is the ability of humans to reach the same goal by taking different routes. In pageant systems, pageant contestants venture through various experiences and paths to reach their final destination and goal which is to compete and hopefully win the title they are seeking (Whitechurch & Constantine, 1993). They bring a variety of personalities, characteristics, experiences, and families of origin to the competition. In conducting the interviews, some of the women who competed in pageantry shared how they and their loved ones overcame various obstacles in order to take part in the competition for a state or national crown. I learned through the interviews that pageantry, like any sport, requires the participant to create a budget to factor their expenses and time to travel to the competition. Finding enough money to finance travel, food, lodging, entry fees, and wardrobe may prove cumbersome for some but not others. Contestants Number 2 and Number 3 shared during their interview that their husbands took a financial role in supporting their desires to compete in pageantry. This financial support made it easier for them to compete. Participant Number 2 shared that her husband is emotionally and financially supportive of her desire to compete. She shared that she and her husband will

sit down to formulate a payment plan in order for her to be able to compete: “Even if we don’t have the money he’s like, let’s sit down and figure it out, we can do a payment plan and if we can get a used gown or this, even a pageant trainer he’s always, always made it a point for me to follow my dreams.”

Participant Number 3’s husband does not enjoy attending his wife’s pageants, however, he makes it easier for her to compete by financially supporting her efforts: “My husband is supportive but he doesn’t enjoy watching the pageant, so he supports me in letting me the buy clothes, go and enjoy, and make new friends.”

Women who were determined to do something for themselves by competing in pageantry demonstrated that financial barriers were not a factor to succumb to. The participants shared how they turned a difficult situation into a fun adventure. Some of the participants had the support of their family members and shared the experience with them. Others did not have family support but had an exciting experience for themselves. For example, Participant Number 12 had the support of her mother and both endured some hardships in order to achieve Participant Number 12’s goal to compete. On the other end of the spectrum, Participant Number 10 has never had the support of her mother or other family members and took on a job at an early age in order to earn the money to compete herself. Participant Number 12 shared the following: “Then when we traveled, out-of-state sometimes it’s like traveling on a wing and a prayer because we didn’t have that much money to get there.”

Participant Number 10 shared the following regarding her efforts to compete in pageants despite her lack of funds and family support:

So, that summer I actually got a job for the purpose of raising money to compete in pageants and I was able to do a pageant the following year, it was a different system, but I raised the money and I competed. I didn't have any money to buy a wardrobe. The interview outfit I wore was my mom's.

Unlike Participant Number 2 and Participant Number 3 who did not have to worry about how they were going to pay for their wardrobe to compete, Participant Number 10 relied on others to find an outfit to compete in. Regardless of the path taken and adventures experienced, all four participants reached their final destination to fulfill their goal and compete in pageantry.

Boundaries

According to von Bertalanffy (1966), systems can be either open or closed. Both open and closed systems have a variety of individual elements that create a system. However, open systems interact with their surrounding environment in a way that sustains the system. They do not just react to stimuli; they actively initiate efforts to flourish (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). Closed systems are comprised of various cogs and wheels and it functions as itself. There is minimal if any interaction without the environment. An example of a closed system would be a machine. However, a human unlike a machine interacts with its environment in everyday life.

Humans are influenced and interact with their workplace, school, church, and family (Whitechurch & Constantine, 1993). Individuals may be influenced by what is heard and described in these environments as well as by television and other forms of social media. These environments are also influenced by a concept known as interdependence or mutual influence. Beauty pageants are an open system when applying von Bertalanffy's perspective about humans interacting with their surroundings and their efforts to flourish.

While writing this portion of the study, I reflected on the whole interview process and realized that members of one subsystem cannot always permeate and be a part of the other. For example, participants of the Miss America and Miss USA pageant systems can compete in the Miss United America and Miss American Elegance System. However, due to age and health (weight) requirements some of the women who compete in the Miss United America or Miss American Elegance Pageant System may not be eligible to compete for the Miss America or Miss USA crown. I thought of the stories shared by the participants and how their perceptions of pageantry had been influenced by what they had seen on television and other aspects of everyday life around them. I thought of the various obstacles some have had to overcome in order to compete and how these pageants that are not like the type we have grown up seeing on television have provided an avenue for these women to fulfill a desire to have an experience that otherwise might not be possible because of boundaries set by strict rules and regulations.

Pageants that allow women who are past the age or do not meet the health (weight) requirements to compete in the Miss USA or Miss America Pageant enable women to

experience what many in this study have referred to as sisterhood or simply the formation of friendships. Women who compete in the same pageant system often address one another as sisters, especially those that have won a title. They often refer to one another as “My sister Queen.” As previously mentioned, there are a myriad of pageants that comprise the subsystem that forms the pageant culture. Sister Queens of the American Elegance System may attend the crowning of The United America System or any other system such as Miss United States or Miss United Nation. These systems interact with one another and at times a title holder of one system may be invited to judge and assist in the choosing of a new queen in another system. It is always a great honor to have a current or former Miss USA or Miss America at any of the pageants as a judge or as a guest. This is something that may happen at the type of pageant used in this study. However, this does not happen the other way around. In other words, a woman crowned Miss United America or Miss American Elegance will probably not be invited to crown Miss USA or Miss America. However, when looking at the system as a whole, all pageant participants can share in the same comradery and love of the sport this commonality is a characteristic present at the sub and general system levels.

All 14 participants who took part in this study made reference to the fact they chose to participate in the type of pageants used in this study as a way to do something for themselves. Participants Number 1, 5, 6, 11, 12 and 14 all stated that competing in pageants was something they did to help raise their levels of self-esteem or confidence in themselves. The Participants were able to do this at their age and stage in life because the

type of pageants used for this study do not deter contestants from competing due to their age or health (weight). Participant Number 14 shared the following: “That was part of the reason why they agreed to let me do this was not just for the crowns and the prize money and all that but to build my self-confidence, um, I had none.”

Some of the participants shared that among the reasons they chose to participate in these types of pageants was to create opportunities for themselves. These opportunities all shared the same concept of the participant improving herself to interact with the greater system. For example, some of the participants shared that participating in pageantry helped them improve their interview and communication skills. The intent of using good interview and communication skills to convince the judges at the pageant to choose them to win the crown filtered through into the real world system where the same skills were applied to gain power in the job force. Participant Number 5 stated the following:

When I go into the job interviews when they ask me, “Why should we choose you for the job? You get that same question in pageantry. Why should we choose you to hold the title? You know I’m able to be confident in what I do, in what my skills are and voice to them, “This is why you need to hire me,” and it’s the same thing with pageantry. This is why you should choose me to be your title holder and so being able to build that confidence in pageantry interview...it comes right out in a job interview at the same time.

By making a conscious choice to compete in pageantry as a way of doing something for themselves, the participants of this study shared that being a competitor in pageants that do not have stringent age and health (weight) requirements has created opportunities for them to thrive in ways that they did not imagine were possible because of the perspectives held by some members that comprise the greater system of everyday life. Competing in the type of pageant systems used in this study has created an opportunity for these women who comprise the subsystem of pageantry to partake of experiences in the greater general system.

For example, Participant Number 9 shared during her interview that she had always wanted to be a model but due to her weight was not able to do so. This participant also shared during her interview that she had also felt depressed in the past and that her mother did not want her to compete in pageants at an adult age because her duty was to take care of her children and her mother. Competing in pageants like the ones used in this study have allowed Participant Number 12 to become the type of person she wanted to be and experience life as other female models have. Participant Number 12 shared the following during her interview: "It has opened up a world of opportunities. Things that I, being a plus size woman, wouldn't have necessarily had the opportunity to do. I model for this production company."

Utilizing her experiences in competing in the types of pageants used in this study has afforded Participant Number 9 the opportunity to be a part of the greater system by becoming a member of the job force and working in the talent industry as a professional

model. Participant Number 4 shared some similarities and some differences in comparison with other participants in this study when sharing her experience of how competing in pageantry helped her excel in the job force. Participant Number 4, like other participants has benefitted greatly by improving her communication and interview skills which aide her in obtaining employment.

Participant Number 4 shared in her interview that not only did her communication and interview skills help her in job interviews, but the platform she developed during pageantry has also become a program that has received a nod of support from the federal government. Participant Number 4 was able to take the platform that was presented in the subsystem of pageantry into the suprasystem to gain recognition by the federal government. Participant Number 4 shared the following: “I actually had the government backing me in doing some of the speaking and now it’s one of the biggest things within the government agency where we focus on conflict management and how to deal with customer service.”

Interdependence/Mutual Influence

Interdependence or mutual influence in a system refers to the concept that a change in one part of a system will create change in another part of the system. In addition, in human systems such things as communication and attitudes will influence others in a system—even if they are unspoken (Whitechurch & Constantine, 1993). In the world of beauty pageants, family members’ ideas about pageantry can have an unspoken influence on the motivation, self-efficacy, and competitiveness of a contestant.

An example of mutual influence can be found in the stories provided by participant Number 4, Number 9, Number 10 and Number 11. These four participants all had one thing in common; family members who did not support them in their endeavors to compete in pageants. Participant Number 4's family did not want their daughter to compete in pageants because they thought she would be judged based on her beauty. Participant Number 9's mother was against her daughter competing because she felt her daughter had greater responsibilities to tend to. Participant Number 10's mother was opposed to her competing in pageants because she believed it was not a good way for her daughter to spend her money and Participant Number 11's mother was not supportive of her daughter competing in pageants because she thought her daughter was too old and that her feelings might get hurt if she did not win.

All four participants' families changed their opinions and began to be more supportive after they fully understood the benefits that competing in pageantry was providing for their daughters. It appears that the communication between parent and child began to open as the parents saw their daughters enjoying and making positive changes for themselves. Participant Number 11 shared the following: "She saw, wow, there's something to this, and it's more to it than just superficial that you see on TV. I started getting more and more support from the family."

While coding the data provided by the women who participated in this study, the theme of bonding became evident. Bonding is an example of how family members' ideas about pageantry can have an unspoken influence on the motivation, self-efficacy, and

competitiveness of a contestant. For example, some of the participants were motivated to compete in a pageant because their daughter wanted them to compete together in the same pageant. The participants saw this as a special parent child bonding time. Their child inviting them into a world where they felt confident both could exist, communicate, and have fun influenced the participant's reason to compete side by side with their child.

Participant number 3, who is a cancer survivor, had the following to share: "Mom, you should come and go with me and we'll just have a fun mother-daughter weekend."

This light hearted invitation differs from the example given by Participant Number 11 who is also a cancer survivor: "And then when I thought about it, the difficulty of a teenage daughter wanting to spend three days doing something with her not cool mother, I better do this."

The interviews provided information on how some of the participants were motivated to compete side by side with their children as a way to have fun and treated pageantry as a time to bond as pageantry offered parent-child time. Other women were supported by their husbands, children and extended family members by means of emotional support. For example, some extended family members would make posters and signs to wave during the competition while some husbands and children would travel to support their loved one. During the interview process, some of the participants shared that their children were very supportive but had a difficult time processing their feelings when their mother would lose during the competition.

The participants I interviewed shared that their competing in pageantry resulted in their having to teach their children how to cope with loss. It was a moment of self-efficacy because the women wanted to teach the children that a person is not always going to win at a competition. However, the women wanted to teach their children that simply because they lost during the competition did not mean they were going to give up on their goals and would continue to compete. Participant Number 1 shared the following: “It also lets them know that you can’t win everything, you know, and you do have to lose some to really enjoy the ones that you win and I think that they’ve learned that, you know.”

In a round-about way, the women were teaching their children to be a good sport. This is an interesting concept as some of the women’s concept of pageantry is that of a sport. Some of the women used pageantry as a way to test themselves and prepared for their competition just like an athlete prepares for a sporting event. These women wanted to push themselves to see how far they could go to reach and accomplish their goal of winning a state or national crown.

Participant Number 12 shared the following: “I think it’s giving yourself a chance to test your limits and your endurance and trying to see how you meet a challenge because each pageant is a challenge and it’s always wanting to see... let me see how I can do this time?”

Participant Number 4 also commented: “So, my family of course they love the fact of when I win, they hate it when I lose, but they understand that pageants is a sport.”

Self-efficacy was also demonstrated by other participants whose family members or spouses did not emotionally or economically support their desire to compete in pageants. In these situations, the participants stood firm with their goal and found ways to participate without the economic or emotional support. These women found the support they desired from the women they were competing with or against. Participant Number 6's husband would become angry when she did not win. For this reason, Participant Number 6 told her husband that he was no longer allowed to attend her competitions and now travels with other women competing in the same pageant system: "He got upset when I didn't win or place, so, I mean really, he really moped around for a long time. So, he was not allowed to come anymore, so if I did pageants, I did them with friends."

Conclusions

As stated in the beginning, the objective of this study is not to show that pageants are good or bad, but to simply lend an understanding of this group of people from their perspective, why they participate in pageantry, and how their families have influenced them. The manner in which the findings are reported in the study may appear to take on only positive connotations, however, I want to make clear that I did not purposely report the information gathered in a manner skewed to appear in a positive light. For example, participants stated that although they wanted to compete, they were not always supported by their families or spouses. This, in my opinion is not something positive that the women had to endure. However, the women also went on to say that even though they were not supported by their families, they forged on and competed anyways.

One participant of the 14 made reference to feeling pressured to compete by her mother and extended family members. I wanted to ensure that all voices in this study were heard. Although Participant Number 5 was the only person to share feeling pressured and not in agreement with participating in pageantry, her words and experiences are valid. Participant Number 5 shared the following: “In the beginning I never really was into pageants, my mom got me started in them because she was tired of me being a tomboy.”

Although Participant Number 5 may have felt pressured, she also shared that her opinion of competing in pageantry may have changed with time: “I actually like making the transformation because sometimes, a lot of times, I shock and surprise myself with what the outcome is and um, it just kinda balances out because it’s like this is my girly side.”

I began this journey to better understand the meanings other women had about their competing in pageantry and what part do they believe their families of origin have played. It has been a wonderful journey and what I gathered from this particular group of women is that they compete for various reasons. Among the reasons is bonding with their children, spouses, and extended family members. The women bonded with their children by teaching them coping skills when they lost. They utilized pageantry as a tool to create special parent-child time when competing side by side in the same pageant system. I learned that a person is never too old to be child as the parents and extended family members of these adult participants emotionally and financially supported their child through her competition.

I learned that the majority of the women in this study competed as a means of doing something for themselves. Some continued to compete in pageantry in order to make friends or simply to continue to see the same women each year as they competed in the same pageant system year after year to enjoy the comradery and sisterhood in the spirit of the sport. Others wanted to raise their levels of self-esteem by performing their art on stage or honing in on their communication and interviewing skills to better their chances in the job force. I learned how some women were able to show the world how beautiful they and others are by breaking through rigid rules and requirements defining what exemplifies beauty.

I have learned that the level of determination and self-efficacy of this group of women is high. Lack of financial or emotional support was not a barrier for them to continue to pursue their desire to compete in a sport that in the past may have been limited to women who met rigid age and health (weight) requirements. I believe the greatest thing I have learned is that given an opportunity, all humans can flourish and have something to share with others if given the opportunity. These pageants that do not have stringent rules about age and health (weight) provide an avenue for women who choose to compete to do exactly that.

I agree with Ludwig von Bertalanffy's belief that therapists should remain cognizant of their own values and assumptions and not impose them on their clients (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). I am in agreement with this belief for two reasons. The first because during the collection of this research it was important for me to remain cognizant of my

reasons for my competing in pageantry and the role my family played was not going to be the same for the women I interviewed. As a human, I suppose I experienced times when I wondered how family members could not be supportive of any goal their loved one wanted to accomplish. However, I kept in mind that I did not grow up in that woman's household and that her entire cultural, religious, and political make-up were different than mine.

The second reason I agree with Von Bertalanffy is because of the responses I have had in conducting this research. Some colleagues have not been welcoming or understanding about the population or topic I have chosen to study. In my opinion, it is disappointing to think that individuals who work in a therapeutic setting would have rigid preconceived notions about women who choose to compete in pageantry. I cannot blame them as they have probably been exposed to only what we see on television which to some may make the women who compete to appear to be vacuous and uneducated. It is my opinion that all humans have value and something to contribute to this world. I hope that this information presented would expose therapists to the idea that there are types of pageant systems that differ from those on television. I think that even if this were not true and only the popular pageants we see on television existed, that we as therapists can remember to put our biases aside and give everyone an opportunity to tell their story because everybody in this world has value and a story to tell. After all, I am sure that there are some pageant winners in the world who are also members of academia.

Limitations

Several limitations existed in this study. For example, due to a timely response from pageant directors, the sample of women interviewed was restricted to The United America Pageant System and The American Elegance Pageant System. There are numerous pageant systems in existence, however, the directors from The United America Pageant System and The American Elegance Pageant System were the first to agree to allow the researcher to have contact with the participants to inform them about the study and ask them if they would be willing to take part in the study.

A total of 14 participants took part in this study. Of the 14 women interviewed in this study, 7 were Caucasian and 7 were of African-American heritage with ages ranging from 24 to 65 years old. The number of participants that took part in this study is acceptable for a qualitative research of this type. However, credibility could have been bolstered if there were a greater number of participants. Credibility could have increased if there were greater regional diversity among the participants interviewed as the women who were interviewed at the United America Pageant were all from the state of Texas and those who were participants in the American Elegance Pageant System were from Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, and West Virginia. Although The Miss America Pageant System and The Miss USA Pageant System are mentioned in this study, none of their contestants were interviewed as a part of this study.

Implications

The results of this study provide a better understanding of women who choose to compete in pageantry from their own perspective rather than from a historical, ethnic, cultural, or feminist perspective. The objective of this study was not to show that pageants are good or bad, but to simply lend an understanding of this group of people from their perspective, why they participate in pageantry, and how their families have influenced them.

According to Ludwig von Bertalanffy therapists should remain cognizant of their own values and assumptions and not impose their biases on their clients (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). The information gathered in this study may help clear any misconceptions therapists and others have about women who choose to compete in pageantry and what part their families have played. The participants shared that pageantry is a way to bond with their children and spouses. They also shared that participating in pageantry is something they do for themselves as they thrive for improvement and an equal opportunity in their daily lives such as in the workforce and academia. The participants were candid when stating that they were not always supported by their spouses or family members but they found a means to an end and competed for the sake of sport, creating friendships, providing service to their community or just for the sake of fun regardless of their loved ones disinterest in their pursuit of participating in pageantry.

Beauty Pageants are open systems that interact with their surrounding environment in a way that sustains the system. They do not just react to stimuli; they actively initiate

efforts to flourish (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). In other words, the women who competed in pageantry also compete in our everyday job force and academia. These women take part in politics, attend and conduct religious services and participate in world consumerism. This study reminds Family Therapists that the participants of this study represent the community that has educated, shaped, and formed them. As the participants excel in life, the community of which they are an extension, does as well (Mani, 2006). In a very systemic manner, ideas that began as platforms to be expressed during pageant competition have spilled over to become protocol that our federal government is applying in the federal workplace. Beauty pageant participants and their families are part of our community and world system. They come in all shapes and sizes. Gone are the days when beauty pageant contestants were expected to answer questions on stage a certain way while wearing a swimsuit. In a very systemic manner, the characteristics of the type of pageants utilized in this study are beginning to permeate the traditional pageant scene as evidenced by current day pageant participants showing off their tattoos or coming out to say they are queer.

This study in no way suggests that a slew of beauty pageant contestants are going to come marching into therapist's office for services. As therapists it is good to remain cognizant that members of society symbolically compete and take part in beauty pageant contests in their daily lives. For example, therapists may encounter individuals who are very competitive and want to be the best in their workplace or perhaps in a family system, siblings may compete to see who the better child is. They may encounter

individuals who want to improve their self-esteem or have problems obtaining employment because they have poor communication skills or fear of public speaking. These are some of the issues that the participants of this study wanted to learn how to improve or cope with and through their determination were able to thrive and do something for themselves.

The information provided in this study also reminds therapists that it is good to know information simply for the sake of knowing something more to connect with our clients. For example, a therapist who works with children would probably want to know the various current cartoon and superhero characters with whom their young clients identify with. In like manner, beauty pageants and contests like them are part of everyday television and if a client were to mention any aspect of pageantry or its characteristics, the therapist would have some idea about what the client is processing and be able to respond in a manner to bring about confidence for the client to share more.

Recommendations

This study has provided information about pageant systems other than from a historical, feminist, ethnic, and cultural perspective. Further research of this subculture could assist therapists in better understanding this subculture and the many facets of which it is comprised. The following are suggestions for future research:

1. Considering that all of the participants of this study were women, this study could be replicated to research outcomes of men who have participated in pageantry during their childhood and as adults.

2. The study could be expanded to research how pageantry affects family cohesiveness.
3. The study could be replicated to see how continued participation in pageantry effects emotional and financial support between couples over time.
4. As thriving and self-esteem were mentioned in the study at various times, it would be interesting to measure the participant's levels of differentiation of self in relation to their decision to compete in pageantry.
5. The study can be replicated to include participants from other pageant systems of other racial, geographic, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.
6. The study can be replicated to research pageants in the LGTB community.

Summary

This study began as a curiosity into understanding women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. The researcher never sought out to prove pageants were either good or bad, but simply wanted to give beauty pageant contestants a voice as society's understanding about pageantry was mainly from a historical, ethnic, cultural, or feminist perspective. The study found that women compete in pageantry for various reasons. Among them are: Bonding with their children, Bonding with Spouse, Bonding with Extended Family, Formation of Friendships, Support from Outside the Family System, and Thriving. The study provided information that even when there was a lack of support from the family system or spouse, the participants found a means to an end and competed anyways. The study provided

information to keep therapists grounded by reminding them that people who participate in pageantry are part of our world system with whom we interact and have valid reasons for their decision to compete in pageantry. Therapists are reminded that judgment about the person and their experiences should be kept aside as all people are valuable.

The purpose of this study was to explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. In the spirit of phenomenological research, 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 women who had previous pageant experience or were in the current position of vying for a state or national freely shared and voiced their life experiences in pageantry. For the purposes of this study, the themes were viewed through a General Systems Theory lens. General Systems Theory is comprised of various concepts such as: Hierarchy, Equifinality, Boundaries, and Interdependence/Mutual Influence. These concepts were applied during the interpretation of the stories shared by the women who participated in this study. This chapter included a discussion, conclusion, limitations, implications and recommendations. This study provided information that could help therapists understand the subculture of pageantry from the participant's voice of experience which differs from information available through a historical, feminist, ethnic, and cultural perspective.

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APPENDIX A
Recruitment Flyer

**Are you a woman between age 21
and 70 and have previous
experience in participating in any
type of beauty pageant?**

If you have ever competed in any type of local, state, national or global beauty pageant during your lifetime, you are invited to participate in a Texas Woman's University dissertation research project being conducted by Catherine Sang.

The purpose of this study will be to

Explore women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants

and what part their families have played

The interviews will be conducted by Catherine Sang at a location that is convenient for you or via telephone if you live outside the state of Texas.

Your maximum time commitment to an interview will be approximately an hour. The information gathered during the interview will be used for the dissertation. *Your name and any identifying information will be kept confidential.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like more information about this study, please contact Catherine Sang at (214)240-0862 or email her at CathSang01@aol.com. You may also contact my advisor, Mary Sue Green, Ph.D., at (940) 898-2865 or email her at mgreen@mail.twu.edu.

APPENDIX B
Initial Telephone Call Script

“Hello, my name is Catherine Sang. Thanks for responding to my flyer. I am a doctoral student in the Family Therapy Program at Texas Woman’s University. This research project is the final component to my completing my degree plan. Society knows about beauty pageants through historical, political and feminist perspectives. I have chosen to conduct a study about the meanings women give for their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played in their decision to compete because very little is known about this subject.

“The purpose of this study will be to explore women’s meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. If you agree to participate in this study, I will travel to a place and time that is convenient for you. If you live outside the state of Texas, I will interview you over the phone and record our conversation. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. When we meet, I will have consent forms for you to review and sign. I will collect some information about your background and then audiotape our conversation which will enable me to be accurate when transcribing your experiences to paper. If our interview is held over the telephone, I will email or mail you a consent form for you to review and sign. I will provide a self addressed stamped envelope in order to facilitate the process of having to mail the consent form back to me.”

These are the questions that I will be asking. 1) Tell me the story of how you got interested in competing in pageants. 2) What part has your family played in your competing in pageants? 3) What meaning does competing in pageantry have for you? 4) What reaction did your family members have to your winning or losing in pageantry? I

will assign a code number to your interview as a method of protecting your confidentiality. I will be the only person who will know your name. Please note that you may withdraw from this interview at any time, your participation is completely voluntary.”

“Do you have any questions at this point?” (All questions will be answered by the researcher.)

“Would you like your story to be a part of this study?” (If the potential participant agrees to participate in the study, the next step will be to schedule a time and place to conduct the interview.) “Thanks for your time. I look forward to meeting with you on the day and time we have agreed upon.” (If the potential participant declines consent to participate, the potential participant will be asked if they know of anyone who might want to tell their story to further this study). “Thanks for taking time out of your busy day to talk with me.”

APPENDIX C
Consent Form

TEXAS WOMANS' UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: An Exploration of Women's Meanings of their Competing in Beauty Pageant and what Part their Families have Played

Investigator: Catherine Sang, J.D., LMSW..... (214) 240-0862

Advisor: Mary Sue Green, Ph.D, (940) 898-2687

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Catherine Sang, J.D., LMSW, who is currently enrolled in the Family Therapy program at Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas. She is pursuing her Ph.D. in Family Therapy. The purpose of this study is the exploration of women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played.

Research Procedures

The investigator will collect demographic information from you and complete a demographic information form. You will then participate in a face-to-face interview or telephone interview. If you choose the face-to-face interview, it will be conducted at a location that is convenient for you. If the interview is conducted via phone, it will be scheduled to take place at a time that is most convenient for you. The investigator will conduct all interviews. Interviews, be they face-to-face or via telephone, will be audio taped to provide accuracy when transcribed by the investigator. The transcribed information will be assigned a code number to maintain your confidentiality. The maximum time commitment is approximately 1 hour. The transcribed information you provide during the interview will be assigned a code number to maintain confidentiality. The maximum time you may estimate to participate in the study is approximately 1 ¼ hours. You will receive a \$20.00 gift card to compensate you for your time.

Potential Risks

Potential risks involved in your participation in this study may include: loss of confidentiality, loss of time, emotional discomfort, fatigue and coercion.

There is a potential loss of confidentiality if you choose to participate in this study. Your confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. Code numbers, rather than your name, will be used to identify your demographic information, transcripts, and audio-tapes. Only the Principal Investigator, her research advisor, and one doctoral-level research assistant will have access to the transcripts. Only the Principal Investigator and her

advisor will have access to the actual tapes. All interview tapes will be transcribed by the Principal Investigator only. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal Investigator's home. All identifiable data will be kept in a separate locked cabinet in the Principal Investigator's home office. Transcripts, demographic information sheets, and audio tapes will be destroyed within five years of the study being completed. Names and other identifying information will not be transcribed.

Participant initials

There is a potential risk for loss of time if you choose to participate in this study. The interview is estimated to last an hour. If you consent to a follow-up call, the call will last no longer than 15 minutes for a total time commitment of 1 1/4 hours. The interview will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you. Telephone interviews will be scheduled during a time that is convenient for you.

There is a potential risk of emotional discomfort if you choose to participate in this study. To minimize your emotional discomfort, you may choose to take breaks and/or stop participating at any time. In addition, a list of counseling services is being provided along with this consent form.

There is a potential risk of fatigue if you choose to participate in this study. You may take breaks at any time or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

There is a potential risk of coercion. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Recruitment efforts were designed to make sure that no individual pageant contestants were targeted specifically for participation. In addition, you will receive compensation for an interview even if you choose to withdraw from the study.

The researcher will try to prevent any type of problem which could arise from your participation in this research. It is important to immediately inform the researcher of any problems you may be experiencing in connection with your participation in this study. Please note that Texas Woman's University does not provide any type of medical services or financial assistance for any injuries sustained by you in conjunction with this research project.

Participation and Benefit

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Incentives of \$20 will be given to each participant at the end of the interview to compensate them for their time. If a participant chooses to withdraw from the study at any time, they will still receive compensation for their time. For example, if they withdraw during the informed consent, survey, they will still receive \$20. Another direct benefit you will receive from your participation in the study is that you will be mailed a copy of the findings upon your request. Your participation in sharing your story

will contribute to the understanding of women's meanings of their competing in beauty pageant and what part their families have played.

Questions Regarding the Study

If you have any questions regarding this research study, you may ask the researchers. Their phone numbers are located at the top of this form. If you have any additional questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study or any questions as to how this study is being conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (940) 898-3378. You may also contact this office via email at IRB@twu.edu. The IRB oversees studies and participants' rights. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant

Date

- If you would like to receive a summary of the results of this study, please provide an address to where the information can be mailed.

APPENDIX D
Demographic Information

Demographic Information

Please complete the following information.

1. Current age _____
2. Gender _____
3. Please check one:
☐ Married ☐ Single ☐ Divorced
☐ Long-term committed relationship (How many Years? _____)
4. Do you have children? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Are you a single parent? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. How old were you when you participated in your first beauty pageant?

7. How old were you when you participated in your most recent beauty pageant?

8. Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply)
☐ African American ☐ Asian ☐ Caucasian ☐ Native
American
☐ Hispanic ☐ Other
9. Highest level of education completed
10. Which state do you reside in? _____
11. Have you ever traveled out of your state to compete in a pageant? ☐ Yes
☐ No

12. Have you received formal pageant training?

13. Religious/Spiritual preference

☐ Catholic ☐ Protestant ☐ Jewish ☐ Muslim

☐ Other ☐ None

14. Occupation _____

15. Annual Income

☐ Under \$20,000

☐ \$20,000-\$39,999

☐ \$40,000-\$59,999

☐ \$60,000-\$89,999

☐ \$90,000-\$119,999

☐ \$120,000-\$149,999

☐ \$150,000 and above

16. May I call you within the next week to check and see if you have any additional questions regarding the study or any additional information you would care to share?

☐ Yes ☐ No Phone Number _____

· APPENDIX E
Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant's Code: _____

Date of Interview: _____

“Good Morning/Good Day/Good Afternoon/Good Evening, thanks for agreeing to take part in my study by sharing your story with me.” (Pause) “The purpose of this study will be to explore women’s meanings of their competing in beauty pageants and what part their families have played. Society knows about beauty pageants through historical, political and feminist perspectives. I have chosen to conduct this study because very little is known about this subject. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any time without fear of reprisal. Do you have any questions about this study before we continue?” (Pause)

“Please keep in mind that you may ask for a break at any time. I will be using a recording device to audiotape our conversation. This recording will help ensure a more accurate understanding and transcription of this interview.” (Pause)

“Before we forge on, I will give you this consent form to review and sign.”

“Before you sign the consent form, can I answer any questions about the form?”(Pause)

“At the end of the form is a space for you to fill out your address if you wish for me to mail you a summary of the findings of this study. Please initial each of the three pages.

This is a copy for you to keep.”

(The researcher will give a copy of the signed form to the participant and keep a copy for her own records).

“I’m turning the recorder on now.” (Recording commences)

“I will begin our interview by asking you some questions to better understand your background. Please let me know if I need to clarify any of the questions I ask. If at any time you feel uncomfortable about the questions I am asking, please do not hesitate to tell me.”

(Questions will be answered by the researcher). (The researcher will then gather demographic information that the participant is willing to provide. Upon completion, the researcher will begin the interview questions).

“Now we will move on to the research questions. Please feel free to express your story freely and openly and elaborate as much as you are comfortable.”

Tell me the story of how you got interested in competing in pageants. (Pause)

What part has your family played in your competing in pageants? (Pause)

What meaning does competing in pageantry have for you? (Pause)

What reaction did your family members have to your winning or losing in pageantry?

(Pause)

Prompts, as needed:

Smiling

Nodding

Leaning in forward

Leaning back into chair

Sure, sure

What were some of the positives in making that choice?

What were some of the negatives in making that choice?

M-hmm

Would you care to elaborate more on that?

Anything else?

Does anything else come to mind?

Let me see if I understand your perspective on that?

Would you like to add anything else?

Any other thoughts?

“Our interview is over now. If you signed the form allowing me to follow up with you later this week, I will be doing so. If you signed the portion of the form stating that you would like a summary of the findings mailed to you, it will be sent to the address you have provided when the study has been concluded. Thanks so much for your valuable time and story that you have shared with me today.”

APPENDIX F
Counseling Referral Sheet

Counseling Resources

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy

112 South Alfred Street

Alexandria, VA 22314-3016

703-838-9808

<http://www.aamft.org>

American Counseling Association

5999 Stevenson Avenue

Alexandria, VA 22304

800-347-6647

<http://www.counseling.org>

AAMFT Therapist Locator

at www.aamft.org

The Parenting Center

2928 West Fifth Street

Fort Worth, Texas 76021

Counseling and Family Therapy Clinic

Texas Woman's University

114 Human Development Building (HDB)

Denton, Texas 76204 (940) 898-2620

APPENDIX G
Telephone Follow-up Script

Follow-up Telephone Script

“Hello, this is Catherine Sang. How’s it going? I am calling to follow up on our interview and see if you had any further questions or anything else you would like to share about your story.” (Participant will be given time to respond.)

(If the participant has any questions, the researcher will answer them. If the participant has no questions, the researcher will say the following), “Thanks again for taking time out of your busy schedule to take part of this study. If you requested I send you a summary of the findings of the study, it will be sent to the address you provided.”