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How Do Child Beauty Pageants Affect a Child's Development?

by *Laura Agadoni, Demand Media* 

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Beauty pageants might send the wrong message.

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Few organized child activities spawn as much heated debate as child beauty pageants. They strike a nerve with some people who believe small children should not parade around in hairdos, clothing and makeup that are not age-appropriate. But proponents claim it builds confidence in their children.

External Vs. Internal Values

Psychologist and TV talk show host Phil McGraw told pageant moms in a 2003 episode that they need to explain to their children that a beauty pageant is a fantasy. If parents don't stress that fact, children might be more concerned with developing their looks than with developing their internal selves, he said. Beauty pageants stress looks, glamor and, often, provocative attire. Children can easily believe after competing in pageants that they should concentrate too much on external and superficial aspects of beauty instead of developing internal values of caring for others and a love of learning.

Possible Emotional Problems

Syd Brown, a child and adolescent psychologist in Maryland, agreed with McGraw's sentiments on "Good Morning America." Not only do children who compete in pageants measure their self-worth by their looks, they are in for a downfall if they don't stay as pretty when they grow up, says Brown. Kids could develop acne, or their figures might not develop into what they imagined they would. Many pageant kids who placed all their eggs in their looks basket might be in for emotional problems. Martina M. Cartwright, a professor of nutritional sciences at the University of Arizona, said at PsychologyToday.com that it's not uncommon for teens who used to be in pageants to develop eating disorders and have body image problems.

Financial Strain

Beauty pageants are expensive, and some parents use money that could be spent on education or maybe family vacations on pageants. The average cost of a pageant dress is \$1,000, and some cost as much as \$5,000, according to a "Good Morning America" report. Entry fees for pageants typically cost \$100 or \$200. Some pageants require contestants to wear several outfits, which can raise the price tag even further, not to mention travel expenses, which are often part of the deal.

Sexualizes Them

Young girls who compete in pageants often look sexy by wearing makeup, hair extensions, "flippers" -- false teeth to hide baby teeth -- revealing outfits and by

learning provocative poses and moves. Paul Peterson, president and founder of A Minor Consideration, said on “Good Morning America” that beauty pageants are “feeding the sex industry.” Phillip Block, chairman of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, concurs. Block told the Australian Associated Press, reported “Allure” magazine, that he supports a ban on child beauty pageants in Australia because pageants judge contestants on “sexualized ideals.” Being judged that way impacts mental and emotional development and affects self-esteem and body image, says Block.

References

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- [Good Morning America: Beauty Pageants Draw Children and Criticism](#)
- [Allure: Should Child Beauty Pageants Be Banned Altogether?](#)
- [Psychology Today: Child Beauty Pageants -- What Are We Teaching Our Girls?](#)

About the Author

Laura Agadoni has been writing professionally since 1983. Her feature stories on area businesses, human interest and health and fitness appear in her local newspaper. She has also written and edited for a grassroots outreach effort and has been published in "Clean Eating" magazine and in "Dimensions" magazine, a CUNA Mutual publication. Agadoni has a Bachelor of Arts in communications from California State University-Fullerton.

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