

Beyond Crowns, Sashes, and Heels: Factors Associated with Self-esteem and Achievement Motivation among Local Beauty Pageant Candidates in the Philippines

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Abstract: This paper explores the factors in a beauty pageant journey that are associated with the self-esteem and achievement motivation of local beauty pageant candidates.

Keywords: Beauty pageants, self-esteem, achievement motivation

1. Introduction

Filipinos treat pageants like a primary sport — beauty queens training for years, rising numbers of beauty queen trainers and camps, and growing fan base supporting every Filipino pageant representative. Of course, this enthusiasm may have an effect psychologically on the people in the pageant industry. The Philippines is gaining more and more international beauty queens — having four Miss Universes, six Miss Internationals, four Miss Earths, and one Miss world. These international recognitions are motivating more people to enter the pageant industry whether as a candidate, organizer, or simply as a fan. Through this study, there can be a large scope of people who can assess the psychological effects of pageants before joining such competitions and pageant enthusiasts that can learn about the industry they are supporting. Meanwhile, there are research that propose different takes on how the beauty pageant industry can affect one's self-esteem. The study of Everhart (2011) suggests that beauty pageant participation may have a direct influence on the candidates' self-esteem. Since the beauty pageant candidates engage in different activities that can hone them like talent portion, interview, and swimsuit training, they are more likely to have higher self-esteem than those who have not joined any pageant. According to the study of Everhart (2011), the mean of the self-esteem scores of 20 non-pageant participants is 28.1 while the mean of 20 pageant participants is 12.9. Higher scores correlated to lower self-esteem. Since those who competed had lower scores, this suggests higher self-esteem. However, according to Virtutio (2016), there are factors of the beauty pageants that focus solely on physical attributes making the candidates feel like they need to do changes to make them look perfect. Since there are certain

pageant stereotypes propagated, the candidates' self-esteem may be affected especially if they do not meet those standards. This can lead them to rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, liposuction, excessive diet and exercise, and other unhealthy activities just to fit in the standards. Moreover, according to the study of Thomson and Hammond (2013), 26% of pageant candidates developed eating disorders, 48.5% of them desired to be thinner, and 57% of them were in the process of trying to lose weight. These numbers show the body dissatisfaction of most contestants that can be rooted in the high physical-related commentaries in the pageant industry. Body perception is one of the biggest factors of self-esteem. To add to that, the study of Griego-Turner (2015) also noted that pageant participants who do not place in a beauty contest suffer from low self-esteem. This can make them feel incompetent and that they do not fit the perception of beauty that these kinds of contests propagate. With these in mind, it can be said that beauty pageants' experiences may possibly positively or negatively influence one's self-esteem. To add to that, there have been studies like the research of Hinojosa & Carle (2016) which show that some successful pageant winners became motivated to step into power especially in politics. Pageant candidates who gained confidence also became inspired to reach other glamorous ambitions like being a supermodel, actress, online influencer, and goodwill ambassador. This may suggest how pageants may also affect the desire of the participants to reach greater ambitions and how their experiences may possibly influence their achievement motivation. That is why it is vital to know what factors exactly can influence the candidate's self-esteem and achievement motivation. This study can give a comprehensive framework on the common profiles of beauty queens in the Philippines and what specific parts of their pageant journeys can affect how they view themselves and their motivation to achieve greater things. Furthermore, even if the pandemic has hardly hit the entertainment scene, pageant organizations continued to stage the biggest pageants. This study can also capture the relevance of pageants during the global health crisis. This study is important since this will be

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able to add knowledge on the pageant scene here in the Philippines and how the industry can affect the candidates psychologically.

The following are the objectives of the study:

1) *General Objective*

To determine the factors associated with self-esteem and achievement motivation among local beauty pageant candidates.

2) *Specific Objectives*

1. To describe the socio-demographic profile of the study respondents.
2. To determine the facilitating factors associated with self-esteem and achievement motivation among local beauty pageant candidates.
3. To determine the hindering factors associated with self-esteem and achievement motivation among local beauty pageant candidates.

2. Methodology

1) *Research Design*

This study is mixed-method research that combines qualitative and quantitative forms. This allowed the researcher to get comprehensive answers to the research questions. This study made use of a descriptive-correlational study design. Descriptive statistics were utilized in showing the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. This study will also try to describe the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The research is considered a cross-sectional survey study as well since the participants were only chosen based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria and it will compare population groups only at a single point in time.

2) *Study Population and Sampling Technique*

For the selection of participants, the researcher employed the respondent-driven sampling (RDS) technique with purposive methods of non-probability sampling. Moreover, purposive sampling was used because a criteria was followed in the selection of the participants in accordance with the needs of the study. The research has the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

B. *Inclusion Criteria*

1. Biologically female
2. Age between 18 years old to 27 years old
3. No. of Training years with a minimum of 6 months
4. Have at least participated in one pageant competition.

C. *Exclusion criteria*

1. Those who have been living outside the Philippines since March 2020 due to COVID19 lockdown.
2. Those who have not been active in the pageant scene.
3. Those who are physically and psychologically incapacitated.

D. *Withdrawal Criterion*

1) *Participants who request to withdraw*

Sample population computation: The study setting is within the pageant industry in the Philippines. The tables below represent the number of pageant candidates accepted to

compete at the national and local pageants for the past three years. These numbers indicate the official candidates of the most prominent local and national pageants that compete independently or may come from different camps.

Table 1
National Pageants no. of candidates

| Pageant | No. of Candidates |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Miss Universe Philippines | 51 |
| Binibining Pilipinas | 40 |
| Miss World Philippines | 40 |
| Miss Earth PH | 40 |
| Mutya ng Pilipinas | 40 |

Table 2
Local Pageants no. of candidates

| Pageant | No. of Candidates |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Miss Quezon City | 25 |
| Miss Manila | 32 |
| Miss Caloocan | 21 |
| Miss Las Pinas Water Lily | 20 |
| Binibining Paranaque | 13 |

Based on the foregoing, the study used the following formula for the sample size n in this thesis:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot X}{X + N - 1},$$

Where, $X = Z_{\alpha/2}^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p) / MOE^2$ and $Z_{\alpha/2}$ is the critical value of the normal distribution at $\alpha/2$ (e.g. for a confidence level of 95%, α is 0.05 and the critical value is 1.96), MOE is the margin of error, p is the sample proportion, and N is the population size. For the population in this study (Daniel, 1999), literature was calculated based on literature at a minimum of 300. After calculations, a total of 74 was reached to participate in the survey. The 74 respondents were reached through email and will be requested to accomplish an online survey using google form. The total p is inclusive of 10% spill-offs. Moreover, according to Al-Barashdi (2020), the recommended number of participants in a focus group discussion is between five and eight. For the focus group discussion in this study, there was only one session with seven participants (which is within the range of the ideal number of participants). To add to that, there were two key informant respondents, one veteran in the pageant industry and one pageant candidate that is new in the industry.

2) *Data Collection and Analysis*

For the quantitative data, a survey questionnaire with original scales were utilized. Descriptive statistics was used using percentage analysis and inferential statistics using linear regression were utilized to analyze the quantitative data. Meanwhile for the qualitative data, Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interviews were done. To analyze it, thematic design analysis was employed.

3) *Ethics Review*

This study has been approved by the UPMREB Ethics Review Panel and may be contacted through the following regarding the rights of study of participants including grievances and complaints:

Dr. Jacinto Mantaring III, UPM REB Panel Chair
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3. Quantitative Results

The study was able to describe the overall pageant experiences the local beauty queens have and its effects on their self-esteem and achievement motivation using statistics and a scale created by the researcher. The table below summarizes the socio-demographic profile of the candidates:

Table 3
 Socio-Demographic profile of candidates

| VARIABLES | % |
|--|-------|
| Age | |
| 18-20 years old | 54% |
| 21-24 years old | 41.9% |
| 25-27 years old | 4.1% |
| Length of pageant experience/training | |
| 6 months-1 year | 41.9% |
| More than 3 years | 29.7% |
| 1.5 years-3 years | 28.4% |
| Levels of pageants participated in | |
| Local pageants and no national | 51.4% |
| More than one local and one national | 21.6% |
| More than one local and more than one national | 13.5% |
| One local and more than one national | 10.8% |
| One national and one local | 2.7% |
| Types of pageant trainings | |
| One-on-one tutorial | 30.5% |
| Modeling training | 23.6% |
| Pageant Workshop | 20.8% |
| Pageant Camp | 14.6% |
| Fitness program | 9.8% |
| Online resources | 0.7% |

The following tables summarize the overall pageant experience, self-esteem, and achievement motivation descriptive statistics.

Table 4
 Overall pageant experiences domains

| INDICATORS | MEAN SCORE | RANGE | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Pageant Placements | 22.20 | 7-14= LOW | High |
| Public Commentaries | 22.06 | | Positive |
| Amount of Support Received | 22.20 | | High |
| Social Network: Family | 24.27 | 15-21= MODERATE | Strong |
| Social Network: Friends | 24.38 | | Strong |
| Social Network: Co-candidates | 24.55 | | Strong |
| | | 22-28= HIGH | |

Table 5
 Self-esteem score

| INDICATORS | MEAN SCORE | RANGE | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------|------------|--|-------------|
| Self-esteem | 53.88 | 15-30= LOW 31-46= MODERATE 47-60= HIGH | High |

Table 6
 Achievement motivation scores

| INDICATORS | MEAN SCORE | RANGE | DESCRIPTION |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| Persistence | 23.50 | 7-14= LOW | High |
| Competitive Behavior | 24.55 | | 15-21= MODERATE |
| Ability to delay gratification | 23.34 | 22-28=HIGH | High |

With regards to pageant placements, the respondents generally have a high pageant placement which means they usually take-home minor or major awards in the pageants they participate in. The study also found out that the local pageant candidates generally get positive public commentaries. People usually react in a positive way with regards to their pageant performance and they seldom get negative comments or at least, only a few of them get flooded with harsh comments. The local pageant candidates generally get a high amount of support. They are usually given different kinds of support tangible and intangible. With regards to social networks, the descriptive statistical data from the scale created by the researcher show that local pageant candidates generally have strong relationships with their families, friends, and co-candidates. Their families and friends are usually hands-on in helping and supporting them during their pageant journeys. As for their co-candidates, they usually build genuine friendships with the candidates they compete with and they feel comfortable with them during and after the competition. The researcher found out that local pageant candidates generally have high self-esteem. They usually have high respect and admiration for themselves. They believe in their capabilities to achieve their goals and contribute positively to the world.

Meanwhile, the achievement motivation scale created by the researcher was based on Immanuel Thomas and Muthee J.M. 's Achievement Motivation Inventory. The scale was divided into three domains -- persistence, competitive behavior, and ability to delay gratification. The statistics show that the local pageant candidates generally have a high persistence rate. They are willing to continue on their endeavors despite the difficulties they face along the way. Meanwhile, the pageant contenders in the Philippines generally have high competitive behavior. They are willing to take a high number of steps to ace the competition but do not necessarily do this just for the sake of attention or competition. For the last domain, the results show that the candidates have ease in delaying gratification.

Table 7
 Bivariate Summary

| Bivariate Summary of Overall Pageant Experience and Self-esteem | | | |
|---|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| .527 | .278 | .213 | 4.474 |

They can easily fight the impulse to take the readily available gratification in the hopes of having a greater reward in the future. A bivariate regression was conducted to examine how

Table 8
 Bivariate Summary

| Bivariate Summary of Overall Pageant Experience and Achievement Motivation | | | |
|--|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| .399 | .159 | .084 | 7.398 |

the candidate's overall pageant experiences can predict their self-esteem and their achievement motivation. For the computation of the overall pageant experiences of the candidates, the pageant experiences domains (pageant placement, public commentaries, amount of support received) and social networks domains (family, friends, and fellow candidates) were all added. As for the self-esteem, a scatterplot of the relationship between pageant experience and self-esteem is linear and did not have bivariate outliers. The relationship between overall pageant experience and self-esteem is strongly statistically significant $r=0.527$ as seen in figure 7. The r^2 for this data is 0.278; that means that 27.8% of the variance in self-esteem is predictable from the overall pageant experience. This implies a relatively strong relationship between pageant experience and self-esteem. At the same time, another bivariate regression was conducted to examine how the candidate's overall pageant experiences can predict their achievement motivation. The scatterplot for these variables was also linear and did not have bivariate outliers. The correlation between overall pageant experience and achievement motivation was also statistically relevant $r=0.399$ as seen in figure 8. The r^2 for data is 0.159; that means 15.9% of the variance in achievement motivation is predictable from the overall pageant experience. This implies a moderate relationship between overall pageant experience and achievement motivation. The quantitative data affirm the findings in the qualitative data that the pageant experiences of pageant candidates can indeed influence the self-esteem and achievement motivation of the local pageant candidates.

4. Qualitative Results

The qualitative interviews conducted by the researcher were able to garner a rich amount of information about the specific factors that affect the self-esteem and achievement motivation of the candidates.

1) Support System of Candidates

First of all, results show that the support system of the candidates has a big role to play. As for the local pageant candidates, their beauty pageant camp trainers and mentors have been some of their biggest allies. There were even cases where some candidates did not have the full support of their families, however, it is their trainers in the beauty pageant camps who kept them motivated. This finding was strengthened by Flores (2019, as cited in France-Presse, Lavallee), the founder of Kagandahang Flores Camp when he stated that the beauty pageant camps have turned the Philippines into a pageant powerhouse and it was able to raise the level of pageant support and training given to local beauty queens. The respondents also revealed several moments they felt discouraged during the competition. This is where the support of their families, partners, and friends becomes very crucial. They can comfortably share their difficult moments to these people and would often turn to them for financial, emotional, and instrumental support.

2) Pageant Placements

The rankings and placements of the beauty pageant candidates also affect their self-regard and motivation. The

varying pageant outcomes is very common because even the most successful beauty queens had experienced both wins and losses. Pia Wurtzbach lost twice and only won the Miss Universe Philippines crown on her third try while Catriona Gray lost in the Miss World competition and found herself being crowned as Miss Universe a few years later. During the times they won, they described how it made them feel proud of themselves and they became more motivated to join more pageants. However, when they experienced loss, they started to question their abilities and had feelings of disappointment, sadness, and even anger.

3) Pageant Advocacies

The rise of promotion of different advocacies in big pageants, gave even more relevance to the pageant industry. The different advocacies and a chance to take part in different community works motivate pageant aspirants to join and win different beauty pageants. The respondents have also emphasized that pageants continue to be helpful during the COVID-19 crisis because of the advocacies the organizations promote. Beauty queens were given chances to do meaningful charity works during the global pandemic. This was backed up by Lee (2020, as cited in Adina, 2020), the national director of the Miss Universe Philippines Organization who stated that they continued to hold their pageant not just for entertainment to the pageant-obsessed Filipinos fans but also to use this platform to provide hope to the Filipino people during these trying times. Pageants have been more instrumental during these times since this platform was also used by the contestants to fulfill their philanthropic missions (Lee, 2020, as cited in Adina, 2020).

4) Pressures brought by Pageantry

Since beauty queens in the Philippines become famous public personalities, there are also a lot of pressures that come with their position. The study revealed that local beauty pageant candidates become pressured with age especially when they are nearing 28 years old since that is the maximum age to join big international pageants. They are pressured to join before they exceed the age limit. Moreover, since beauty pageants take a lot of resources, the pageant candidates are pressured to be prepared financially to join a competition. According to Sashes and Script (2018), each candidate has to prepare about Php 250,000-Php 500,000 to participate in a national pageant. Since the pageant competition has become very stiff in the Philippines, more candidates can spend more than Php 500,000 since some would invest in having several social media publicity materials, high standard couture gowns, and building a competent team (including a make-up artist, stylist, handler, coaches, creative directors, and photographers). Lastly, since training for a beauty pageant takes up a lot of time, the contenders are also pressured to put their other dreams on hold (Ex. schooling, career opportunities, venturing into the business) and marriage since the famous pageants prohibit contestants who have been married or previously married.

5) Body-image Issues

At the same time, the beauty pageant industry has always been criticized for exposing thin-ideal images. The respondents revealed that they experience certain body image issues. Those contestants who fit the ideal petite standard of beauty feel that

they are more capable, and their body can be their advantage in the competition. However, those who are on the heavier side, they experience stress and pressure when they compare themselves to other people. In fact, some respondents are already considered slim by other people, but the candidates continue to perceive themselves as heavy. This finding can also explain what Wales (2013) stated that several studies have already stated that more than a quarter of women who join pageants are likely to be suffering from an eating disorder because of the pressure they feel to fit in.

6) *Beauty Stereotypes*

The stereotypes in the industry are not only confined to the bodies of the candidates but also their other physical attributes. Moreover, the colonial influences still continue to leave a massive impact on the ideologies of the Filipinos. That is why Filipinos still prefer western looking women who are tall, fair-skinned, have sharp noses, etc. This preference has made the western features the standard of beauty in the country and even in the pageant scene (Rafael, 2000). The local pageant candidates have stated that they evaluate themselves higher when they fit the traditional notions of beauty. On the other hand, the candidates who do not meet the ideal standards battle with insecurities and tend to have lower self-evaluations.

7) *Success of Former Filipina Beauty Queens*

The high number of successful Filipinas in different beauty pageants influences the motivation of the current local pageant contenders. They consider the victories, socio-civic involvements, and success stories of these former beauty queens as a source of motivation. Some of the inspirational Filipina beauty queens that were mentioned are Pura Villanueva Kalaw (First Filipina Beauty Queen, Queen of Orient 1908), Venus Raj (Miss Universe 2010 4th Runner up), Pia Wurtzbach (Miss Universe 2015), Catriona Gray (Miss Universe 2018), and Karen Ibasco (Miss Earth 2017).

8) *Public Commentaries*

Furthermore, since beauty queens are given public exposure, there are several public commentaries towards them. This makes them an easy target of bashers. The local pageant candidates highlighted that there were several people who state hurtful remarks towards their physical appearance and pageant performances which can make them feel demotivated. With the height of the use of social media, it has been easier for the candidates to receive nasty comments which sometimes dampen their spirits as they compete. There was even a respondent who experienced depression after being severely bashed online. This took a toll not only on her but also on her family. However, there are other candidates who have learned to manage what comments they should take in. This is aligned with the past experiences of beauty queens because even the most successful beauty queens experienced bashing. For example, Catriona Gray was not only bashed by ordinary people but also by fellow beauty queens like Coco Suparuk, Miss Grand Thailand 2019 who shared a photo of Catriona with a caption that says "fat" (Olarte, 2019) and Bb. Pilipinas World 2007 Maggie Wilson and Miss International 2013 Bea Rose Santiago both stated on their social media accounts that Gray did not deserve the Bb. Pilipinas' "Best in Swimsuit" award

stating that she did not have the best body out of all the candidates (ABS-CBN News, 2018).

9) *Role of Media*

The candidates have also experienced how their experiences with media affect their self-esteem and achievement motivation as well. Since pageants partner with several sources of media to be able to get publicity and more profit. The press presentation where the candidates are officially introduced to the media is one of the segments where the candidates feel pressured to do well. There are also a growing number of beauty pageant analysts and pageant bloggers who have a say in whether the candidates can be considered front-runners. The local pageant candidates expressed that when they are included in the "hit list" or hot picks of these bloggers, they feel more motivated that they can ace the competition. However, when the candidates are not being interviewed by the press or featured by the bloggers, they have the tendency to question their abilities.

10) *Ambitions outside Pageantry*

The local pageant contenders do have other lives outside their pageantry careers. The respondents have mentioned the other ambitions they want to pursue in the world of business, academia, and even media. They have also mentioned that the values they learned in pageantries like hard work, perseverance, and dedication can be applied in their other career opportunities. Indeed, their pageant experiences have motivated them to reach more goals in their lives.

5. Conclusion

The pageant experience factors that were found to facilitate a high self-esteem and achievement motivation are support from family, friends, and pageant camps, high placements during the competitions, the advocacies of pageant organizations especially during the pandemic, and the success of former Filipino beauty queens. Meanwhile, the factors that hinder high self-esteem and achievement motivation are pressures brought by pageantry like age and budget, body image issues, rigid stereotypical standards of beauty, and foul remarks from the media. Meanwhile, their pageant experiences have also been found to affect the values, mindset, and motivation in the other ambitions they wish to pursue. This quantitative bivariate regression conducted in this study affirmed the qualitative data. There is a strong relationship found between overall pageant experience and self-esteem. At the same time, there is a moderate relationship between overall pageant experience and achievement motivation of the local pageant candidates that was discovered. This study was able to highlight that the different factors in the pageant experiences of local pageant contenders can have effects on their self-esteem and achievement motivation.

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