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## Beauty pageants expose ugly truths

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By Kristina Ioannou

When a young girl dresses provocatively and imitates the look of a grown woman to a crowd, there is something terribly wrong.

Team this with a competitive mother eagerly encouraging the girl to strut about winking at judges and blowing kisses and you have yourself what has recently become a red hot issue in Australia – the child beauty pageant epidemic. Although child beauty pageants have been around for years, a US-style [Universal Royalty Pageant](#) held at Northcote Town Hall last month brought the controversial event to the public arena.

The competition, the first of its kind in Australia, sparked a media circus as protesters and government members called for a ban on the American fad which was alleged to be far too glamorous and provocative for young, susceptible children.

But despite community outrage, the competition was given the all clear by Victoria's Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary, who claimed that no regulations were being breached.

So why, given the angry community response and the potentially harmful effects for young contestants, is Australia prepared to host the same event in Sydney next year?

Funder of Victorian anti-pageant group [Pull the Pin](#) Catherine Manning said if these types of beauty pageants are to continue, they need to be adequately regulated.

“We’d like to see some sort of legislation, some sort of age restriction applied to competitions where physical beauty is judged,” Ms Manning said.

“I don’t like the idea of little girls being pitted against each other in a beauty competition regardless of what they’re wearing. Even if they’re going to stand together and be judged and rewarded solely on their appearance, it’s morally wrong.”

### **Killing innocence**

Applying false eyelashes, teeth whitener or even Botox to a little girl is a gross misconduct of a child’s innocence.

Switch on Foxtel’s Lifestyle YOU channel and you’ll see young girls morphed into flawless beauty princesses on Foxtel’s high-rating show Toddlers and Tiaras.



Are beauty pageants placing too much physical and emotional stress on young girls? PhilRose

Just recently, the series received criticism for featuring a child dressed as Dolly Parton, sporting breast and butt padding to complete the celebrity look.

The show continues to air to millions of viewers across the nation.

The long-standing opinion in the psychology community about children's beauty pageants is that they are not in the best interests of healthy child development.

Over the past 10 years there has been a 270% increase in the number of girls hospitalised with eating disorders.

Girls as young as seven years old have also reportedly been diagnosed with anorexia, which is directly related to body image.

These statistics should be a warning to parents entering their vulnerable children into such events – that it is potentially endangering the child's self worth.

### **Mothers know best**

On the other end of the spectrum are mothers who believe the competitions are no different from competitive sports or extracurricular activities like ballet or gymnastics.

Mother of three Ann Panayi said she didn't regret entering her children in beauty pageants when they were younger and the media have blown this issue completely out of proportion.

“It’s all a bit of innocent fun. Every child deserves to feel beautiful and this is merely another way of making them feel comfortable and pretty in their skin,” Mrs Panayi said.

“It’s no different to putting a child into tennis lessons day in day out. It’s fun for the kids.”

But Catherine Manning begs to differ, claiming the competitions are from the average extra-curricular activity.

“There’s a huge difference when you enter your child into a sport or competition that’s based on talent. If you enter your child in a soccer game or a singing competition, if they lose that competition they can come home and practice and enhance that skill,” she said.

“With a beauty competition, you can’t practice what you look like. If you don’t fit the mould, if you don’t fit the narrow beauty definition, then it’s difficult to win without ramifications.”

### **Too American for our shores?**

Despite psychologists predicting deep-seated issues in the futures of young participants, child pageant events across Australia are soldiering on with their Toddlers and Tiaras style pageants.

In fact, the Universal Royalty Pageant announced they will be holding another event in Sydney next year. It is disturbing enough that we are hooked on reality TV shows that feature children primped and preened like adults or dolls, but to be in the process of hosting an Americanised version on our own shores in the near future is disappointing, to say the least.

If Australia is to continue this American fad, then the government must remain vigilant in monitoring future events.

Why they have not yet responded appropriately to the collective cry of those against the recent competition is concerning.

### **Keeping an eye on our children**

There is enough unnecessary focus on superficial beauty in this culture without children competing against one another in a contest of looks.

In the end, it comes down to fact: no one, least of all children, should compete based on physical beauty.

How the wider community reacts to future pageants, only time – or angry protesters – will tell.

### **Do you think Australia should go ahead with US-style child beauty pageants?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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