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Trailer Park Royalty: Southern Child Beauty Pageants, Girlhood and Power

Elisabeth Blumer Thompson

TRAILER PARK ROYALTY: SOUTHERN CHILD BEAUTY PAGEANTS, GIRLHOOD AND POWER

by

ELISABETH BLUMER THOMPSON

(Under the Direction of William M. Reynolds)

ABSTRACT

Child beauty pageants are a phenomenon in rural communities throughout Georgia. My belief is that most of those who compete in these pageants are from the lower socio-economic bracket, participating for a multitude of reasons. A bricolage of post-structural feminism, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and cultural studies lenses will analyze how the performances of participants and the power exercised by the beauty pageant culture work to formulate girls' identities. Analysis will also include how power operates to perpetuate this subculture and its "right" to dictate norms for beauty and acceptance and will be situated in the culture of girlhood. Examination of what is depicted in popular culture through videos, documentaries, and television shows will also occur. I suggest that the rural beauty pageant culture does work to create girlhood identity and a way in which the participants view the world and themselves. In fact, I believe that the rural beauty pageant culture does intricate cultural work in terms of gender and class.

INDEX WORDS: Child beauty pageants, Girlhood, Bricolage, Post-structural feminism, Critical ethnography, Critical hermeneutics, Cultural studies, Gender, Class

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DEDICATION

My daddy always said he could provide four key things for me when I was a child: food, clothing, shelter, and an education. Through this set of "rights" outlined for me, I became a young lady with an enormous love of learning and an undying desire for academic excellence. The consummate gentleman and an unending fount of information, John Frederick Blumer III encouraged me to apply for the doctoral program in Curriculum Studies. Upon my acceptance, he was a faithful cheerleader and dogged encourager for me to complete my studies and write this dissertation. He almost lived to see that dream to completion. On May 30, 2007, Daddy lost a courageous battle with metastatic hepatoma. My prospectus defense was held the very next day. He witnessed the beginnings of the culmination of my writing, only to watch from heaven as I stood before the committee and defended August 13, 2007, and he will be there with that great cloud of witnesses in December to watch me – donned in my hood and graduation regalia – walk across the stage and have this doctorate conferred upon me. With great love, undying gratitude, and the promise to continue Daddy's love of learning, I dedicate this dissertation to him. I did it, Daddy! Spread the word in heaven.

In like fashion, I dedicate this work to my mother – the lady who made trips too many to count to keep my sons while I wrote, most at the height of Daddy's decline. You are the true example of a lady and a Godly woman. Your wisdom and your example provide me with a model of who I desire to be. And your determination, love of learning, and demand for nothing less than the best have made me into the learned, multi-faceted woman I now am. You are amazing and I love you so.

And without fail, I dedicate this to my two angels, Zach and Tyler. You have been very patient as Mommy has traveled back and forth for classes, locked herself in her room to type, hauled you to Statesboro to attend classes or to "drop something off quick as a bunny in the College of Education," and forced you to eat oh-so-much fast food as my time was diverted to the all-consuming dissertation. You are my heart – and I am who I am because you inspire me to be the best for you.

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Dr. Shirley R. Steinberg, outside member of my doctoral committee, contributed increased insight, constant and much-needed guidance, editorial direction, encouragement, and excitement throughout this entire project. All of this stemmed from a "chance" conversation in a receiving line at Georgia Southern University in 2003. Nothing happens by accident, and I am indebted that my plan included our meeting.

Dr. Delores D. Liston served on the doctoral committee and provided advice with data collection, feminism, and analysis. I appreciate her mark on my life and my work.

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My parents loved, encouraged, and motivated me to work from the moment I was accepted into the program in August of 2001 – with a 3 year old and a 7 month old in tow. Not miraculously have I made it to this juncture, but by the wonderful support, both physical and emotional, you have provided.

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To all of my other friends and students who have encouraged me and have taken special interest in my doctoral pursuit, your support and belief helped me achieve this goal. It is true – I am no longer writing this book. It is finished!

Most importantly, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – you began this good work and I am most thankful that you have seen it through to completion. Nothing is possible without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: A kindergarten beauty queen.

Perhaps it is due to the fact that the first recorded beauty pageant in Spa, Belgium, in 1888 was held on my birthday, September 19th that I am fascinated with pageantry and find myself in the midst of this study. Or maybe it comes from my exposure to the subculture of pageants in rural Georgia – as I am living in a town of 4000 people with 5 dance studios and a pageant every weekend at the 4-H Clubhouse or the mall 30 miles away. Or perhaps it stems from the images in popular culture that state "she's Miss America, and I'm just the girl next door…" among other things. As I ponder these things and possible reasons for my interest, I am reminded of the phenomenon that continues in rural communities throughout the Southeast – most specifically in Georgia. Do the girls

who participate in these weekend pageants one can find throughout the state do so because they want to stand apart – or do they participate for that "one-in-a-million" opportunity to gain fame and fortune?

The pageants I refer to are not the Miss America or Miss USA systems, nor are they quite the "JonBenet Ramsey-esque" pageants seen on television again recently due to the resurfacing of her story. No, these are the festival and fair pageants, the pageants perpetuated by small groups and civic organizations throughout the rural South. My chief belief is that most of those who compete in these pageants happen to be from the lower socio-economic bracket and they pursue the crown and titles for a multitude of reasons.

Since it is evident that beauty pageants do operate to construct female identity, *Trailer Park Royalty* begins with an investigation into what constitutes and defines the rural beauty pageant. Chapter one will focus on pageant structure and will give a history of beauty pageants and their place in culture. The grounding of and framework for the methodology will be provided. This chapter will also give information on girlhood and the implications of female involvement in pageants.

Chapter two will situate the research process in the critical tradition in relation to the beauty pageant culture, and more specifically the rural beauty pageant culture. A review of the literature surrounding the beauty pageant culture will be included as well.

Chapter three will provide a poststructural feminist, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and popular culture comment on beauty pageant performance. These lenses will be combined to analyze how the performances of participants and the power exercised by the beauty pageant culture work to formulate girls' feminine identity as

power operates to perpetuate this subculture and its "right" to dictate norms for beauty and acceptance.

Chapter four will provide analysis of the information gathered from the study of pageants, works written on pageantry, and media depictions of pageantry in relation to the power that operates and the effects on girlhood. It will also be a comment on the ways in which pageant participants experience both success and victimization from participation. In addition, the irony of appearances – the acceptability of making children look like adults – will be explored. This discussion will be situated in the culture of girlhood and around what prompts parents to enter their little girls into pageants. In order to make the decision to pay the entry fee and buy the clothing and other necessary items, there has to be some driving force, some reason behind these actions. What is depicted in popular culture through videos, documentaries, and televisions shows will also be examined.

Chapter five will not be the traditional focus on conclusions. Instead, knowledge that can be "used for social action that transforms grand narratives and discourses" will be discussed (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, p. 106). I will consider the implications of post structural feminism, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and popular culture and will use these findings for future investigations of pageantry and the culture of girlhood as it relates to pageantry.

I suggest that the rural beauty pageant culture does work to create girlhood identity and a way in which the participants view the world and themselves. The rural beauty pageant culture attempts to provide a definition of girlhood femininity in a commodified culture where femininity is unstable and unfixed as a category. However, it

cannot accommodate all of the tensions that arise in defining "femininity." In fact, I believe that the rural beauty pageant culture does intricate cultural work in terms of girlhood and class.

CHAPTER 1

RURAL SOUTHERN CHILD BEAUTY PAGEANT CULTURE, GIRLHOOD AND POWER

Southern rural beauty pageants are very much a part of Southern culture. They offer a view into the ways female identity is formed - more specifically, Southern female identity: Who counts as feminine? What does it mean to be a specifically feminine member of a group? How are social concerns – such as racism, multiculturalism, economic standing, and values – mediated in and through girls' bodies on a public stage? What are the social and cultural conditions through which particular kinds of representations can occur?

Our postmodern culture focuses on questions and concerns about identity and its formation, along with the intensity and speed of identity change. The evidence of our national focus on identity and difference are seen in the social issues of minority equity, immigration, sexual orientation, and social programs such as welfare. In each of these, identification with a certain group and the difference of that group from others is what is at question; as a culture, we are quick to define the criteria of what it means to be of a certain gender, to be of a certain race, or to be of a certain class. All of these areas are also defined and discussed (or silenced) on the beauty pageant stage. Sarah Banet-Weiser (1999) states "in contemporary popular culture, unruly celebrities and riotous popular events force our attention and our fascination (if by nothing other than their sheer ubiquitous presence) over debates concerning 'appropriate' boundaries of contemporary racial, gendered, and sexual identities" (p. 2).

The beauty pageant has become a theatre for meanings of individual and cultural identities to be created, discussed, and disputed. It provides both a gendered representation and a regional representation of these identities. It is a civic ritual in that it gives people an arena in which to tell stories of themselves to themselves. Being commodity-driven, it becomes a mass-mediated spectacle that is deeply embedded in the culture in a time when almost all forms of social participation are shaped by the continuous interplay between representation and consumption. As a visible performance of gender, the acts that construct girls as feminine are seen as positive and good, and these constructions are to be desired. And, since the presentation and reinvention of identity takes place on the beauty pageant stage, the pageant then becomes a political arena as it produces political subjects.

This study will center on the rural, Southern beauty pageant culture and how these pageants work to form identity. The divergent views of how pageants are damaging and how they are still desirable will be discussed. The dichotomy of being a winner and yet a victim of the power that operates in the pageant sub-culture as a result of participation in pageants and by the pageant system itself will be at issue. The conservative standpoint of the positive impact of the ever elusive "poise," self-confidence, and individual achievement will be highlighted. And it will become evident that there is no one definition of the "rural, Southern beauty pageant" and that there is no one meaning of it to be garnered for all groups or individuals. This, therefore, will not define, once and for all, the entity and meaning of the rural, Southern beauty pageant, but will work to understand the power that operates to form girlhood identity in the beauty pageant culture.

The significance of this study is seen in many ways. First, there are few works on beauty pageants as a form of popular culture, most specifically rural southern beauty pageants. Many works have been completed on the Miss America, Miss USA and Miss World systems of pageants and how they work to create a national identity (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Brewer, 1999; Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje, 1996; Dick, 2002; Giroux, 2000; Lovegrove, 2002; Savage, 1998; Tice, 2006; Latham, 1995), but few works exist on the impact of the smaller, more pervasive rural pageants and their impact on girl and female identity construction (Heltsey, 2004; Boyd, 1996; Levey, 2002; Cross, 2004; Roberts, 2002, Tice, 2006; Pannell, 2004). And even fewer exist on the culture of girlhood and how pageants affect that culture (Cross, 2004; Lalik and Oliver, 2005; Harris, 2004; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2005).

From a feminist standpoint, this study will not be one from the traditional feminist standpoint on beauty pageants that sees girls' bodies as objectified, nor will it be from a "post-feminist" standpoint, which says that the current feminist ideologies have created beings that are victimized, and vulnerable and needing protection. This study will approach the popular culture subject of beauty pageants and the ways in which they operate to form girlhood identity from a post-structural feminist viewpoint. Poststructural feminism emphasizes feminism as the

> quintessential postmodern discourse. As feminists focus on and affirm that which is absent and/or peripheral in modernist ways of seeing, they ground the poststructuralist critique in lived reality, in the material world (Steinberg, 2004, p. 8).

The ideas of class issues in relation to women and their place lower in this realm in society and of the oppression of women by males in society are central to the poststructural feminist approach to analysis of the lived experiences of women. And this lens will allow for the injecting of

> feeling, empath, and the body into the act of inquiry, blurring the distinction between knower and known, viewer and viewed – looking at truth as a *process* of construction in which knowers and viewers play an active role (Steinberg, 2004, p.8).

This will call for a reading of the body that is deconstructive, not to build new formulations but to open possibilities for further strategies. "Since our bodies bear the marks of culture, practices and policies," this study will allow for the thinking beyond current boundaries and will "expose what is generally overlooked because it is too uncomfortable to discuss and will bring to light those things that generally remain obscured" (Pillow, 2000, p. 214).

As a woman who competed in beauty pageants on various levels and has worked within the Miss America system and in local pageant systems as a coach and pageant coordinator, I have seen the positives and negatives of beauty pageant involvement and the ways that power operates within this culture. However, what interests me is the phenomenon of identity development in the pageant sub-culture. For many girls, who they are, how they view their bodies and their self worth, and how they view the world is largely shaped by their participation in beauty pageants. And, I noticed that in rural Georgia, the titles that have been won do not fall by the wayside as one ages; instead, they are continually used to define who a girl or woman is and why she is credible in

certain job and cultural areas – dance instructor, etiquette instructor, pageant director, public speaker, entertainment coordinator, civic group member, and more. All of this prompted me to inquire why this happened and what in the pageant culture worked to formulate the identities of these girls.

This study looks at how beauty pageants work as a part of culture to produce feminine identity – especially in the area of girlhood and in relation to socio-economic standing. I am a gendered female in the contemporary United States commodity culture. It is because of my place in the culture and my involvement in pageants that this is important to me and others interested in feminist studies and popular culture. According to Banet-Weiser (1999),

> Popular cultural forms such as the beauty pageant have been both celebrated and vilified as sites for scholarly inquiry in the last decade; though many have challenged an understanding of U.S. popular culture as merely a vehicle for the cultural industry, the legacy of the Frankfurt School has nonetheless proved to be remarkably resilient (p. 5).

Popular culture is not just a reification of the dominant ideology, but it is closely tied to the commodity culture. Identity is no longer seen as something that is "given" or "done" to someone; rather, a culture of creation and one that George Lipsitz (1990) says competes for dominance in a multiplicity of discourses. In this light, pageants are a public display, they focus on archaic systems of medieval pageantry, and they create and articulate female identity norms. For these reasons, they are situated in popular culture and call to be studied.

Historical Roots of Beauty Pageants

Although historically pageants could be said to have begun in Greek mythology with the story of Paris and his selection of the "most beautiful woman in the world" – Helen – and his subsequent snubbing of the goddesses of Mount Olympus, the first real "beautiful baby" and other contests in America were begun by the famed P. T. Barnum to draw crowds and add to his traveling shows (Riverol, 1992). This concept of having competitions to find the "most beautiful" led to Atlantic City's famed "Miss America Pageant," developed in 1921 as a way to keep tourists in the coastal town after Labor Day. Miss America had many ups and downs over the years, but it cannot be denied that the pageant itself led to the current systems of pageants (now more commonly known as "beauty contests") seen across the nation today.

In 1953, the modern world watched with rapt attention as Elizabeth II was crowned in ornate splendor at Westminster Abbey. My own mother recalls, with dreamy voice, that her whole school got together to watch the coronation live on television. And each little girl dreamed of wearing a jeweled crown, so it seemed. The world – specifically the United States – became enamored with the idea of royalty and pageantry. And this led to increased interest in Miss America and the development of other local and national pageant systems in the United States. In fact, by 1957, the Miss America Pageant System, along with its sponsors the Jaycees, created the America's Junior Miss system to honor high school seniors – and thereby develop a new "crop" of contestants ready for the Miss America stage (Pageant Center, 2007, p.3). As the baby-boomer generation began to grow up and participate in these pageants, the move was being made

to having younger and younger females as contestants in these beauty and scholarship pageants.

It did not take long for the idea of dressing up and being considered royalty to become vogue for girls in the United States under the age of 10. Just three years after the *Junior Miss* System began, *Little Miss Universe* – an international pageant for children – began in Miami, Florida (Pageant Center, 2007, p. 4). This led to more children's pageants, among them the *Little Miss America Pageant* in New Jersey, which was the creation of the Palisades Amusement Park in 1961. P.T. Barnum and the Atlantic City creation had led to a national love of royalty, crowns, competition, and beauty standards – for girls under the age of 16. Pageants for teens popped up all over the country - *Miss Teenage America* in 1961, *Miss National Teen-Ager* in 1971, *Miss United Teenager* in 1971, and *Miss Teen All America* in 1976 – and one of the longest standing pageant systems for children, *Cinderella Pageants*, began in 1971 and became a leading scholarship pageant for children (Pageant Center, 2007, p.6).

It seemed, from the beginning of the modern beauty pageant, that the Nordic peoples of Northern Europe were the models for beauty (Savage, 1998, p. 62). This was further noted in the cultural phenomenon of women with darker skin tones using powder to lighten their complexions to attract attention from the opposite sex. "When it came right down to it, white was beautiful" (Savage, 1998, p. 62). In the beginning, only white, Anglo-Saxon women were allowed to compete in the pageants. And for the little girl pageants, the same held true in the beginning. Over time, the barriers came down and African-American, Jewish, and women of other races were admitted to contests. But

even when this happened, they conformed to the accepted standards of "whiteness" or they seemed not to fare well in the competition.

It is a well noted fact that when African-Americans are portrayed in mainstream representation, they usually look the most "white." For many African Americans, this was clearly the case with Vanessa Williams with her straight hair and her Caucasian features. Williams did not embrace a white femininity, but considered herself a woman of color, despite her wide, green eyes, full mouth, and oblong face framed by shoulder-length hair falling in loose waves highlighted in gold. Yes, she did seem to fit the "white is right" bill for Miss America, and that seemed to work for the pageant realm at large.

This idea of race and pageantry as a site for race to be discussed and situated continues to exist. And even though there have been great strides to include girls from many races, there still seems to be among the rural, Southern beauty pageant culture, a belief that the Nordic northern European stereotype is the model to strive to meet. Blond, blue-eyed, and relatively fair-skinned (the tanning bed is changing things a bit here!) seems to be the look to have for the pageant circuit, past and present.

In the United States currently there are about 3,000 annual pageants geared towards those girls under the age of 11. These pageants are most often held in states on the West Coast (California, specifically) and the Southeast (Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia). In fact, most of these pageants are held in shopping malls and hotel ballrooms in mid-sized towns and cities across these areas. And these "pageant systems" have a set of requirements, competition types, registration fees, and modeling styles specific to themselves. In order to compete and hope to win, one must be aware of these requirements (Gleick, 1997, p. 2).

Contestants' are judged in the areas of writing skills (grammar, spelling, and mechanics on the application, essay portion – if required, and short answer questions), interviews, talent, poise, personality, modeling style, and attractiveness in most pageants. There are also additional categories, such as prettiest dress, prettiest smile, prettiest hair, photogenic, supreme beauty, overall beauty, overall poise, highest score, etc. There are generally an odd number of judges – most of whom are "trained" on the criteria for the particular pageant system. And each of these phases of competition requires an entry fee as well as costuming and preparation, so there is money to be made both from the competition and the preparation. Many applicants seek professionals in the pageant realm to complete their applications, coach them on interview skills, create their platforms or guide them on community service activities and extracurricular activities to set their applications apart, and prepare them for modeling, talent, and other portions of the competition. As a former interview coach and application writer, I have known parents to pay upwards of $250 for the completion of the application with suggestions on activities and then pay $50 to $75 an hour for me to coach their daughters for the interview portion. And my fees seem to pale in comparison to the fees charged by modeling coaches and talent (dance, singing, gymnastics, etc) coaches.

Pageant coordinators have the opportunity to clear a great profit from staging beauty pageants. Often, well-run pageants can net anywhere from $5000 to well-over $100,000 (Nussbaum, 2007, p.1). These profits come from registration fees for basic competition, add-on competition, "People's Choice" competitions, ad sales by contestants, gate receipts, and program sales. The cost for contestants and their fans can be astronomical.

For many of the states where pageants are held, there is not set of laws governing the operation of the competition. Often, the individual pageants have well-developed criteria for their participants, but these are not subject to the laws of a particular state (Nussbaum, 2007, 1). In fact, as I researched the guidelines for pageants and their conduct for the purposes of this study, I was amazed to find that there are no laws that exist in Georgia to govern the practices of pageant systems. There are laws for non-profit and for-profit pageants in the area of "fund raising," but none that affect or dictate the requirements and restrictions for the actual participants or judging criteria. This, in light of child labor laws and child abuse laws, is frightening. Since much can be said for the ways that pageants "work" children, and the ways pageants can cause psychological anguish and/or require children to become overly anxious or nervous about competition, it is amazing to think that more laws that specifically address the system do not exist.

Pageant Community and Culture

Pageants create a sense of community for their participants in the larger cultural sphere. They occur at prescribed places and times and they focus on divergent types of contestants and judging criteria, as discussed above. Pageants often have a shared set of symbols of ethnicity, race, femininity, and identity. These are not the same for all pageant systems, but they are constructed and symbolized in certain behaviors and modes of appearance.

Even though beauty pageants do not directly confront the difficult issues of race or class, they do create norms from which these can be viewed and constructed. Banet-Weiser (1999) comments that

> pageants do not necessarily attempt to erase existing inequalities (whether those of class, race, ethnicity or gender) as much as they perform the function of confronting those inequalities, incorporating them into a common language and practice, and ultimately providing some sort of idealistic solution (p.7).

From a feminist perspective, this study is not completed to expose pageants as demeaning to girls and as rites of feminine objectification. I want to see how pageants, the media's representation of pageants, and the influence of social class work to construct the girls who compete in them as commodities and work to create identities. The objectification of the body is one area in which the pageants work to create this commodified identity. In addition to this, I want to further investigate the dual nature of pageants, one in which participants are both rewarded and victimized.

This look at ways that girl's identities are constructed as commodities will take the feminist perspective a step further than the surface level attack leveled by the media, some feminist groups and cultural theorists at the problems with beauty pageants (as seen in the documentaries on beauty pageants in the wake of Jon-Benet Ramsey's death and in the common objections to women and children seen as "cattle" to be judged by opponents to beauty contests or pageants). It will work to see what type of subjects and identities are produced by pageants and what practices, media, and institutions work to sustain and revise this production. Susan Bordo (1993), Sandra Lee Bartky (1990), Teresa de Laurentis (1986, 1987), and many others have discussed theories of power and agency in different feminist theories which view gendered and raced bodies not as passive sites constructed by power, but as the effects and mandates of power. This view of power is

essential to generate a more complex understanding of productions of femininity – those represented by dominant culture and those self-represented within dominant culture. According to Foucault (1977), this calls for the analysis of gendered and raced bodies, which are in a political, cultural, and social landscape, to be analyzed in the paradoxical ways that they are disciplined and regulated.

Beauty Pageants, Girlhood, and Social Class

In keeping with this discussion, I will focus on the culture of girlhood instead of looking at adult women, teenagers, or young women. The works of Claudia Mitchell (2002, 2005), Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2002, 2005), Valerie Walkerdine (1990, 1998), Angela McRobbie (1991/2000, 1994, 1998), and others will be used to define "girlhood" and discuss the characteristics of this culture and the influences which affect it. In looking specifically at the culture of girlhood, a clearer reading of power and how it operates in the rural pageant culture can be obtained. From that point, gleaning information on how the media, how parents, how popular culture, and how participation in pageants affects girls can be more easily done. And the effect of social class on the perceptions of girls in the pageant realm can be better understood.

Gender is performative. We constantly act to produce ourselves, but we do not perform as if it were a role. Judith Butler (1990) has argued that

> because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without these acts, there would be no gender at all (p.140).

Gender does not exist as a pregiven fact of nature. Just having an anatomical part does not necessarily make one a "girl." It is what one does – how one speaks, acts, dresses, etc., - that works to construct gender. And the more one "does" these acts, the more – or less – "girlike" one becomes. Individuals do not do these things to create a performance; they do them because culture dictates the actions and then individuals continue to perform them to continually redefine themselves.

We cannot escape the facts that gender both produces and is produced by a particular definition of self. To just say that we should not participate in beauty pageants will not make the dominant definition of girlhood as situated as "feminine" go away. Since there is a certain amount of enjoyment and aspiration associated with girlhood as it is celebrated and performed on the pageant stage, it is difficult to have participation in beauty pageants stop. Contestants, or their parents, seem to benefit from participation in the pageants and this satisfaction derived from being "girly" is desired. The excessive nature of appearance (hair, makeup, clothes, physical fitness, body language, and gestures) is equated with aspiration and its connotation. For many of these girls, coming from a lower socio-economic area or background does not allow them the opportunity to dress up or be considered "pretty" or "sparkly" on a daily basis. Nor are they doted upon like they are on pageant days. To have the opportunity to be "girly" and to have the attention given to them when they dress and act this way gives them positive reinforcement for participation in pageantry. And the awards, attention, and accolades received by the girls, in turn, give attention to the parents, who want the status their daughters receive. So the cycle of performing girlhood on the pageant stage continues.

The participants receive accolades and physical gratification from their appearance and performance of girlhood. In addition, there are tangible and intangible benefits to pageant participation. Awards are given and achievements are recognized. Scholarships and other monetary gifts are given. Opportunities for careers and fame arise. These, and many others, are positive rewards. But the damages to a girl's identity and construction of reality still exist.

Within the feminist perspective, I do not find myself working from a post-feminist standpoint. I do not see all beauty pageant contestants as victims because this viewpoint does not recognize how power operates in constructing identity. Post-feminism, as seen in the works of Camille Paglia (1990), Katie Roiphe (1993), and Naomi Wolf (1991), takes issue with the idea that is pervasive in most postmodern feminist standpoints that girls and their bodies are vulnerable. The post-feminist view sees that the traditional feminist theories have created a society of victims and tend to reinforce female passivity and powerlessness. Since this does not account for the workings of power in the production of girlhood identity, I choose not to view this study from this viewpoint.

Post structural feminism seems to be a much more accurate lens through which to study the workings of power in beauty pageants as it creates female identity. St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) state that post structural feminism

> continues to trouble the subject of humanism – the rational, conscious, stable, unified, knowing individual whose morality allows atrocities beyond imagining but still claims inalienable 'rights' that protect it from responsibility to the Other it destroys. The subject of post structuralism is

> generally described as one constituted, not in advance of, but within discourse and cultural practice (p. 6).

The post structural feminist is troubled by categories such as "woman" or "girlhood" and attempts to loosen these categories and make them more unstable and undefined. These loose interpretations give me room to discover how the power operates in beauty pageants to create girlhood identity – not one that is stagnant, but one that is in a constant, commodified state of flux due to the changing rules of what girls need to posses to do well in the culture as well as to the forces and entities that gain financially and in areas of power due to the participation of these girls in the pageant realm.

The research will focus on three main groups of questions:

1. How does power operate in the beauty pageant subculture? How does it create and maintain this subculture? What effects do media and socio-economic status have on this culture and the power that works therein?

2. What inspires entry into a beauty pageant for a girls or for the parents of girls? Is there a correlation between the media representation of why girls enter pageants and the reasons stated by participants? What is the correlation between socio-economic status and pageant entry?

3. What dichotomies exist in the pageant subculture? What can we assume about the relationship between representation and the "real" when considering beauty pageants and beauty pageant contestants? How do the girl participants (or their parents) in rural beauty pageants reconcile the fact that they are both rewarded and victimized or do they realize that

> they are both winners and victims? How is the discrepancy between the adultification of children and the childification of adults reconciled?

So many more questions exist and I would love to pursue and answer them. But for the sake of brevity and a smaller scope for this research's purposes, the study will limited to these three main groups.

Girlhood Studies: A Brief Background

In this research, the first thing that must be discussed is "girlhood" - as these pageants target little girls, what makes them feminine, and what is deemed acceptable and appropriate for beauty. And it is no understatement to say that beauty is defined in a multitude of ways by each individual pageant in each individual community. There exist some common threads, however, among all of them. But as for girlhood – to understand the subgroup and subculture of girlhood – one must start with its historical context to childhood studies.

Gaile S. Cannella (2002) comments that "those who are younger have been historically disqualified and invisible (especially within a context of 2000 years of patriarchy)" (p.11). This idea that children were seen as a group that was not important or called to be studied has lead to little work prior to the twentieth century being done in the areas of childhood, boyhood, or girlhood. More current theorists, like Joe Kincheloe (2002), propose

> the conscious construction of a progressive politics of childhood which involves media and power literacy for children as well as adults that would continually examine power agendas that generate and support particular knowledge(s) (p.13).

So what does this mean to those of us who wish to understand childhood studies and beyond? This means that the studies of childhood are no longer just discussions of the ways that children are like adults, but "recognize that young human beings do not escape the complexities of society" (Cannella, 2002, p.15).

Kincheloe (2002) states

> to illustrate the confusion and conflict about perceptions of childhood and how we should address children, it is important to note that right at the time traditional assumptions about, and categorizations of, children have been crumbling, the mobilization of the iconography of "the innocent child" has become omnipresent" (p.77).

Children can no longer be seen in the same light as they were pre-twentieth and pre-twenty-first century. Society has changed in such ways that media, toys, entertainment, parenting styles, and so many more factors make childhood a much more complex and confusing sub-culture to study and navigate.

The idea that childhood and adolescence are separate developmental stages has also been challenged. The notions of a definable age of competency and a clear demarcation between childhood and adolescence are passé – the "tween" phenomenon and the continued "adultification" of children in dress, media creations, video games, music and so much more have worked with other forces to create a fluid definition of the different stages of development. As Kincheloe (2002) confirms

> in the new childhood, the distinction between the lived worlds of adults and children begins to blur. While certainly childhood and adulthood are

> not one in the same, the experiences of adults and children are more similar now than they were before (p.79).

This leads to the examination of childhood and the factors that impact and influence it.

In times leading up to the 1700s, there was not much thought to children, with exception of their being little adults. Henry Swinburne in his "Treatise of Spousals" in 1686 describes the maturation of boys and girls in terms of ripening fruit.

> Female Bodies are more tender and moister than the Male: and so Mens Bodies being harder and drier, they are more slow in ripening; and Womens Bodies, because they are softer and moister, are more quickly ripe; like as it is to be seen in Plants and fruits, whereof that which is more soft and moist is sooner ripe, than that which is hard and dry (cited in Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2005, p. 191).

This idea makes current readers uncomfortable and seems to be full of flaws in reasoning, but oddly enough, there is evidence of this line of thinking about girls and boys in our current culture. The idea of girls maturing more quickly and being more "juicy and rounded" is mirrored in childhood beauty pageants and many other aspects of popular culture. The current study of girls and girlhood seems to be tied to this 17th century belief in the ways that popular culture views the differences between girls and boys still exist.

But as the Enlightenment changed thinking in so many areas of life and academics, it also changed the views of childhood, and girlhood specifically. According to Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2005),

> in the 18th and 19th centuries, it seems that ideas about girls and girlhood were generic catagories. Girls of the lower classes still existed in a binary system of child and adult, while girls of the middling class and higher had a third stage of "young lady" (pp.11 – 12).

This idea about girls seems to stem from the famous work done by Rousseau in his studies of Sophie and Emile and the differences between boys and girls in childhood.

Rousseau (1963) attributes two traits to girls in relation to their education: love of finery and a need to be noticed. He says "not content with being pretty they want notice taken of them," (p. 135) as opposed to boys who do not care if others notice them. It is this preoccupation with what others think that led Rousseau to conclude that girls "can be controlled by telling them what people think of them" (ibid.).

In addition to the influence of the opinions of others, Rousseau (1963) also discussed the differences in boys and girls and their toys, indicating that girls play with dolls in practice for her lifework. This view of girls "practicing" for their futures is not held by other theorists of the time, mainly Maria Edgeworth. Edgeworth (1730) saw dolls and doll play for girls as mimicking adult play and encouraging "facile" behavior. Edgeworth , in a positive light, believed that girls learned about fashion from doll play, but they did have the ability to create and construct, just as boys did.

It is Rousseau's ideas about girls and their predisposition to dressing up and pretending to be women that finds an interesting parallel to the study of girls and rural beauty pageants. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2005) comment,

> to realize the tenacity of this type of thinking we have only to compare Rousseau's views with the predominance of preschool beauty pageants,

> the ever-moving downward edge of sexualized fashion for girls, and the knowledge that market research has demonstrated that little girls like to comb and adorn long hair (p.183).

But the study of girlhood is not limited by the writings of Rousseau and others from the 18th and 19th centuries. Present day culturalists and sociologists have continued to study the culture of girlhood and identify many different elements of the subculture.

The idea of girls (or children) as miniature adults continued through the Victorian period. It was during this time that doll play and dressing up became popular pastimes and play for girls and was seen as appropriate and fitting for girls as they learned skills needed for becoming cultured and well-rounded women. Ironically enough, it is the present-day's turn to children wearing adult fashions that leads many who study child and girl culture to say that there seems to be a return to the Victorian line of thinking that children are miniature adults. Karen Calvert, in Mitchell and Reid-Walsh's *Researching Children's Popular Culture* (2005), states that

> present day children's fashion – which is often a miniature reproduction of adult styles – [is] a kind of return to Georgian and colonial attitudes of the child as (necessarily) a small adult. [This] require[s] an early sophistication of attitudes on the part of the child as necessary for survival in a world where "innocence" has become "vulnerability" and the "uniformed child is the child at risk (pp. 190 – 191).

So as the evolution of childhood studies has lead to specific notions of girlhood (and boyhood), it is important to specifically understand what girlhood studies actually encompasses. Mitchell and Blaeser (2000) state that "girlhood is more than just a stage

of development; it is a cultural site where issues of race, class, power, domination and so on are played out" (p.1). And tied to this definition is the understanding that due to the many different sources of influence, girlhood as a whole does not imply a sense of power over environment or other factors. It seems, in light of my study of girls in rural beauty pageants and in studies of multitudes of other girls in an infinite number of other scenarios, that girls are often manipulated by sources of power outside themselves.

Diederick F. Janssen (2006) gives further definition to girlhood studies and has compiled a comprehensive bibliography of resources written on and about girlhood. According to Janssen,

> "Girlhood Studies" is an emerging international research area. The current status quo of "girlhood studies" as a field of inquiry allows the image of a nexus, niche, or intersection projected from "established" panoramic frames of endeavour such as "feminist studies," feminist pedagogy, queer pedagogy, and "gender studies" in general. Thus, toward the end of the previous century (pre)adolescent femininities have been elaborated within various interventionalist and normative paradigms (anti-"abuse," anti-"sexism," anti-"harassment," anti-"violence," anti-"underachievement") as well as within panacademic paradigms of embodiment, identity and self-image, locality and positionality, power and participation, emancipation and actualization. Researchers have begun examining how girl'hoods' are modeled, reproduced, reinvented, managed, negotiated, and articulated in terms of racialization, authenticity,

multiplicity, hierarchies and hegemonies, transgression, and ritual (pp.3 – 4).

And it is within this definition of girlhood and girlhood studies that I find myself focusing on females between the ages of birth and 11 years old and the impact of power and participation, emancipation and actualization within the ritual of rural beauty pageants and the media depictions of them. And tied to this whole study is the influence of socio-economic factors on the participants and their perceptions.

My questions concern why girls are entered into beauty pageants, how socio-economic status influences and is influenced by the participation in beauty pageants, and what influence various works from the media in the current culture have on the girls who compete and the beauty pageant culture itself.

Research Process

To answer these questions, I will frame this study around the rural pageants that are prevalent in South Georgia. This will provide an avenue to study the power structures and ways they operate to construct identity in rural pageant systems. In this same light, I will endeavor to define how the media defines the pageant culture and the pageant participant by studying the documentaries *Smile Pretty*, *Painted Babies*, *Living Dolls*, and *Little Beauties: The Ultimate Kiddie Showdown*, and various other investigative reports along with the movies *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Beautiful*, and *Drop Dead Gorgeous*. In addition to the videos and documentaries on pageant culture, I will also rely on the works of various authors on pageantry and popular culture. In all of these areas, I hope to analyze the characteristics of the participants in and winners of rural pageants in terms of

social class and further use this information to answer the research questions posed above.

By watching the films and documentaries, I discover the participants, characters, and pageantry cultures portrayed in them and can then relate these elements to the larger realm of Southern beauty pageant culture outside of the films and documentaries. Using the works of Shirley Steinberg (2004) as a guide, I am able to locate the patterns of cultural expression and social interaction as depicted in the works on pageantry. And, through this careful watching and "reading" of the films and documentaries, I am able to identify the hidden agendas and assumptions that "reflect and shape culture" (Steinberg, 2004, p. 5). And, as I study these films, I am better able to position them in relation to other films on beauty pageant culture in relation to themes or genre. This allows for seeing sides of this genre that can often be overlooked.

Bricolage : Cultural Studies, Poststructural Feminism, and Poststructuralist Ethnography

As I began to conduct my study and to collect and study the data, I did not want to restrict myself to a single methodology. This dissertation, in its entirety, is part cultural studies research, part critical ethnography, part critical hermeneutics research, and part poststructural feminism research. These approaches will be used together in a bricolage, as they are divergent lenses that are all focusing on a common topic. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994),

> the product of the bricoleur's labor is a bricolage, a complex, dense, reflective collage like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under

> analysis. The bricoleur will … connect the parts to the whole, stressing meaningful relationships that operate in situations and social worlds studied (p.3).

As cultural studies, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and post structural feminism alone are unable to adequately collect and analyze the media portrayal of pageants, pageant culture and the way that power operates within it, a bricolage of the methodologies seems to be the best design. In this way, I will have more opportunities to create meanings than with a narrow methodology that would constrain my research and force me to follow one course, instead of seeing where the study and analysis will take me. This causes me to hold an awareness of the concepts required in making an informed choice between different methods and research traditions. And this process illustrates Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) idea that "the interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage – that is, pieced together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (p.4).

Using four divergent lenses that fall under the umbrella of qualitative, theoretical research, I felt that using a bricolage approach would be best. It would allow me to grow more practiced at researching using several methods and employing numerous sources. As this study focuses on theory and subjects on which there is not much material already available, being able to have the freedom to make do with what was at hand, rather than having to conform to set standards that would exclude or de-value my research, was liberating. As Shirley Steinberg (2004), citing Kellner (1995), states

> Bricolage interprets, critiques, and deconstructs the text…Pedagogical bricoleurs attempt to widen their perspectives through methodological

> diversity. In no way do they claim that as a result of the multiperspective bricolage they have gained the "grand view."… The bricoleur attempts to gain expanded insight via historical contextualization, multiple theoretical groundings, and a diversity of knowledge by collecting and interpreting methodologies (p. 2).

Knowing that my research would be more a work in progress and not a "once and for all" definition of rural beauty pageant culture and they ways power operated in relation to class within it made the task much less daunting and more open to study.

The lenses of cultural studies, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and post structural feminism will be used to identify how pageant culture operates to create identity; how pageant culture operates in a regional culture within the United States and within the issues of class and gender; and how this "pageant identity" effects the ways that the participants view the world and define themselves, and, therefore, how they relate to other parts of the world.

Knowledge will be acquired from what motivates participants to enter pageants and what is required to be successful at pageants. In addition, knowledge will come from what barriers and limitations exist for participants and what advantages and disadvantages come from participation. The workings of the pageant culture to create the identity of the participants in relation to the above criteria and in relation to social class will be the primary knowledge gained.

CHAPTER 2

SITUATING THE BRICOLAGE: RESEARCH AND THE CRITICAL TRADITION

The field of curriculum studies has been reconceptualized as there was a move from development of concrete practices, methods and evaluation, to a field that was centered on dialogue to achieve understanding. It is within this discursive view of curriculum that I find the frameworks from which to create my research. Seeing curriculum as a gendered, post structural, cultural text, I will be working from a cultural studies, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and post structural feminist angle. These four frameworks employ aspects of post structuralism as the focus is on language and discourse and the movement of power in culture. All four also employ aspects of gender as they see that identities are social constructs that come from language and culture.

The focus of my research will involve the discursive field of the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity, class, and power. Weedon (1997) explains,

> Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed (p.21).

Feminist post structural theory examines the relationship that lies in this discursive field, including time and space, in relation to aspects of gender. It is through feminist post structural theory that we can see the discursive field that is reinscribed every day. In her research on poststructural feminism, St. Pierre (2000) comments,

> Poststructural theories of discourse, like poststructural theories of language, allow us to understand how knowledge, truth, and subjects are produced in language and cultural practice as well as how they might be reconfigured (p.486).

This theory allows us to reconfigure language, power, subjectivity, and discourse by exposing the "expected and accepted" aspects of life.

Butler's (1990) theory of performativity further informs post structural feminism as it recognizes the subject as constituted through matrices of power and discourse, matrices that are continually reproduced through processes of re-signification or repetition of hegemonic gendered discourses. At the very least, post structural feminism sees itself as a form of resistance to the patriarchal discourse that permeates the lives of women, not to mention those persons of various races, classes, and sexualities.

Curriculum Studies: Tying Schools and Culture

Curriculum as a field has moved from one focused on design to one focused on discourse. The Tyler rationale and the industrial models that characterized the curriculum field at the turn of the 20th century desired to have curriculum follow a set design focused on implementation and evaluation. This served to limit education and to deny students and others involved in the curriculum field a voice in the educational practices. Beginning with the works of Dwayne Huebner and James B. Macdonald in the early 1970s, curriculum theorists began to see curriculum through the lenses of philosophy, aesthetics, and theology. In other words, instead of working from a desire to create new methods of teaching, the desire was moved to a curriculum that worked to create understanding. And this understanding required that discourse take place.

Huebner's work centered on examination of curriculum historically as it is situated in thought and action. Curriculum theorists worked within the frame of history and in environments with other people. Because they existed in this context, it was necessary for them to generate a language with which to effectively describe and converse with those around them and it was necessary for them to evaluate the physical and environmental forms that served as the backdrops for education. It is in this thought about education, the discourse, and the actions taken from this that actual curriculum development came. Through praxis came growth. Macdonald's work mirrored this in part, as he saw that there needed to be new ways to talk about curriculum. Again, the key question involved interactions with others and the environment. And to answer the questions that arose, Macdonald saw that autobiographic and political discourses were needed.

In 1973, the first of the conferences that addressed the future of curriculum as a field was held. The University of Rochester Conference, organized by William Pinar, saw a core group of curriculum theorists who were writing and researching about curriculum as it was enacted in political and cultural fields. The results from this, and the future conferences (from which Bergamo emerged), included the desire to see curriculum as political, historical, and autobiographical texts. This mirrored the ideas expressed by Huebner and Macdonald. But even within this group, there were divisions that occurred along political lines – one group saw the purpose for curriculum as a means to work from a Marxist perspective in order to bring about political change or to address the ways that social entities influence curriculum and the other group saw the purpose for curriculum as a means by which an individual could learn more about themselves and that education

should be more of an autobiographical work. From the stance of girls in the child beauty pageant culture, there needs to be a move towards hearing their voices and not just listening to their parents, in a "Tyler-esque" manner of curriculum. These girls are learning at the hands of the pageant culture and are individuals whose voices need and demand to be heard. And a dialogue needs to be developed to listen to their stories and to allow them to understand the lessons and the changes that they are undergoing as individuals.

The major criticism that the reconceptualists faced came from the Tanners and McNeil, members of the traditional curriculum camp, who believed the focus of curriculum should be on developing a standard curriculum. They saw that the reconceptualists were more interested in culture and its effects on curriculum, schools, students, teachers, etc. The crux of this argument centered on theory versus practice, one that still wages today.

Becoming a Bricoleur

Levi-Strauss (1962) describes a bricoleur as a "jack of all trades or a kind of professional do it yourself person" (p. 17). Using whatever tools preferred by individual methodological trades, the bricoleur employs whatever methods, tactics or practical materials are available. By examining the research questions being posed, the bricoleur determines which research practices to use and the research questions depend on the context from which the issues being studied arise (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, 1992, p. 2). As my research spanned the topics of girlhood, social class and beauty pageant participation, several different methods of data collection were required to explore the intricacies of participation. As I began this work as a researcher, I came

equipped with a set of methodological skills as well as beliefs in equity, autonomy, and the individual's right to choose. My background in pageantry as a participant and as a pageant coordinator, as well as my work in the areas of interview and stage presence with girls and teens who were preparing for pageants, enlightened me to the importance of seeing each participant as an individual and seeing the damaging aspects as well as the positive rewards of the pageant culture.

A bricoleur is described as being skilled at a broad range of diverse tasks, from interviewing, observing and interpreting documents, to intensive self-reflection and introspection. In addition to these jobs, bricoleurs are called to read a wide range of topics and be readily able to work between divergent and overlapping perspectives and paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). But even more important than this, a bricoleur has the comprehension that research is an interactive process shaped by the individual's history, gender, class, and biography as well as those being researched.

In the beginning, I was uncomfortable with the idea of being a "jack of all trades." I wanted a clear, cut-and-dried methodology with which to conduct my research. However, as I began to formulate my research questions and compile data, I realized that a traditional methodology would not work. In fact, I quickly realized that no one methodology adequately allowed me to analyze my information in light of my research questions. And given the prevalence of "do-it-yourself" shows on television – in fact, an entire network devoted to such – I was afraid of a "whatever-feels-right-to-you-and-meets-your-needs-and-preferences" appearance to my research. As I researched Levi-Strauss and the idea of bricolage, my fears abated when I saw that Levi Strauss made it quite clear that the bricolage in a research context has a different and very dignified

connotation – very different from the idea of "Handyman Negry" that I had from the children's show I watched as a child (Crotty, 1999).

Media analysis, poststructuralist ethnography, cultural studies, and more can provide important insights and knowledge in research. In this way, researchers do not have to be constrained by knowledge usually garnered in the traditional disciplines because a bricoleur works with a broad range of material, drawn from multiple disciplines (Crotty, 1999) to create meaning. In relation to my research, I wanted to see myself as a bricoleur charged with the task of creating a bricolage.

Envisioning myself as a bricoleur provided me guidance and made more clear my role in my research. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that there are many ways of being a bricoleur. A theoretical bricoleur reads widely and is knowledgeable; a bricoleur theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives. A methodological bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks. An interpretive bricoleur understands that research is shaped by his or her own personal history and a political bricoleur knows that science is power as all research findings have political implications (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 9). Coming to terms with my role as a bricoleur as one who is engaged in the task of creating a bricolage gave me a vehicle through which to articulate the diversity of my research project and to organize this dissertation by using a quilt metaphor.

As someone who thinks through decisions and contemplates relationships and new information, I felt a connection with the idea of being a researcher who not only was interactive, but who was also self-reflective. A bricoleur is both of these things, among others. I know that my research is shaped largely by who I am and the relationships I

developed with those who participated in pageants in the media or in pageants with which I interacted personally as a contestant, official, or coach. Time spent in the field or in watching documentaries and movies were periods of reflection and of critical analysis. As Crotty (1998) notes

> Research in the mode of bricoleur requires that we not remain straight jacketed by conventional meanings. Instead, such research invites us to approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or richer meaning (p. 51).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe a bricoleur as a quilt maker who uses aesthetic and creative abilities to carefully craft a research product, suggesting that "the quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together in a creative process that brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience" (p. 7). The idea of a quilt metaphor appeals to me and became quite central to my research as I see opportunities for representing multiple, competing complex aspects simultaneously, allowing all voices to be heard at a similar level. No one aspect covers up another.

In this dissertation, I see myself as a bricoleur whose role it is to craft, piece by piece, a work that reflects multiple ideas existing in relation to social class, girlhood, and rural child beauty pageant culture without losing the clearness of the complex, contrasting issues uncovered by intimate interactions with people in the field of research. With the idea of the quilt comes the idea of different things going on at one time. A mixture of voices, perspectives, and points of view exist in one creation. The texts become "dialogical and can move from personal to political and local to historical" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 8). In this light, my desire to conduct research that

combines critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics, cultural studies, and poststructural feminism is given a platform to create possibilities of representing multiple different angles and emancipatory perspectives. To begin, I am called to examine the different disparate views.

After much deliberation and beginning my research, I conceded that I must use the lenses of cultural studies, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and post structural feminism to analyze that data. Using all four lenses allows me the opportunity to move with the findings from my research and to more richly examine culture, a task so complex and impossible to isolate that being able to move with the findings and to take advantage of new information discovered is important. These reasons firmly support my decision to approach my research as a bricoleur, a bridge-maker, a quilt maker, to see where my research takes me and to build a "bridge" between my research and the possibilities that exist in its examination or a "quilt" that expresses both my research and the possibilities that exist in its examination.

Theoretical Bricolage: Towards a Critical Approach

Since there are so many sources of curriculum in each individual's life, it is important to analyze the ways that the individual can react and change as a result of the interaction with the curriculum. Paulo Freire (as cited in *Sacred Heart Showcase*, 2004) states

> education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the

> means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (p. 1).

As I contemplated the study of rural beauty pageant culture and the ways power operated within that culture to shape the identities of girls in relation to their social status, I began to formulate questions relating to the creation of knowledge and the ways to react or change as a result of that knowledge. The purpose of my research needs to center on finding sources of knowledge and power and then giving voice to the various reactions or consequences connected to those who work within that knowledge.

My discussion centers on bringing to light how knowledge related to participation has been generated and argues that the concept of participation in rural beauty pageants needs to be explored differently. As a result, the uniqueness of knowledge - how we know what we know- is briefly considered and possibilities for developing a critical epistemological approach are explored. The aim of this research is to provide opportunities for understanding how rural beauty pageants affect identity development in young girls with relation to their social status and to identify power as it operates in this realm. A critical approach might make this possible – and cultural studies, poststructural feminism, critical hermeneutics and critical ethnography grow out of a critical approach.

The opportunity to understand how rural beauty pageants affect identity development and the ways that power operates in this sub-culture influenced my decision to adopt a critical approach to my research. As I examined what others had researched and written about girls and their participation in child beauty pageants, I noted a number of issues about the current knowledge in this area. First, there are a limited number of studies on girlhood culture and the impact of rural Southern beauty pageants on that

culture, specifically in relation to social class. Much of what has been written centers on the larger pageant systems (Miss America and Miss USA or the Jon-Benet Ramsey-esque pageant systems) and the ways that girls are victimized or that culture at large is impacted. Secondly, studies that are available about girlhood and how beauty pageant culture impacts the construction of identity used traditional interpretive methodology. And lastly, the damaging effects of pageant participation are the result of the studies conducted from research and theoretical based discussions. Discussing the media portrayal of pageant participation and the effects of this participation on childhood and girlhood is the purpose of the studies.

A review of the literature from 1987 to the present revealed a cross-section of research and theoretical papers relating to pageant participation and the effects on women and girls or culture at large. Works centering on pageant participation and its effects from national contexts were accessed. **Table 1** on pages 55, 56 and 57 gives summaries of the research reviewed, methodological approaches, and theoretical comments made by the researchers. Research that focuses on international pageants or pageants that occur only in countries other than the United States is not included, as these pageants do not focus on the specific phenomena of rural Southern beauty pageants. **Table 1** on pages 55, 56 and 57 is not guaranteed to be a complete list of all the works on beauty pageants in the United States and their influence on female identity development and culture, but every attempt was made to complete a comprehensive review.

Acting as a theoretical bricoleur, it was imperative for me to read a broad range of information. I had to establish what research had already been undertaken and discern patterns and knowledge generated through this research. In my reading, I realized that

there were various methodologies used and various ways of knowing discussed. I did not want the limits of the previously used methods to interpretive and quantitative investigations that had neglected other possibilities of knowledge to limit my research, so I turned to theoretical understandings of epistemology to further my exploration.

Table 1 Literature Summary

Author/Year of Publication	Research Focus	Methodology	Theoretical Comments
Tice 2006	Commodification of Female Bodies	Cultural Studies, Critical Theory	Power in pageant culture leads to commodification of women.
Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 2006	Beauty pageants and reality television show performances need to be understood from as emerging from the cultural and political positions from which they are produced	Cultural Studies Critical Theory Critical Ethnography – Media observation and criticism	Changing role of media (presentation of subjects in beauty pageants and makeover programs) speaks to the normalization of performances of femininity and the affiliation of many young women with post-feminist politics in United States.
Lalik and Oliver 2005	Critique of the ways girls' bodies are implicated in the schools' hidden curriculum	Ethnography – Case study highlighting participation patterns	Critical and feminist pedagogies led to girls critically engaging with topic of ways bodies are implicated in hidden curriculum
Roberts 2005	Examination tools, practices, and institutions associated with beauty in Jim Crow culture of the South	Cultural studies Ethnography - historical/archival research	Consumer culture and modernity impact on beauty and the pursuit of it can provide women with the means to subvert restrictive and reactionary social mores
Wonderlich, Ackard, and Henderson 2005	Associations between childhood beauty pageants and adult disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, depression , and self-esteem	Ethnography - Interviews, surveys, and questionnaires	Beauty pageant participation influence adult body dissatisfaction, interpersonal distrust, and impulse dysregulation
Pannell 2004	Creation and Contestation of Beauty in Child Beauty Pageants	Cultural and Media studies; Visual sociology	Child beauty pageants become cultural site for creation and exploitation of child appearance
Valdez 2004	Novel on two cousins who turn to pageantry and dance to achieve dreams.	Narrative Inquiry Bildungsroman	Questions values of society imposed upon women and effects on individual lives
Heltsley 2004	Construction of the Pageant Child	Ethnography - Interviews and pageant observation	Social world theory integrated with Social constructionism and Exchange theory -vendors and the power they wield to shape participants' identities and appearance
Foley 2004	Investigation of the intersection between means of representation and ideology in the field of female popular entertainment	Systematic comparative analysis of beauty contests and exotic dancing	Female entertainers perform a carefully calibrated mixture of revelation and concealment in order to negotiate within culturally prescribed norms of morality
Lowe 2004	Pageant Participation and Body Image	Cultural studies, Social History	Impact of race, gender and education on body image

Author/Year of Publication	Research Focus	Methodology	Theoretical Comments
Cross 2004	Media influence on Innocence in Children's Culture	Cultural Studies, Critical Theory	Power and consumerism in childhood and popular culture
Bryer 2003	Examine popular images of women's beauty and sexuality in context of African Americans' struggles for rights and respectability	Cultural studies and social historical methods and the textual analysis of primary sources with oral histories and secondary literature	Cultural studies reveal internal debates about respectability and racial pride within African American community
Lovegrove 2002	Culture of beauty contests has lead to the obsession with aesthetics and beauty for women throughout the world	Cultural studies - Critical Theory – Ethnography - Pageant observation	Popular culture forms through beauty pageants create cultural obsession with beauty
Levey 2002	Reasons for Participation in Child Beauty Pageants	Ethnography – Interviews and pageant observation	Power in childhood and in popular culture.
Dick 2002	Miss America's influence in society	Cultural studies Ethnography – social historical methods and textual analysis of primary sources with oral histories and secondary literature	Pageant provides cultural symbol of beauty and national identity
Gleick and Booth 1997/2001	Social Concerns of Child Beauty Pageant Participation	Ethnography – interviews and pageant observation Cultural studies	Troubling questions emerge on whether pageants benefit child or parent – or just pageant organizations themselves
Giroux 2001	Myths that function to limit the welfare of children and to promote the existence of the "innocent child"	Cultural studies - Critical Theory	Cultural politics must use best theoretical resources available to change contexts of power that structure children's lives
Guiling 2000	Differences between preadolescent beauty pageant participants and nonparticipants on eating behaviors and body image	Ethnographic research through standardized tests and questionnaires	Girls who competed in pageants had higher self-image scores and lower instances of eating disorders than control group
Watson and Martin 2000	Impact of Miss America pageant on United States culture	Cultural studies Ethnographic fieldwork with historical/archival research and feminist analysis	Miss America's popularity supports contention that pageant represents a microcosm of change in U.S. culture and reflects the values and beliefs of greater U.S. society
Boyd 2000	Cultural performance of femininity in three contemporary rituals: beauty pageant, sorority rush, and Confederate pageant.	Ethnographic fieldwork (audiotaped interviews and participant/observation) with historical/archival research and feminist analysis	Feminine practices reinforce the myth of the southern lady and the ritual performances that give it life
Banet-Weiser 1995/1999	Pageant as sites for the construction of national identity, femininity, and ethnicity	Ethnography - Interviews and pageant observation Cultural studies	Popular culture forms work as vehicles for studying idealized, gendered notions of national identity

Author/Year of Publication	Research Focus	Methodology	Theoretical Comments
Hilboldt-Stolley 1999	Psychological impact of beauty contests on kids and merits of child beauty pageants	Ethnography – Interviews, participant observation, pageant observation Cultural studies	Child pageant contestants are confident, well-mannered, and articulate in spite of the suggestive costumes and routines
Savage 1998	Pageant History and impact of beauty pageants on popular culture	Cultural studies – Ethnography - Interviews and pageant observation	Popular culture forms such as the beauty pageant work to establish norms of beauty for women
Neimark 1998	Why we need Miss America	Cultural studies Critical Theory	Miss America informs us about our culture's ideas and conflicts
Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje 1996	Entanglement of beauty, contests, and power	Ethnography - Interviews and pageant observation	Critical theory and cultural politics provide the background for a discussion of the history and pervasive influence of beauty pageants
Welker 1995	How intentionally symbolic performances like small town beauty pageants manifests the ideology and values of the participants	Ethnography Interpretive analysis of contestant behavior on stage and off	Miss Apple Festival pageant both articulates and reifies community power relations in broadest political sense
Latham 1995	The ritualized legitimization of the public performance of feminine "nudity" within the beauty pageant format	Cultural studies Ethnographic research with historical/archival research and feminist analyis	Repeals of Censorship codes for the female body influenced norms of both beach and stage and led to legitimization of the beauty pageant
Wolfe 1994	How the emergence, evolution, and decline of beauty contests reflects the changing relationship between physical attractiveness and women's roles and the American ideals of womanhood in the 20th century	Cultural studies Ethnographic research with historical/archival research and pageant observation	Lessening of class and other distinctions in women's roles and the pursuit o physical attractiveness in mid-20th century made more plausible a singular ideal for women which could be captured in a beauty contest like Miss America
Maginnis 1991	Analysis of fashion shows, strip shows, and beauty pageants in relation to the "theatre of the feminine ideal"	Ethnography Audience studies, participant observation,	"Theatre of the feminine ideal" is argued to be flexible by the demonstration of the widely divergent ways the three genres of performance have adapted their common format to different users.
Napoleon 1987	Systematic measure of the relationship between physical attractiveness, family environment, and personality	Ethnography Standardized tests and questionnaires administered to 58 beauty pageant contestants	Cultural studies - Family environment utilizes the beautiful contestants as receptacles for the family's need to be special and achieve positive esteem and that culture at large recreated this same family dynamic.

Epistemology

Epistemology furnishes a basis from philosophy which helps with deciding what knowledge is possible. Since it does grow out of philosophy, epistemology helps to answer questions about what makes true knowledge different from false knowledge, or knowledge based on inadequate information (Heylighen, 1993). This epistemology, as a result, leads to the development of theory, which leads to the development of methodology, and ultimately method. Because of this, it is imperative to discuss the differences between the basis of philosophy that inform research.

How knowledge is acquired and made valid has been the subject of much debate. Knowledge is divided into basic categories which include propositional knowledge (knowledge that something is so, or just is) and non-propositional knowledge (knowledge gained by direct awareness, or acquaintance). Using these theories of knowledge, the argument is made that there are absolute or permanent positions. Later theories moved from this absolute position, emphasizing relativity (situation dependent knowledge) (Heylighen, 1993). As epistemology evolved, it understood that knowledge comes from relationships between objects and subjects and the ways that they interact in the world. As a result, knowledge creation has moved from a static, passive view to a more adaptive, active one (Heylighen, 1993).

Objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism comprise the range of epistemologies (Crotty, 1998) and these are not "watertight compartments" (p.9). Objectivism is a part of posteriori epistemology, one based on scientific principles that state that truth is a form of knowledge independent of consciousness and experience (Moser, 2002). Related to positivism, objectivism shares a belief that there is object truth

yet to be discovered as meaningful reality and this object truth exists without direct awareness (Crotty, 1998). This idea that understanding people and values are objectified provided the basis for early ethnographies. The belief was that if people were studied the "right" way, then objective truth would be discovered.

In contrast with this idea that there is a truth independent of consciousness and experience, constructionism is a way of knowing that rejects object truth and focuses on priori epistemology, one that states truth or meaning is generated by interaction or engagement with the world. Meaning, in this way, is constructed instead of discovered (Crotty, 1998). This epistemological approach allows for different people to construct different meaning in different ways. Due to this range of creation of knowledge, constructionism is a favorite among qualitative researchers.

Subjectivism states that meaning is not generated by relationships between subject and object, but is imposed upon the object from somewhere else (Crotty, 1998). It finds its home in structuralist, Poststructural, and postmodern works. Subjectivity and objectivity cannot be separated. Because of the critical relationship between human experience and its object, objects cannot be described in isolation from those experiencing it. In the same way, no experience can be described in isolation from its object. There is an inherent relationship between subject and object as people engage in their worlds.

There is a key difference between constructivism and constructionism which centers on the argument by Crotty (1998) that constructivism needs to be used only for epistemological considerations that seek to find meaning from an individual perspective. If creating and transmitting information is the purpose of generating meaning, then

constructionism should be used. Constructivism focuses on each individual's way of making sense of the world as valid, thereby standing in the way of a critical stance in research. Social constructionism, in contrast, takes into consideration the culture surrounding the individual and how that culture shapes the way the world is viewed by the individual. Using this perspective, constructivism resists a critical approach while constructionism fosters it (Crotty, 1998).

When generating research from a constructivist tradition, one must use methods and approaches that are uncritical in the exploration of cultural meaning. Constructionism, in contrast, allows for a position in research that encourages a more critical exploration of meaning. Crotty (1998) states that central to identifying the limitations in research approaches is understanding the epistemological basis for the research, and he highlights the differences between constructionism and constructivism to show this.

Critical Epistemology

Using a critical epistemological approach became obvious for use in my research for this project because it provided a way for me to move beyond the usual views and exploration of child beauty pageants, girlhood, social class, and identity. Working from existing knowledge about participation in rural Southern child beauty pageants rather than using a predetermined preference of knowledge influenced my decision to approach my research from a critical standpoint. Critical methodology has components that are epistemological and are not dependent upon the value orientations of the researcher (Carspeken, 1996). This does not mean, however, that the values held by the researcher

are not important, but it does mean that the values of the researcher can be key to the research due to the lack of limitations in creating knowledge and truth.

Critical approaches to knowledge generation differ from interpretive knowing. Believing that the world is comprised of unequal resources and power is the stance of critical approaches. Knowledge that is created from critical epistemological perspectives does not accept positivism and interpretive science. It sees these epistemologies as separate from the world and focusing on studying the world rather than acting on it. From the critical epistemological standpoint, knowledge is power that can be used to control others (Neuman, 1997).

Communication is key to critical epistemology. This view allows for the idea that truth and power are interconnected. If power is unequal, then truth is distorted in relation to claims made by research. The critical epistemologist needs to be very clear on how power and knowledge are created as he or she conducts research and views the findings of that research. Since power and authority are created by culture, different groups are silenced. This can often raise questions of the validity or truth of research (Carspeken, 1996). This is illustrated in the continual claims of pageant parents who say that participation in pageants offers rewards and ways to develop poise and presence, but these same parents do not allow the children who are the actual participants in the pageants to respond to the question. This raises the question about the power relationship between parents and the children who are the participants in the beauty pageants. Researchers who come from a critical epistemological stance may have come from a different outcome from the research as parents may have not considered the point of view of the child or may not have cared about the child's perspective at all. This point, in the

research cited above, was not considered as understanding was constructed from a description of events as they took place.

Reaching a Critical Approach to Research

As I reviewed the literature concerning child beauty pageants and the construction of girlhood identity and its relationship to social class, I realized that using an epistemological perspective allowed me to identify possible gaps in the knowledge about the participation in these pageants. I also became aware that knowledge might be distorted over time because the research methods silenced other ways of knowing. Often researchers reinforce ways of knowing that are accepted by the majority by using language that continues the inequities due to the unconsciousness of the using of their positions of authority. As a critical researcher, I need to be aware of these issues and work diligently to try to uncover the unbalanced power relationships that exist in the child beauty pageant culture.

Reification is the process of treating the accepted patterns of behavior as objective realities. This phenomenon interferes with being critical as it suggests that the individual makes sense of things based on the way they are and then continues this line of thinking as truth (Agger, 1991). Thinking passed on this way may become accepted and we may find ourselves victims of believing in the things that are familiar to us. Sedimentation, a similar process, allows for a distancing from the original engagement in reality as layers of interpretation and meanings are placed on top of each other. If theory is built upon these existing ideas, this theory is at risk of becoming false culture.

Of the literature reviewed in conjunction with this research, several of the dissertations, studies, books and papers were written using a cultural studies methodology

for the research process. While they do approach the research from this standpoint and this standpoint is one that I have chosen to use in the research bricolage for this study, the angle of their approaches and the findings they unearthed from this approach differs from this study. Tice (2006) sees that cultural forces in pageantry have lead to the commodification of women – an approach that differs from my research in relation to girlhood and in relation to the finding of an "answer" rather than opening a dialogue or questioning of the power operations present.

Using the same framework and finding answers to research questions that unearth negative effects of pageantry and pageant participation. Pannell (2004) finds that participation in child beauty pageants leads to an exploitation of child appearances, an often cited criticism. Cross (2004) and Giroux (2001) both discuss the power operations in child beauty pageants and the objectification and exploitation as sexual objects of participants. The questions of who actually benefits from pageant participation, the child, the parents, the pageant organizers, or the pageant vendors are addressed by Gleick (2001) and Hilboldt (1999). And the dangers of pageantry leading to an obsession with appearance and beauty is discussed in the work by Lovegrove (2002). Again, all of these researchers approach the subject of child beauty pageant culture or beauty pageant culture in general from a negative perspective and with the intent of proving a negative finding. This differs from the research in this study, as my intent is to open a dialogue to see both sides of the pageantry culture and to find questions to lead to further discussion.

Several of the authors using the cultural studies framework had neutral or positive findings in their research in relation to beauty pageants. Seeing pageantry as a way of normalizing the performance of femininity or of gendered norms, Banet-Weiser (2006),

Banet-Weiser (1999), Savage (1998), and Neimark (1998) discuss how the Miss America pageant or child beauty pageants provide a platform for appearance and performance norms. Lowe (2004) discusses the ways that beauty pageants lead to positive and negative impact of race, gender, and education on body image. Dick (2002) and Watson (2000) provide passionate discussions on ways the Miss America pageant and other state and local pageants provide symbols of beauty and national identity for women and Wolfe (1994) reveals ways that class and other distinctions are so lessened in our current society that any woman has the opportunity to become a symbol of beauty or national identity through pageantry. In relation to African American women and beauty pageants, Bryer (2003) believes that competition and participation in pageants can lead to respectability and pride in the African American community. Latham's (1995) work gives an in-depth look at the censorship of women's apparel and appearance in relation to stage performances and swimming and how this led to the legitimization of the beauty pageant culture. Again, there are differences between these findings and approaches and those associated with this research. First, the focus on finding definite answers is different than my objective to open up a dialogue between the divergent sides of this culture. Secondly, the focus of many of these studies on the Miss America pageant system and the systems that involve teenagers and women moves away from my focus on girlhood and the power operations found in pageant participation.

Only one of the works reviewed used a critical ethnography approach to research. Banet-Weiser (2006) reviewed media productions of pageantry in relation to the post-feminist viewings that resulted from the young women who were exposed to them. Ethnography as a methodology was used by many of the works as they discussed the

effects of pageantry on participants and others. In relation to body image and eating disorders, Napoleon (1987) and Guiling (2000) used standardized tests and questionnaires to poll contestants to glean information for the premises of their research.

The use of interviews and pageant observation was a vehicle employed by Wonderlich (2005), Levey (2002), Gleick (2001), Boyd (2000), Banet-Weiser (1999), Hilboldt (1999), Savage (1998), and Cohen (1996) as these researchers worked to find participant opinions and cultural effects of pageant participation. As several researchers worked to find the historical roots of pageantry and its culture or to find the cultural norms established by pageantry, they employed historical and archival research and textual analysis in relation to ethnographic research. These studies include those completed by Roberts (2005), Lovegrove (2002), Dick (2002), Watson (2000), Latham (1995) and Wolfe (1994).

Maginnis (1991) approaches the ethnographic methodology with research conducted from audience studies and observations of participants and of pageants themselves. Welker (1995) employed yet another ethnographic approach in working with interpretive analysis of contestant behavior from watching videos or observing participants at pageants. And Lalik and Oliver (2005) employed a case study of four young African American women as they reacted to the hidden curriculum present in their school's annual beauty pageant. All of these ethnographic methods differ from the critical ethnography I will employ as I find the themes and patterns in media associated with the child beauty pageant culture.

Critical theory approaches to research were found in the works of Tice (2006) as her research discussed the power structures present in the pageant culture and the ways

that these power structures lead to commodification. Likewise, Cross (2004) researches the operations of power and consumerism in childhood and popular culture. And Lovegrove (2002) analyzes power found in the pageant culture as it leads to an obsession in our larger culture with beauty. Giroux (2001) carries this further as he critically analyzes the objectification and sexualization of children through pageant participation. Banet-Weiser (2006) also employs critical theory with media studies in her research on the ways roles are changing in media depicting beauty pageants and makeover programs. Foley (2004) critically analyzes performances by female entertainers and pageant participants in relation to their revelation and concealment in the parameters of culturally prescribed norms. And in relation to the Miss America pageant system and its ability to inform our culture of beauty and identity ideals and conflicts, Neimark (1998) employs a critical theory approach.

Even though it seems that many of the research projects approach beauty pageants and child beauty pageants from a negative viewpoint, there are many that point out the positive effects or products from pageant participation. For these researchers (Banet-Weiser, 2006; Roberts, 2005; Heltsley, 2003; Dick, 2002; Guiling, 2000; Watson, 2000; Boyd, 2000; Banet-Weiser, 1999; Latham, 1995; Wolfe, 1994; and Napoleon, 1987), it seems that pageant participation often leads to positive identity construction, ways to achieve success, or positive self-image.

The findings that center on the negative ways that power operates within the pageant culture often center on the objectification or the commodification of pageant participants and those who support these pageants (Tice, 2006; Roberts, 2005; Heltsley, 2003; Cross, 2004; Levey, 2002; and Giroux, 2001). And there are others that find other

negative aspects of pageant culture. Lalik and Oliver (2005) discusses the implications and effects of the hidden curriculum that exists in the school sponsored beauty pageant and Wonderlich et al. (2005) finds that many pageant participants are victims of body dissatisfaction as they grow older. Pannell (2004) and Giroux (2001) discuss the distortion of appearance that occurs in many of the child and adult beauty pageants and Valdez (2004) takes this further with a discussion of ways that societal values for beauty and worth are created through pageantry. Hetlstley (2004) finds that vendors in Southern style beauty pageants are the ones who benefit the most from participant involvement and Gleick (2001) questions who actually benefits from child pageant participation – the organizers, the parents, or possibly the child? Napoleon (1987) visits this question by suggesting that families have a vested interest in pageant participants doing well as there are accolades and social status associated with having a pageant winner in the household. Lovegrove (2002) looks at the obsession with beauty our society develops and how that obsession comes from beauty pageant participation and media depictions and Boyd (2000) sees this obsession allowing for the continuation of the myth of the Southern belle and the construction of beauty ideals.

Miller and Fox (2004) state that interpretive data are social constructions, reflecting the values and ideas of the producing researchers.

> Discourses provide persons with coherent interpretive frameworks and discursive practices for constructing different social realities within which particular kinds of people reside, relationships prevail, and opportunities are likely to emerge. We enter into discourses as we go about the practical activities of our lives. The discourses are conditions of possibility that

> provide us with resources for constructing a limited array of social realities, and make other possibilities less available to us (Miller and Fox, 2004, pp. 42 – 43).

Researchers, when describing participation, identify familiar patterns of behavior and familiar patterns of language. Existing discursive frameworks may have constrained the researcher's descriptions of behavior and may be further made legitimate by others who have similar research issues or realities. As a result, processes of association, sedimentation, and aggregation have continued ways of knowing that have been created within a paternalistic discourse.

Simply acknowledging that interpretive data as social constructions does not mean that the data generated is not useful. This data outlines very real discourses of everyday life that requires further examination (Miller and Fox, 2004). Taking on a different perspective to research requires the researcher to recognize practices often taken for granted by stepping outside of the usual and accepted explanations. This is not easy, as the researcher is called to question groups and divisions familiar to us, as we cannot be sure when we use such distinctions in the practice of everyday life (Foucault, 1972a). Foucault suggested that the divisions that exist are automatic categories organized using normative rules which call to be examined as they have complex relations with each other. Focault (1972a) states

> one tries to rediscover beyond statements themselves the intention of the speaking subject, his conscious activity, what he meant, or, again, the unconscious activity that took place, despite him-self, in what he said or in the almost imperceptible fracture of his actual words; in any case, we must

> reconstitute another discourse, rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animates from within the voice that one hears, reestablish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them (p. 27).

After examining the literature related to girlhood and the participation in child beauty pageants, I found that there are potential gaps which call for further research from a critical perspective. Research exploring the specific areas of girlhood and the creation of identity in relation to social class in the rural Southern beauty pageant culture is limited. Moreover, there is an absence of studies that specifically examine the power that operates in this specific culture in relation to girlhood identity creation. Research studies that have been carried out to date have generally adopted quantitative or qualitative methods and have not always focused on emancipation. In this light, some of these studies, unintentionally, may have reinforced the accepted ways of knowing through the processes of reification and sedimentation.

Studies performed by critical perspectives, when examined according to epistemological orientations, generate different understandings to those that adopt other approaches. Critical epistemological studies see that power and knowledge are related and reject positivist value free approaches as myth because power is used to control people (Neuman, 1997). Approaching problems differently, critical researchers reflect this in the questions they ask and their purposes for conducting research. The theory garnered from this type of critical epistemology may provide people with opportunities to participate in the transformation of their world.

Foucault: The Road to Poststructural Analysis of Power

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) state that

> Critical research can best be understood in context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name of critical must be connected to the attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within a particular society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label political and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness. (p. 291).

With such a mindset, I decided to adopt the role of bricoleur in my research as I move within and between competing paradigms. A bricoleur, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000/2003) is a quilt maker, and Weinstein and Weinstein (1991) believe that the metaphor of quilt-making allows for a creation that continues to evolve as a result of the bricoleurs methods of research. I decided to use several different techniques and methods of analysis in conducting the research for this dissertation, and these methods are self-reflective, strategic, and pragmatic. During my literature review and the field work I completed, I determined the techniques needed to complete the research. Using the quilt making metaphor, the piecing together of ways of analysis produces different ways of seeing the complex issues that influence why lower socio-economic parents enter their children into rural Southern beauty pageants and how this subculture works to create girlhood identity in the contestants.

Making the choice of a critical framework to support my dissertation research was important, because central to critical theory is the understanding of position, power, and

politics. As the discussion moves from critical epistemology, I need to provide a background to understand the critical ethnographic, cultural, and feminism methods detailed later in this chapter. Postmodernism and emancipation will be explored and a criticism of Foucault's work will be considered. This discussion will provide a backdrop to analyses of power relationships and structures within the rural Southern beauty pageant culture in relation to girlhood, identity, and social class.

Critical Theory

Critical theory, according to Agger (1991), grew from an attempt to address the effects of oppression and led to the formation of a school of interdisciplinary thought rather than a single dogmatic approach. Agger (1991) further described critical theory as a family of approaches from whom a number of emancipatory methodological directions have emerged. In order to understand critical theory, it is important to understand the concept of critical consciousness, or the ability to analyze assumptions and social expectations that determine how individuals interact with and relate to their worlds. Key to this idea is reflection, which is the process through which self-understanding and an awareness of culturally and socially embedded ideologies emerges. This allows for the exposure of false consciousness and the emancipation of the individual. Felski (2000) explains that scholars who approached research with a critical consciousness reconceptualized and problematized the familiar aspects of practice and required the use of rigorous critique to oppose oppressive processes. They are unwilling to accept ideas and practices based on authority and their focus turns to asking questions often left unasked. Agger (1991) furthers this explanation by including the idea that critical

consciousness also requires the researcher to expose meaning that is not often obvious or easily found.

The early beginnings of critical theory are found in the works of Marx in 1818, Freud in 1856, and Fromm in 1900, but the Frankfurt school in Germany in 1930 brought the ideas of critical theory to the forefront (Sarup, 1993). The Frankfurt school took issue with the views of positive science that ignored democracy and humanism and these researchers developed theories that revolved around emancipation and domination, due in no small part to the political and world events that occurred during the early 20th century (Agger, 1991). Horkiemer, Marcuse, Adorno, and Habermas, early philosophers who worked in a European atmosphere working to assimilate the ideas of socialism and capitalism into their culture, supplied the basis for studying society and the relationships between social conditions and the individual and they used this knowledge to challenge oppression in the existing social structures and help emancipate individuals (Sarup, 2002).

Even though the theorists were working toward similar themes and were connected to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, they were not unified in their approach to their research (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). Regardless of the differences in approaches, the focus of their work was the relationship between theory and practice, and the effects of science's domination and growth as an ideology in the 20th century. The theorists saw that science did not always develop negative outcomes, but the challenge occurred in the combination of praxis intent and explanatory strength often ignored by modern science.

This critical theory developed by the Frankfurt school attempted, according to Kincheloe and McLaren (1994), to explain why Marx's socialist revolution did not occur and the theorists at the Frankfurt school tried to reconstruct Marxism to fit the capitalist society that was emerging in the 20th century. Marxism theory is often considered to be the cornerstone of critical theory as it emphasizes economic exploitation and the dehumanizing of workers oppressed by a world who disregarded their contribution (Agger, 1991). According to Marx, humanity can break from this established oppression, as he stated,

> We do not anticipate the world dogmatically, but rather wish to find the new world through criticism of the old; even though the construction of the future and its completion for all times is not our task, what we have to accomplish at this time is all the more clear: relentless criticism of all existing conditions, relentless in the sense that criticism is not afraid of its find and just as little afraid of the conflict with the powers that be (cited in Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 137).

As critical theory became reconceptualized in the late 20th century, it began to turn its back on the Marxists' notions of human existence being based on economic forms of power (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). Even with this move from Marxist theory, the goal for critical theory remained somewhat the same: constructing a new future through interrogation of established ways of thinking.

Now as we move into the 21st century, critical theory contemplates the multiple forms of power that operate in relation to race, gender, and sexual domination. That is not to say that economic forces are not shaping culture and the lives of individuals,

because often these forces have an impact on the dominant cultural areas of race, gender, and sexual domination (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). The study of the ways that power operates to dominate is a difficult one for critical theorists, one that is an "extremely ambiguous topic that demands detailed study and analysis" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000, p. 283).

Society, in the eyes of critical researchers, is unfair, unequal and oppressive and change is necessary. Agger (1991) states that critical theory should aim to create a state of emancipation, and it is this idea that many researching child beauty pageant culture have adopted to reconstruct power relations particular to child beauty pageant culture and girlhood. This research is built on the ideas of critical epistemology and Foucault's work and this framework allows for actions of emancipation as understanding is developed for knowledge, power, and disciplinary structures. In deciding on a framework for my research, I knew that focusing just on Foucault's work or critical social theory would not be enough on its own. The desire to move beyond identification of and interpretation of the power that operates in beauty pageant culture prompted me to search for a theoretical framework that would allow me to move to offering opportunities to address the injustices that exists in this subculture.

Why is Foucault's work appropriate for the analysis in this research? Agger (1991) comments that critical social theory and Foucauldian analytics have tensions between them. Often, Foucault is criticized for being pessimistic and lacking constructive opportunities to end oppression. Some claim Foucault's work sees individuals as marionettes manipulated by another power instead of seeing them as

individuals who think independently. These criticisms are valid, and I have considered them in light of my research.

Foucault

Foucault, a professor of history of Systems of Thought, worked as a social scientist and idea historian at the College de France (Rabinow, 1984). Though he died in 1984, Foucault continues to be recognized as a controversial French thinker with a variety of interests and changes of position (Frasier, 1989). The three prevailing themes in Foucault's work are the disciplines of knowledge, questions of power and control, and theory of the self (McHoul and Grace, 1993). Foucault's works centered on the ideas of power and knowledge, most specifically *Madness and Civilization* (1967) and *The Birth of a Clinic* (1973) (Frasier, 1989).

Even though Foucault was criticized as a modern theorist in the 1970s and 1980s, he is now seen by current critical theorists as one of the most influential thinkers of the current era as much of his theoretical thinking has influenced our ways of thinking of and understanding the world. Sarup (1993) warns that making Foucault's thinking into an accepted orthodoxy would go against Foucault's intentions, and it is dangerous to assume that we fully understand Foucault's ideas if we have read only translations of his original work. There is a risk that Foucault's work may be erroneously used to add respectability and glamour to what would otherwise be seen as ordinary research.

Foucault's popularity is seen in the many works that have been written about his research and theories. Some see Foucault as a philosopher, historian, and political activist, while others target his personal life as fodder for discussion (Sarup, 1993). Foucault did not only work in the scholarly realm, but he also worked at the practical

level to support the rights of prisoners, immigrants, the politically oppressed, and those held in health institutions.

Challenges to Foucault's work are varied, and mostly focus on Foucault's thinking being functionalist and focusing more on society's being ruled "by an invisible hand rather than by an accountable, legitimate state power and rational rule of law" (Couzens Hoy, 1986, p. 10). Habermas believed that Foucault was an irrational "fortunate positivist" and Habermas did not accept Foucault's panoptican generalization and stated that Foucault was outdated in his attack on human science (Habermas, 1987, p. 276). Habermas also criticized *Discipline and Punish* and its generalization of the panoptican as being irrelevant, due to its specific context and generalizations (Habermas, 1987).

The Move to Postmodern Thinking

Foucault, a critical thinker according to some and a theorist whose works identify with postmodern thinking, denied the concept of ideology in the analysis of social structures (Palermo, 2002). Sarup (1993) saw Foucault's views on governmentality as a guide for understanding relationships between culture and society and understanding these relationships is paramount to making the connection between resistance and techniques of power in our current times. Current thinking questions Foucault's belief in the upholding of modern societies by truth claims of expert knowledge which stipulates normative rules of behavior and asks why people are willing to accept this authority and what maintains it.

Sarup (1993) states that postmodern theory grew out of thinking in the 1960s, which questioned modernity, or the age that grew out of the Age of Enlightenment and

was based on rationalism or postitivism where knowledge is based on scientific, objective facts free from outside influences. Postmodernists, according to Sarup (1993), reject the idea of a science of the social world and do not trust any systematic empirical observation. In fact, postmodernists reject claims to truth as it refers to logic, rationality, and reason based values.

In its move from scientific authority, postmodernism supports individuality and different views by challenging positivistic science and power and capitalism's dominance. The multiple views created by a postmodern thinking come from the freeing aspect which allows society to move from the domination of one world view or ideology (Palermo, 2002). And this aspect leads to the conclusion that postmodernism cannot be defined as a single perception (Sarup, 1993).

The criticisms of postmodernism are many and varied. One of the strongest is the failure of postmodernism to address the ideas that we live in a society where capitalism and consumerism dominate (Sarup, 1993). Palermo (2002) discusses the problems between the ways that education and knowledge are organized, citing that knowledge is now measured in terms of economic potential rather than in terms of the promotion of justice and truth. One indicator of this is the privatization of education in its attempt to attract better clients or students. And in beauty pageant culture, advertising the presence of talent and modeling scouts in the audience or awards in the form of monetary or other prizes leads to the attraction of contestants (consumers).

Another critique of Foucault's theories centers in his reluctance to provide solutions to the inequities brought to light by his analysis. However, Foucault never intended on being a postmodern theorist but that his work gives us the tools to reassess

the understanding of power and how it is exercised. Foucault's works, as a result, offer illumination of ways in which power is understood and this provides us with ways to identify injustice and the ways we work to change our practices.

Emancipation from Existing Power Structures

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) identify the work of critical researchers as political action focusing on addressing injustices identified in the process of doing research. This emancipatory action is produced by the ability of the researcher to bring to light the socially accepted ways of seeing the world. Foucault's work is emancipatory in nature in its attraction of justice, liberty, and human dignity (Sawicki, 1991). He located power outside conscious decisions and opened up possibilities that might be considered emancipatory. This relied on the idea that power produces effects (McHoul and Grace, 1993). This emancipation as a goal of empowerment has moved the objectives of critical theory embraced by academics to the address of social injustices.

Foucault believed that present happenings were not necessarily better than past happenings, but this does not mean that emancipation is not a component of his theory (Frasier, 1989). Rather, Foucault's view of progress did not embrace the idea that emancipation grew from increased knowledge – especially from modern science. Our ability to see change is not based on seeing better, but seeing differently (Frasier, 1989).

A problem with emancipatory research identified by Agger (1991) centers on the idea that the research is based on a belief that one person can act as an emancipator instead of seeing that the goal of emancipation needs to be regarded in research designs. If the researcher sees himself or herself as the emancipator, then the question becomes how does he or she decide which people need liberating. Therefore, research that works

to identify power structures and works to liberate or emancipate needs to be reciprocal with the researcher and the people being researched having an opportunity to experience change in understanding (Lather, 1991).

As I worked on my dissertation, my intent was part of my research from the outset. I desired to work in a reciprocal relationship with the contestants in the rural Southern beauty pageant culture to learn from each other. To do this, an understanding of Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge, and discipline was necessary.

Power, Knowledge and Discipline

Foucault's work discusses three different frames of time or phases: discourse, power, and subject (McHoul and Grace, 1993). *Discourse* refers to questions of knowledge, *power* refers to political questions of surveillance resulting in control through discipline, and *subject* sees human behavior as internally controlled by relationships with external surveillance. The second phase, power, is the frame used as I developed the critical framework for this study. My interest lies in understanding the ways power controls individuals – specifically girls – through disciplinary practices. But, because power and knowledge are so closely related, it was important that I examine Foucault's work in regard to power and knowledge relationships.

Power and knowledge are connected on an intimate level and are expressed as one unit. Rejecting power as a fragile repressive idea, Foucault (1972b) states:

> …power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute a knowledge of the body, this has been by way of an

> ensemble of military and educational disciplines. It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible (p. 59).

Power and knowledge will be studied together in relation to this research. The understanding of how discourse relates to discussions of disciplinary practices that exist in beauty pageant culture makes it relevant to the discussion generated by this dissertation. Therefore, Foucault's recognition of units of knowledge as discourse before discussing power/knowledge is appropriate to the research performed.

McHoul and Grace (1993) state

> …the term "discourse" refers not to language or social interaction but to relatively well bounded areas of social knowledge (p. 31).

Using this interpretation, discourse becomes whatever constrains as well as enables writing, speaking and thinking within a historical time frame. In keeping with this thinking, researchers are required to think about different ideas that happen to have names that they already know. Discourses seem to intersect and overlap in historical changes and form complex networks called discursive fields (Martusewicz, 1992) and, in light of Foucault's research, form a set of constraints that influence our thinking and actions.

For Foucault, discourse refers to bodies of knowledge, a theory that diverges from the idea of language and grammar and turns, instead, to a concept of discipline (McHoul and Grace, 1993). Discipline, as used by Foucault, has divergent meanings: scholarly disciplines such as sociology, medicine and psychology, and disciplinary institutions which exercise control such as prisons, schools, and organizations (like beauty pageants)

(Danaher et al, 2000). This shows the relationship between bodies of knowledge (disciplines) and social control (disciplinary practices).

Discourse becomes more than what is outwardly spoken or written about a particular discipline. As Foucault (1972a) explains,

> To this theme is connected another according to which all manifest discourses is secretly based on an "already said" and that this "already said" is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a "never said," an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark (p. 25).

Foucault saw discourse as an oppressive presence of that is "never said" and what is not said can undermine, in its silence, what has been said. This calls for researchers to question "what is said" discourses in light of the silent rules which call to be disrupted and made known. Admitting that discourse is an ambiguous term, Foucault (1972a) stated he had "used and abused [the term] in many different senses" (p. 107). In a general sense, Foucault saw discourse as verbal performances, including "groups of signs," "acts of formulations," and "series of sentences or propositions" (p. 107). To explain that discourse is represented by a group of statements that can be assigned to a particular mode of existence, Foucault (1972a) commented that "discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation" (p. 107). In this light, discursive formation becomes the rules that exist in relation to a group of statements (discourses).

Can a statement be considered a unit of discourse? Is this comparable to saying a sentence is a unit of language? Many, including McHoul and Grace (1993), believe that a statement cannot be considered a unit as a sentence is. A statement, unlike a sentence or act of speaking, carries with it much more meaning in keeping with Foucault's (1972a) belief that a statement has to be a functional unit used to "bring about effects rather than merely 'represent' states of affairs" (p. 37). Using this logic, Foucault himself argues that a statement is not the same as a linguistic sentence, as statements can take the form of unwritten media (maps, films, pictures,) with hidden or silent meanings. With this understanding, a statement becomes something functional due to the rules that surround their understanding.

Foucault's logic, limitations, rules and exclusions govern the ways that knowledge is produced in discourses. Discourses and events happen according to rules and other constraints and therefore, according to McHoul and Grace (1993), always find their functioning in relation to power. These discursive practices work to regulate cultural institutions like beauty pageants because dominant discourses such as beauty and feminine ideals have produced powerful cultures which, in turn, produce dominant discourses.

These discourses affect our daily lives as they provide frameworks for interpretation and practices of discourse that construct different social realities (Miller and Fox, 2004). Discourses, as a result, become "conditions of possibility that provide us with the resources for constructing a limited array of social realities, and make other possibilities less available to us" (pp. 42 – 43). Knowledge then becomes power as it

provides rules through which contestants understand what is true and what is imaginary. Knowledge tells the person what is important about her experience.

Foucault (1980) calls dominant discourses regimes of truth where "truth is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it" (p. 131). The status of the person or power who is responsible for saying what is true is what determines the truth or falseness of statements. To Foucault (1980),

> "Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induces and which extend it – a "regime of truth" (p. 133).

In this way, Foucault argues that truth is the product of many forms of restraint and truth works to encourage customary forms of power. In western societies, truth is often the product of scientific research and Foucault's concern was with the circumstances that allowed this position to be produced (McHoul and Grace, 1993). Social relations and the institutions produced by them held Foucault's focus, much more than natural science, as the social relations worked from the basis of human situations and the truths related to them.

Pageant participants and their parents use a multitude of regimes of truth or discourses to support their activities and actions and these discourses depend on the pageant systems within which they compete. For some of these girls and their parents, acceptance of the discourses produced by the pageant system within which they work becomes their basis for understanding beauty, feminist ideals, and qualities of winners.

Investigating the ways these regimes of truth are developed through dominant discourses allows for alternative forms of truth to be exposed and opportunities are then provided to finding other ways of functioning.

The Power/Knowledge Relationship

In his work, Foucault concentrates on the relations of power/knowledge and the body in modern society. This is seen in his works *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1979), as both move in thinking from analysis of knowledge to the diagnosis of power/knowledge relationships. Foucault's attention to the role of power in his work seems to point to a move in his thinking from knowledge analysis to power/knowledge relationships and this shift must be discussed in relation to his examination of truth. If researchers attempt to discuss Foucault's understanding of power without taking into consideration the role of truth, then they ignore important ties between power relations and the ability to construct the truths individuals live by.

Power and knowledge are closely related and Foucault (1977) confirms this saying,

> Power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (p. 27).

In this way, Foucault (1977) sees that power is implemented but is not possessed as property, possession, privilege, or as something those who dominate have and those who

are oppressed lack. This leads to abandoning the accepted concepts of power which lead to the belief that knowledge exists outside power relations.

Moving from this view that knowledge is what makes people more powerful, Foucault's work indicates that knowledge works to make us subjects because we begin to define and make sense of ourselves in reference to the knowledge and its sources (Danaher et al, 2000). According to Danaher et al (2000), power is not something that is imposed upon people, but people submit themselves to actions or ways of operating that fit specific circumstances. In the beauty pageant realm, this is evidenced in that contestants perform and dress in certain ways dependent upon the pageant system in which they are competing – using different dresses, modeling techniques, talents, and costumes for particular systems.

Foucault (1980) worked to "reverse the mode of analysis" of power so that power was not described in negative terms which tend to exclude, repress, and conceal the effects of power. He wanted to change the perceptions of domination to show the entire machine with all its parts. Danaher et al. (2000) suggest that Foucault wanted to "cut off the king's head" to allow power to be recognized, instead of as the property of the forceful (like kings, presidents, judges, or pageant systems), but rather as forces that create positions and ways of acting in daily life (p. 48).

As it is an outgrowth of Marxists' thinking, the Frankfurt school's perception of power was one that saw power as sovereign, a repressive and negative force, and as a class struggle between the bourgeoisie and working class and capitalist modes of production (Frasier, 1989). Foucault's notion of power pointed out the inadequacy of this thinking of power as it sees power as a strategy with those who are "dominated" being as

much a part of the system of power relations as those who dominate (Frazier, 1989). According to Foucault (1980)

> In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, or implemented without production accumulation, circulation, and functioning of discourse. There can also be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and cannot exercise power except through the production of truth (p. 93).

For Foucault, power was not seen as a general concept but as a system. Power can be understood by the techniques though which it is exercised (Fiske, 1993). The ways, according to Foucault, that power can be recognized and comprehended in society are through legal, administrative, and economic forms and techniques. As there are no universal ways to exercise power, our society is governed by certain practices that reveal to us the ways that power and its relations function. For Foucault, these practices are visible in our culture through structures like the beauty pageant organizations which produce docile and passive behavior or actions which lead to positive reinforcements.

Time and Place: Docile Bodies

Discipline produces what Foucault (1977) called "docile bodies," or ones that can be trained or manipulated, used, subjected, and transformed (p. 136). The process by which bodies become docile, or develop a political anatomy, is not sudden, but occurs over time due to forces that come from various directions and which have similar

intentions. This is illustrated in the methods used by schools, the military, beauty pageants, contests, and many other social structures. Foucault (1977) worked to "map a series of examples of the essential techniques that easily spread from one institution to another" (p. 139). Discipline does work within these institutions, but does not become the institution itself. The techniques that work to create this disciplinary power is adaptable to any institution and Foucault discussed that these power operations work in conjunction with the knowledge that comes from their existence (Fiske, 1993). Docility, according to Foucault (1977) is achieved through four disciplinary techniques: (1) spatial distribution, (2) activity control through timetable use, (3) geneses organization, and (4) composition of forces. In relation to this study on rural child beauty pageants, Foucault's work on spatial distribution and activity control through timetable use are relevant.

According to Foucault (1977) individuals are placed into spaces according to discipline by way of several methods. By enclosing the individual into a specified space, a "protected place of discipline and monotony" (p. 141), discipline works to create spatial distribution. Foucault (1977) follows this idea in the confinement of beggars and the poor in France in the 17th century and in more modern ways of boarding schools, military institutions, and religious organizations. This extends to "partitioning," where the goal is to control disappearances by focusing on who is present and who is missing in a group (Foucault, 1977). In child beauty pageants, this is demonstrated by who is on stage during the call-backs, who is counted among the top-ten or top-five, and who is named queen or among the "royalty."

In keeping with pageantry's way of creating docile bodies, Foucault (1977) discussed that it is not just the place that one occupies but the position or status one holds

in that place that creates the docile body. This is also seen in schools with the difference in rank between teacher and pupil or in the military between officer and soldier. Hierarchical position does create obedience, as position or status is a fluid state which is able to be changed due to its relationship with knowledge. If one knows the right information and uses that information correctly, then a change in status can occur. And once people are allowed to move up in status or position, they then become subjected to other techniques that maintain discipline's power to create docility.

According to Foucault (1977), "time permeates the body and with it all its meticulous controls of power" (p. 152). The use of timetables to control dates back to monasteries with their daily rhythms and cycles of repetition. This idea of discipline through time is seen in more modern organizations like schools, hospitals, and workplaces. In this way, time regulates the body by imposing rhythm from the outside.

Through this regulation of the body using time, the focus becomes efficiency and speed. For Foucault (1977), this allows for the "correct use of the body, which makes possible the correct use of time as nothing must remain idle or useless" (p. 152). As wasting time has historically been seen as negative, this use of time to regulate bodies reinforced the idea of making the most of time creating a "positive economy" as Foucault (1977) discussed,

> Discipline on the other hand, arranges a positive economy; it poses the principle of a theoretically ever growing use of time: exhaustion rather than use; it is a question of extracting, from time, ever more available moments and, from each moment, ever more useful forces. This means that one must seek to intensify the use of time, as if time, in its very

> fragmentation, were inexhaustible or as if, at least by an ever more detailed internal arrangement, one could tend towards an ideal point at which one maintained maximum speed and efficiency (p. 154).

In this way, discipline strengthens time and the idea that using every moment is paramount. In Foucault's mind, just as position or spatial distribution produces docile bodies, the control of activity produces them as well. To perform competently an individual is required to be obedient to the conditions expected of it to function in. In order to do this, the body must be trained and people develop these actions based on the knowledge of what is considered to be "true" (Fiske, 1993).

Developing these actions is illustrated through the training pageant participants receive on talent, modeling, interview skills, wardrobe and other aspects of competition. And the development of these skills focuses on being able to perform them efficiently. Making the use of every available moment for training or practicing is important. For many of the competitions, there is a required 20 to 30 second on-stage introduction or a required 30 to 60 second introduction in the interview. Or the talent portion may enforce a time limit on routines (usually one minute and thirty seconds to two minutes and thirty seconds) – and certain modeling routines are limited to certain amounts of time as well. This means that performing efficiently and optimally is paramount. And the behavior is reinforced through losing or winning contests. Pageant participants become caught in a network of power relations that disciplines them to behave in certain ways.

Measuring Disciplinary Success

Hierarchical observation and normalizing judgments combine to create what Foucault (1977) termed the "examination." It is through these mechanisms that

disciplinary success is measured. Hierarchical observation is based on the idea that surveillance is paramount to control (Martusewicz, 1992). There is an unequal connection between the observer and the observed, as the person being observed does not have the power or knowledge to reverse the process on the observer.

Surveillance allows disciplinary power to become anonymous power. Foucault (1977) uses the model of Bentham's panopticon (1791) as an example of this anonymous power because

> … the Panopticon brings together knowledge, power, the control of the body, and the control of space into an integrated technology of discipline (p. 189).

The function of this power is on individuals as well as networks, working top to bottom, bottom to top, and laterally (Foucault, 1977). The supervisors are continually being supervised. In the pageant system, contestants are judged (supervised) by the judges, who are in turn supervised by the pageant officials, who are supervised by the audience and participants in the pageant system.

There is a standard that unifies the operations in this disciplinary system and allows for punishments at the micro level of operation known as a "normalizing judgment" (Martusewicz, 1992). Foucault called this "micro penalty" as more and more levels of life are subject to power. Micro penalty can include punishments for lateness, laziness, disobedience and more through minor deprivations to humiliation (Foucault, 1977). Even the smallest deviations from proper behavior are subject to being punished. Those who are slightly nonconformists, even for a small amount of time, can be subject to discipline. This is visible in beauty pageants as those who are non-compliant with the

accepted rules, dress, modeling techniques, etc., do not win or are ridiculed by others who are competing.

For normalizing judgments, nonstandard behavior is determined when one person is judged by another using knowledge possessed by the person making the judgment (Fiske, 1993). Power/knowledge usage in this manner is also seen in examinations, as the process is created by someone possessing knowledge and it is carried out on those who are seeking it.

The ideas of surveillance and normalization come together in the process of examination, since people become objectified, individualized, and ranked accordingly. In pageants, the importance of examination is based on subtle reversals of power. Disciplinary power reverses the traditional, visible sovereign power. Power becomes invisible and the objects of power – those on whom it operates – are made the most visible (Martusewicz, 1992). Constant surveillance becomes the means by which discipline is maintained.

Working Towards a Framework for Analysis

Working with Foucault's understandings of power/knowledge and discipline allows for another way of examining relationships between girls, their social class and child beauty pageant culture. Admitting that power is demonstrated through disciplinary techniques inherent to cultures presents explanations as to why people may be willing to accept and participate in beauty pageants that dictate an adultified or seeming false or exaggerated form of beauty. Understanding the techniques tied to discipline allow for highlighting how the body (people) can be seen as objects subjected to surveillance (observation) that produces docile bodies. Pageant accolades are recognized as true

knowledge and through normalization processes people are judged and given titles and other labels. Deviant displays of behavior by participants, parents or pageant officials are corrected by visible punishments and conforming behavior is encouraged. Disciplinary technologies are the ways through which power is exercised and examination of this allows for ways to identify changes that might support participants to be involved in the ways that beauty and success are defined in the pageant culture.

In my research, I am working to look beyond descriptions of possession and compliance and this is in keeping with Foucault's notion of power which refuses the idea that power is something that is possessed. For Foucault, there is no one fundamental principle of power, but power is experienced in many different ways at the most basic levels when the individual is subjected to particular exercises of power (Fiske, 1993). Being able to understand and then change the world relies on the understanding that power is an open network. Foucault's aim of analyzing daily practices in which people work under "micro powers" is key in the research I am conducting in this study.

I do believe that change is possible in the pageant culture and this is supported by Foucault's (1980) understanding that power relations do not exist without resistance. This takes place where power is exercised and resistance can be seen in many different forms, just like power, as resistance is open-ended. Using this view of power relations in conducting this research helped to identify the ways some individuals in this research resisted the disciplinary processes that accompany pageant culture. Using Foucault's work as a framework for analysis allows for asking questions, seeing new ways of doing things, and participating in some small way in understanding the sub-culture of pageants as they relate to social status. Foucault's works are situated in relation to my research

through the discussion of critical theory, current modes of thinking, and understanding. The works related to power/knowledge and discipline create the critical framework for the discussion related to critical theory and provides the background to the methods of critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics, cultural studies, and poststructural feminism. The methods of critical theory and the Foucaultian perspective offer ways of understanding and therefore they have been used in this research. My role as a researcher was to identify opportunities for reflection and expose alternative ways of seeing taken for granted operations.

There are social dynamics that shape media and popular culture. To study these social dynamics and to bring to light the internal structures and forces at work in them, one must adopt a theoretical framework that is ethnographic, or that has the ability to study the experiences of others. The framework must also include ways to study the political and epistemological concerns often studied in Poststructural feminist research, as these forces have influence on media and popular culture. There must also be a method of research in place to focus on the social theories that influence media and popular culture as well. In this way, theory becomes a filter to allow the researcher to approach the information being studied and to designate facts to be acknowledged. Theory also allows the researcher to be able to identify problems in the information gathered and then be able to devise solutions for those problems. Different theories allow for different views – and in deciding on the theory or theories for research, one must be sure that the scope is not too broad nor too rigid.

Approaching my research from a critical poststructuralist theoretical standpoint seemed to be the most important for me. First, this theory focuses on individuals making

meaning from personal experience and research. This means there is independence in the research process and there is an opportunity to create dialogue with the phenomenon being studied in order to learn answers as research is conducted. In this way, context becomes key to the research process and the researcher herself. Critical postructuralist theoretical frameworks bring to light and see the gap between what really happens and the ideas of what could happen.

When studying media and popular culture, one must admit the existence of dominant forces in culture. Critical theory tries to identify cultural production from inside the source so that there is a new understanding of the event or phenomenon. For this research, child beauty pageant culture, girlhood, social class, and identity formation will be studied to note contradictions in the power operations and to seek the possibilities that exist within these structures. Critical theory allows the frameworks through which to find this information.

Within critical theory frameworks, research can begin by drawing on personal experience. Researching others allows the researcher the opportunity to also study inner experiences. Now the researcher can watch cultural or media phenomena and study the phenomena from within. This allows for knowing directly and for watching and experiencing. In this way, private is made public. And the critical frameworks of critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics, postructural feminism, and cultural studies allow me the lenses through which to study rural child beauty pageant culture in relation to girlhood, social class and identity construction.

CHAPTER 3

BRICOLAGE: CULTURAL STUDIES, CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS, POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINISM, AND POSTSTRUCTURALIST ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is regarded as holistic in its approach as its aim is to understand individuals and their behavior in the context of culture (Fetterman, 2000). According to Chambers (2000), ethnography as the varieties of inquiry that work to describe culture and human affairs delineating that ethnography is defined by the subject matter and not by methodology. Not a stagnant methodology, ethnography requires an ongoing process of placing individuals and events in meaningful contexts. Each of the ethnographic traditions share a common goal of gathering first-hand experiences and exploring specific cultures (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lotland, and Lotland, 2001).

Brewer (2000) defines ethnography as

> The study of people in naturally occurring settings or fields by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researchers participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning imposed on them externally (p. 6).

In this way, researchers learn about others by learning from them. Ethnography becomes understood through a combination of actions - fieldwork, design, and methods of inquiry that create personal, historical, and political accounts of people's lives. Ethnographic research works to recognize the characteristics of groups of people by spending much time in observation and using diverse methods of data collection to unearth all facets of a given culture or situation (Fetterman, 2000).

In the modern era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modern ethnography is seen as an outgrowth of British anthropology and the Chicago school in America. Some even trace it back to 18th and 19th century German philosophy or to the Renaissnace (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Criticism of ethnography stems from relevance as a research methodology, as there are questions of conflict between positivist scientific and qualitative methods from ethnography's interpretive start. In response to this argument, scholars cite the focus of early anthropologists on anthropology as a science (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

As the modern era turned from the early 20th century to World War II, the Traditional Period of ethnography emerged. This was characterized by a focus on objective accounts of field experiences based on positivist scientific paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). It is during this time that ethnography became seen as the scientific side of anthropology. Even with this perception, the Chicago school focused more on life stories rather than anthropology and moved to create an interpretive methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

Not specific to any discipline, ethnography combines aspects of all of them and works within those aspects of the disciplines that are parallel. Now different approaches within different paradigms are being used in ethnography – education, medicine, social sciences (Brewer, 2000). Ethnography now allows for the use of different perspectives and the inclusion of different intellectual cultures. In this way, it is not constrained by conventional frames. Some common features of each of ethnography's different traditions include the use of first hand observation, the use of participant observation as a key part of understanding, and the importance of observation not being done in isolation.

Critical ethnography focuses on emancipation, as there were criticisms of modern ethnography citing its lack of recognizing oppression (Hammersley, 1992). In critical research, the concern is with societal inequalities and the focus is on positive social change. Research in this field is disturbed by power relationships and culture and how inequalities affect human behavior (Carspeken, 1996). Through critical ethnographic research unequal power relationships can be exposed, so within this framework pageant participants and viewers of pageant media can begin to understand these inequalities leading to changes in practice.

There is much debate over methods and objectivity in relation to ethnography when questions arise over how researchers separate themselves from the data being collected. This is especially true when researchers are performing participant observations in the field. How do researchers distance themselves, or is distancing even necessary? In critical ethnography, researchers admit that their research is subjective, citing their desire to uncover the intrinsic power relations within the process of gathering information (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Due to their involvement and influence in a certain area of culture, researchers become part of the research process and capture one version of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). In light of this, it is important for researchers to admit their theoretical perspectives and be honest about the ways they produce data. The perspective must be clearly identifiable in the research because ethnography requires the researcher to create validity through a reflective account of the research process (Brewer, 2000).

Ethnographers center on describing social scenes and culture from an insider's perspective and, as a result, there is a reflection of many forms of reality (Fetterman,

2000). When they are involved directly with the individuals they are studying within a culture or social setting, researchers must maintain a professional stance as an outsider. Thus there is a combination of insider and outsider perspectives that allow for a deeper understanding of cultural or social settings. This requires researchers to be active when working with individuals or culture and then step back and analyze the information collected.

Coffey (1999) states that it is this total immersion in the field that yields strength for ethnographic research. In her eyes, this total immersion is not a weakness leading to familiarity which causes distortion and limitations to research, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) espouse. In Coffey's argument, she states that immersion is not a weakness, but the lack of acknowledgement of the presence and role of the researcher is. This immersion, however, must be done with critical, analytical, and self-conscious awareness, in Coffey's opinion. This requires keeping extensive field notes and journals that includes personal reflections as a researcher in order to keep the proper awareness required for critical research.

It is impossible to separate the ethnographic researcher from the personal in research reports, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), as they address the place of the writer in relation to the extent one's personal self should be included. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), it is not possible to conduct research and write without the self being present since "all texts are personal statements" (p. 578). Researchers should balance their admittance of self presence and their objectiveness without being the focus or the dominating force in the project. This requires a reflexive account in writing and an intent to present realistic research accounts with authenticity established, leaving out the

idea of self privilege in the accounts of their fieldwork. As a bricoleur, I am able to support my intention to balance my use of self without dominating others' views in the research.

Researchers using a critical ethnography approach can consider several different organizations, social situations, and research processes within power relationships. And this allows ways to move beyond the limitations of social structures to show how power relationships affect individual behaviors. Critical ethnography is connected to illuminating the exercise of power and local knowledge in culturally specific, socially reproductive processes (Lather, 2001). According to Lather (2001), critical ethnography includes reworking Foucault's theories as well as feminist, post-colonial, and cultural race theories, to focus on the construction of consent and uncovering inequalities (p. 479). Lather encourages the move from traditional ethnographic practices to work and collaborate with dominated groups. This idea is reflected in my relationship with the participants in child beauty pageant culture as well as the pageant structures themselves within this research, as I was a participant in, an organizer of, an observer of beauty pageants. As my desire was to be actively involved in the research of rural beauty pageant culture, it was important for me to adopt a critical ethnographic framework.

Unlike traditional ethnographic frameworks, critical ethnography can describe the deep structures that support educational settings and social patterns. By using critical ethnography in a bricolage, I can gain insight into the films and documentaries that center on child beauty pageant culture. Rather than conducting traditional audience studies like John Fiske (1998), I want to investigate the culture and characters portrayed in these films and documentaries and to investigate the social dynamics that exist outside the

films. Documenting patterns of cultural expression and social interaction while watching these films and documentaries allow for identification of ideologies at work in them. And in so doing, there will be a dialogue between research and researcher that focuses not on privileging a dominant narrative or viewpoint, but on breaking down the hierarchies that exist between research and researcher. Meanings from such research are constructed from the context (Aronowitz, 1993). Circumstance and context become keys to finding meaning when researching films and documentaries as part of culture and history.

Working towards Interpretation: Critical Hermeneutics

Historically, hermeneutics grew from the interpretation of ancient and biblical texts and was then applied to general human sciences. From there, hermeneutics now is acknowledged to encompass all acts of interpretation in human sciences (Rorty, 1991). Hermeneutics, then, is focused on mediating the processes of human understanding and interpretation. It reveals the mediated processes of all human understanding (Rorty, 1991) and is connected to qualitative research as qualitative research has similar goals. Hermeneutics, however, takes this concern with the mediated processes of human understanding a step further and questions the limitations of positivist approaches to research. Gadamer (1990a) claims "we must ask repeatedly if something has not been omitted…" (p. 153). It is just this "omitted" aspect that qualitative research and hermeneutics work to understand and uncover. Therefore, hermeneutics gives a basic foundation to qualitative research and offers ways to enrich and deepen the foundations of research from the qualitative perspective.

Gadamer (1992) cites that "hermeneutics is a protection against abuse of method not against methodicalness in general" (p. 70). As an approach to research, hermeneutics does work to find understanding over explanation of events or individuals. It also acknowledges that interpretation is subject to situatedness of the researcher and interpretation also is subject to language and historicity. Inquiry then becomes a conversation, or dialogue, that is not looking for "be-all-end-all" knowledge but is comfortable with ambiguity in the process of building understanding.

As the goal of hermeneutics is to build understanding rather than provide an explanation or an authoritative reading of a text, Jardine(1992) states

> Hermeneutic inquiry has its goal to induce understanding, to bring forth the presuppositions in which we already live. Its task, therefore, is not to methodically achieve a relationship to some matter and to secure understanding in such a method. Rather, its task is to recollect the contours and textures of the life we are already living, a life that is not secured by the methods we can wield such a life our object (p. 116).

The point, then, of hermeneutic research, according to Gadamer (1996) becomes the clarification of interpretive conditions in which understanding takes place, giving attention to the individual prejudices brought to the interpretive event beyond what is on the surface of the present. Gadamer (1996) explains

> The horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding

> the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past (p. 306).

In light of this, understanding becomes making what is said one's own. To make this clear, Gadamer (1996) writes

> one intends to understand the text itself. But this means that the interpreter's own thoughts too have gone into re-awakening the texts' meaning. In this the interpreter's own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk, and that helps one truly make one's own what the text says (p. 388).

The horizon of the individual is not static, but the text combines with the questions of the interpreter and a fusion of the horizons takes place.

Bontekoe (1996) points out that understanding takes place when the analyst or researcher acknowledges the significance of the various aspects of what she notices and recognizes how these aspects relate to each other. Rorty (1991) sees these changes in understanding as a reweaving of human beliefs and desires. He sees this web of belief should not be seen as just a "reweaving" but one that produces a catalyst to action for the individual.

Central to this idea of understanding is the hermeneutic circle, a methodological process of understanding. Schwandt (2001) states that the hermeneutic circle allows for the understanding of the whole of a text though the "construing of meaning of the whole [by] making sense of the parts and grasping the meaning of the parts [depending] on

having some sense of the whole" (p. 112). Bontekoe (1996) explains that the traditional hermeneutic circle

> …has what might be called two poles – on the one hand, the object of comprehension understood as a whole, and, on the other, the various parts of which the object of comprehension is composed…The object of comprehension, taken as a whole, is understood in terms of its parts, and …this understanding involves the recognition of how these parts are integrated into the whole (p. 3).

Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (1996) saw this circularity of interpretation as an essential component of all understanding and knowledge, not just as a procedural process. Instead of seeing the process as the illumination of individual parts that brings understanding of the larger whole, Heidegger and Gadamer saw each interpretation relying on another interpretation. Gadamer (1996) explains "the circular movement of understanding runs backward and forward along the text and ceases when the text is perfectly understood" (p. 293). Gadamer illustrates this in contrast to Heidegger's belief that "the understanding of the text remains permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding" (p. 293). Or, to explain, complete understanding does not mean the whole and the parts are dissolved, but understanding is best realized in the exchange between the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter (Gadamer, 1996). Gadamer (1996) explains

> The interpretation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonailty that binds us to the tradition. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather,

> we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a methodological circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding (p. 293).

This hermeneutical circle opens up to the individual many different metaphors thought which analysis can occur outside of the traditional, familiar modes of interpretation. In this light, we could begin, as Steinberg (2004) states,

> thinking of movies as mass-mediated dreams [to] help us reconceptualize the interpretive act as a psychoanalytic form of dream study. In this way, educational scholars could examine psychoanalytical work in the analysis of dream symbolization for insights into their studies of the pedagogy of popular culture and the meanings it helps individuals make via its visual images and narratives (pp. 16 – 17).

As I, as a researcher, begin interpreting the various movies and documentaries connected to rural child beauty pageant culture and girlhood, I will need to be aware of the metaphors I bring to the interpretive process. This will involve the culture, the language, the historical era, and socio-economic position that impact me as an individual. This will allow me to properly work within the hermeneutical circle.

Hermeneutics acknowledges that all interpretation or understanding is located or situated, or given a view from somewhere. Gardiner (1999) discusses this, saying,

> The hermeneutic approach stresses the creative interpretation of words and texts and the active role played by the knower. The goal is not objective explanation or neutral description, but rather a sympathetic engagement

> with the author of a text, utterance, or action and the wider socio-cultural context within which these phenomena occur (p. 63).

This situated nature of interpretation is a growing theme in hermeneutics.

There is a uniqueness to each vantage point, and as Eisner (1998) points out, each vantage point is unique as how we interpret what we see bears our own signature. This unique vantage point becomes a strength instead of a liability due to the individual insight that is brought to a situation. Smith (1999) focuses on the influence of social groups and social practices by pointing out that all inquiry begins from a particular social location where every knower is located, stating, "she is active, she is at work, she is connected up with particular people in various ways" (p. 4). It is these social networks and locations that influence interpretive perspectives and ways of constructing meaning.

Each person's perspective is always biased (Haraway, 1991) and as a result objectivity is not as strong. When we view events or texts with such a view, we are called into account, as much as we are able, to acknowledge the situated nature of our subjectivity (Harding, 1991). The researcher's perspective and experience, therefore, become the historically and culturally situated lens through which texts are considered.

Hermeneutical thinkers argue that language and history are conditions and limitations of understanding (Wachterhauser, 1986).

> Hermeneutical theories of understanding argue that all human understanding is never "without words" and never "outside of time." On the contrary, what is distinctive about human understanding is that it is always in terms of some evolving linguistic framework that has been

> worked out over time in terms of some historically conditioned set of concerns and practices (Wachterhauser, 1986, p. 6).

Gadamer (1996) sees this awareness of prejudices informed historically as basic to understanding, citing

> A person who believes he is free of prejudices, relying on the objectivity of his procedures and denying that he himself is conditioned by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him… A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudiced will fail to see what manifests itself by their light (p. 360).

So no matter who we are, the background of our lived lives and the judgments we make prior to situations form the traditions we use as we interpret and create understanding.

Gadmer (1992) describes hermeneutics "as the skill to let things speak which come to us in a fixed, petrified form, that of the text" (p. 65). This makes the interpretation of text more like a translation, full of intonation, focusing on certain features, and suppressing other aspects. Highlighting certain features is part of this interpretation or translation. And in light of this, a hermeneutic conversation, the partners should work towards a common language. Gadamer (1992) expounds upon this, saying

> Finding a common language is not, any more than in real conversation, preparing a tool for the purpose of teaching understanding, but rather, coincides with the very act of understanding and reaching agreement.
>
> Even between the partners of this conversation a communication like that between two people takes place that is more than accommodation. The

> text brings a subject matter into language, but that it does so is ultimately the achievement of the interpreter (p. 388).

There may be a range of voices adopted as the individual fosters a conversation between different texts. And while this cacophony of voices may be distracting for the reader and inquirer, it is the necessary price for engaging the conversation between texts written in languages foreign from each other. This calls for the need to broaden Gadamer's interpretation from a conversation to a dialogue which allows for the multitude of voices that become a part of the interpretive process.

Hermeneutics also embraces the idea of ambiguity, or as Gadamer (1992) describes, "all that is unfamiliar and strikes us as significant" (p. 70). Part of this task is to restore life to its difficulty (Jardine, 1992). And therefore, hermeneutics rejects the idea that one single authoritative view exists for the reading of a text and embraces a complex interpretive endeavor. The goal is "to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves and to know that, even if it must always be understood in different ways, it is still the same text presenting itself to us in these different ways" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 398). A single interpretation that is correct in and of itself does not exist because the historical life of tradition is dependent upon constant assimilation and interpretation. Thus the hermeneutic approach is open to the ambiguous nature of textual analysis, resisting the urge to offer authoritative readings and neat reconciliations.

The merger of Heidegger's view of hermeneutics with the deconstructionist work of Derrida leads us to the realm of critical hermeneutics (Caputo, 1987). In this new realm, the owning up our situations or our vulnerability allows for a new direction for the understanding developed through hermeneutic inquiry. This does not mean that a true

synthesis on all sides will occur, but critical hermeneutics has as its aim respect and openness toward the perspective of the "other" and the willingness of the individual to suspend position to achieve understanding. In this light, insights gained from critical perspectives with respect to power, the potential of the misuse of language, the acknowledgement of distinct and communicative selves, and an awareness of the state of things, have the potential to inform hermeneutical inquiry. In my dissertation, this critical social theory is part of the interpretive process of the hermeneutical inquiry. Using this critical social theory will allow me to understand the hidden structures and implied cultural actions that work behind the scenes. As I study the media constructions of pageantry and the cultural construction of beauty pageants and I situate these in the socio-historical structures present in society, I will be conducting the central hermeneutic of my research.

Hermeneutics does not require the repetition of traditions, but it "incites the particularities and intimacies of our lives to call these traditions to account, compelling them to bear witness to the lives we are living (Jardine, 1999, p. 2). Gadamer (1976) sees hermeneutic reflection as that which "exercises a self-criticism of thinking consciousness, a criticism that translates all its own abstractions and also the knowledge of the sciences back into the whole of human experience of the world" (p. 94). As a result, consciousness about how hermeneutics influences our interpretive experiences as individuals and the limits of what we can know is a reflection of a critical condition.

In this critical tradition, the individual can recognize that all interpretation and all communication take place within what Rich (2001) calls a "tangle of expressions." Criticism becomes, as a result, "an art of saying useful things about complex and subtle

objects and events so that others … see and understand what they did not see and understand before" (Eisner, 1998, p. 3). The frames of social reference help the researcher to shape the questions he or she wishes to answer, and these questions influence the nature of the interpretation. As a researcher, I am not expected to remove all worldly influence, but I am encouraged to identify them and understand the ways in which the world affects the ways I approach rural child beauty pageants and media and the ways that they work as curriculum. This allows for the illumination of situations so they can be appreciated.

Critical hermeneutic approaches to inquiry search for a way between dualities, or an intermediary course between simplistic polarities (Kearney, 2003). Kearney furthers this idea by stating that in order for the individual to rise above the dangers of thinking in a polarized manner, the individual must take apart or deconstruct the binary dualisms "so as to muddle through with the help of a certain judicious mix of phonetic understanding, narrative imagination, and hermeneutic judgment" (p. 187). Feminist epistemology and philosophy embraces this idea similarly as many feminist perspectives work towards a way to "resist dichotomous, dualistic, divisive modes of thinking" and argue that such modes of thinking "impose unnecessarily artificial distinctions upon experience, and often draws on unwarranted evaluative conclusions from them" (Code, Mullet, and Overall, 1988, p. 6). This call for an acknowledgment of dualities and resistance to polarized positions situates a critical hermeneutic approach to inquiry.

In critical hermeneutics, the dissection of the ways that people bridge the gap between their everyday experiences and the cultural representations of those experiences is central to the analysis (Steinberg, 2004). While viewing and analyzing the

documentaries and movies concerning child beauty pageant culture, I will work to identify and understand the ideological codings that are deeply a part of these cultural representations. There is much meaning that is assumed or "taken for granted" embedded in the cultural representations of child beauty pageantry, and this complicates the process of unraveling as these assumed meanings are accepted into daily life. The key will be to identify those "taken for granted" meanings and discuss them in relation to the aspects of media curriculum that is not usually discussed or commented on in relation to child beauty pageant culture.

Every human situation is marked by dialect, with both sides of the "conversation" being equally significant and being unable to be fully resolved (Green, 1995). This idea is furthered by Merleau-Ponty who identifies with the idea of the importance of the dialectic, outside of the Hegelian or Marxist sense of final integration, in a multi-faceted, endless dialogue between polarities (Gardnier, 1999). The open-ended concept of the dialectic can be created and used through a critical hermeneutic dialogue. Within these open-ended dialogues, there "always remains the possibility of a sudden shifting of polarities, surprising reversals and transformations, inexpressibly complicated crossovers, overlappings and imbrications – none of which can ever fully anticipate or exert complete control over" (Gardnier, 1999, p. 137).

Through postmodernism, there seems to be a secondary culture that is "filtered and pre-formed in the marketplace and constantly communicated via popular culture and mass media" (Steinberg, 2004, p. 20). As a critical analyst, it will be important for me to understand the aspects of curriculum that are formed through this

mediated culture – both the ideological (or political) and the epistemological (cognitive). As Steinberg (2004) discusses,

> …the situating effects of print media tend to promote a form of linearity that encourages rationality, continuity, and uniformity; on the other hand, electronic media promote a non-linear immediacy that may encourage more emotional responses that lead individuals in very different directions (p. 20).

So it will be imperative for me to identify the epistemological or ideological processes that are present in the different types of child beauty pageant media and identify these in the context of the research process itself.

Through critical hermeneutics, researchers work to situate the world as part of larger work of evaluation and positive change. This is accomplished through the attention given to domination as an active force, as it is limiting to self-direction and the building of community. The answer to this domination is emancipation through the identification of ways individuals can understand the ideological processes that have entangled them in the dominant views. This exposure of dominant forces and the identification and critique of dominant ideology is the primary concern for critical hermeneutics. Those with race, class, and gender positions of power have the resources available to them to continue these ideologies that those not in their positions cannot. Entertainment and communication industries are used by those in power to create a cultural consciousness and individual subjectivity (Denzin, 1992).

It is this focus that critical hermeneutics has with popular culture and its impact on epistemological and political constructions that drew me to it as a methodological

framework. As my study of child beauty pageant culture is interested in exposing the ways that power operates to construct girlhood identity in relation to social class, a key aspect of the study is the socio-political impact of media in this genre on the ways young people – specifically girls – are socialized. One of the main aspects of critical hermeneutics is the belief that all popular culture that is consumed and that makes an impact on its audience is called to be studied despite the outward judgments that so-called "elite" cultural scholars might offer (Berger, 1995). In this way, critical hermeneutics notes that movies and other popular culture texts influence subjectivity and can only be understood when situated in the socio-historical and political contexts that support them (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992).

Cultural texts do much work in the realm of the creation of identity within a human subject. Denzin (1992) and Mills (1959) focus on the subjectivity or consciousness aspect of critical hermeneutics, the idea that various types of cultural productions lead to persuasive consequences for humans. Through Mills' work, Denzin brings to the forefront of current critical hermeneutics the connection that material existence, cultural patterns, processes of communication, and the formation of human consciousness create. What comes from this is a study of the ways that people use particular cultural contexts to create stories that define their identities in order to make sense of their everyday lives (Denzin, 1992). As Steinberg (2004) states, "How, Denzin wants to know, do individuals connect their lived experiences to the cultural representations of these same experiences (Berger, 1995; Denzin 1992)" (p. 21).

Challenges to an individual's identity that are caused by cultural experiences (such as movies and documentaries or actual pageant participation) become the focus of

this dissertation, as it seeks to identify the pedagogical aspects of identity formation and ways in which these experiences lead to oppression or liberation. Even though these experiences may occur through rational means, there is an element of emotion that is often ignored by social scientists who work from a logical framework (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992). Working from a critical hermeneutical framework within the bricolage will allow me to offer ways to empower individuals to understand their experiences with popular culture and interpret these experiences in ways they have not ordinarily done.

Continuing Interpretation: Post Structural Feminism

As an outgrowth of critical theory and postmodern thinking, post structural feminism seems to be another accurate lens through which to study the workings of power in beauty pageants as it creates female identity. St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) state that post structural feminism "continues to trouble the subject of humanism – the rational, conscious, stable, unified, knowing individual whose morality allows atrocities beyond imagining but still claims inalienable 'rights' that protect it from responsibility to the Other it destroys. The subject of post structuralism is generally described as one constituted, not in advance of, but within discourse and cultural practice" (6). The post structural feminist is troubled by the category "woman" and attempt to loosen the category and make it more unstable and undefined. This loose interpretation gives me room to discover how the power operates in beauty pageants to create female identity – not one that is stagnate, but one that is in a constant, commodified state of flux.

Joan Wallach Scott (1990) explains how post structuralism may best fit feminism's theoretical needs:

> We need theory that can analyze the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations – ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective – accounting not only for continuities but also for change over time. We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them. And we need theory that will be useful and relevant for political practice… It seems to me that the body of theory referred to as post structuralism best meets all these requirements (p.134).

Scott (1990), in this sense, argues that post structuralism and feminism share a desire to address the "self-conscious critical relationship to established philosophical and political traditions" (p.135).

According to Hekman (1990), feminist post structural epistemology can be distinguished by two concepts. First, we as females, and as knowing subjects, and the knowledge we come to know are constructed through various forms of discourse. Therefore, and secondly, there are multiple truths rather than one single truth. Research about women and girlhood as is seen in feminist empiricism, and research that is done for women and girls as in standpoint feminism, both seek to create knowledge based on the essentializing concept of "woman" or "girlhood" which allows "woman" or "girl" to be

the object of what is known even if the knowing subject is also a woman or a girl. Standpoint feminism, as it is grounded in experience, begins to address this issue by including the contexts of both the knowing subject and the known object. Feminist post structuralism goes further to ascribe that reality for all participants is constituted or constructed.

Post structural feminist theory takes into consideration the varying social constructs that comprise each person's individual identity, rather than collapsing all of those characteristics into the generic category of "girl." Nancy Frasier (1989) states that post structural feminism must be "explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods" (p.101). Using this definition, post structural feminism avoids universalizing claims in the construct of gender as well as in other areas of analysis.

The criticisms of post structural feminism stem from the idea that the subject, specifically girlhood, is continually reproduced and in a state of flux. Among the first of these criticisms is outlined by St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) as they state that often critics see the creation of free spaces as creating another fiction and give rise to the belief that we could ultimately get the definition of "female" or "girlhood" right. The critics challenge the notion of the liquefied subject (specifically "girlhood") that, in their opinion, is given no boundaries. Linda Acoff (1995) questions, "How can we ground a feminist politics that deconstructs the female subject? Nominalism threatens to wipe out feminism itself" (p.271). She further questioned

> If gender is simply a social construct, the need to and even the possibility of a feminist politics becomes immediately problematic. What can we

> demand in the name of women if "women" do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myths that they do? How can we speak out against sexism as detrimental to the interests of women if the category is a fiction? (p.272).

In keeping with this argument, Rosemary Tong (1998) points out that post structural feminism may be seen as "a feminism for academicians" (p. 231). For, in its language used in examining and analyzing situations, it may prove to alienate those who have not been introduced to the important constructs in post structural thought.

The comment that St. Pierre and Pillow give to refute this criticism is that post structural feminism does not desire to find the one real truth. Instead, they see the focus on differences as a way to possibly provide changes for the better. Judith Butler (1990) addresses this concern in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* when she argues that identity is not necessarily a prerequisite for social action, "that there need not be a doer behind the deed but that the doer is variably constructed in and through the deed" (p. 142). Further, Butler (1990) suggests that identity is a signifying or naming practice in which "culturally intelligible subjects" are

> the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life. The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. (p. 145)

In other words, as the discourses made up of rules and implemented through language are constructing us, we are not permanently constructed by these discourses because the discourses are not constant. In addition, the varieties of discourses which create signification are not necessarily balanced. The result is "a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated" (Butler, 1990, p.145), so we experience a variety of realities even though we are influenced by similar discourses. Susan Hekman (1990) continues this thought as she states that

> discourses, even hegemonic discourses, are not closed systems. The silences and ambiguities of discourse provide the possibility of refashioning them, the discovery of other conceptualizations, the revision of accepted truths (p. 187).

The relationships between and among discourses result in a plurality of subjects and knowledges. This further adds strength to post structural feminism as it allows for an understanding of diversity. This treats experience contextually and offers the possibility of dealing with multiple and local truths, rather than attempting to essentialize "girlhood" and assume that all experiences are generalized to all girls.

Lorraine Code (1991) rejects the relativism of post structuralism due to the perspective that post structuralism takes on multiple realities.

> Politically, feminists could not opt for an absolute relativism that recognized no facts of the matter no objective, external reality but only my, your, or our negotiated reality. It would fly in the face of the well-documented experiences of countless women to deny that these [sexism,

> etc.] are realities. If there are not objective social realities in a sense that allows for perspectival differences there are no tools for realization of feminist political projects (pp. 319 – 320).

Code's argument stresses the experiences of women and rejects post structural feminism on political grounds. The possibility of the constructed subject having agency to achieve change is not Code's political concern. Rather, she asserts that to take action it is necessary to have a provable cause. Her objection to post structuralism is a moral one based in the idea that is it necessary to be able to prove that feminism is right.

Acoff (1995) offers a further critique of post structural feminism on political grounds. She argues that "in their defense of a total construction of the subject, post-structuralists deny the subject's ability to reflect on the social discourse and challenge its determinations" (p. 269). This concern arises out of a desire for individual and group agency. If we are constructed as products of social factors over which we ultimately have no control, then how can we act within that theory? Further, a theory that insists on differences and the absence of unifying structures creates problems for the ability of a politics that focuses on gender as one of those structures.

Judith Butler (1990) answers these criticisms by suggesting that a practical feminist politics is what is needed, not a new universality. It would be a politics that will "contest the very reifications of gender and identity" (p. 5). She develops this perspective in *Gender Trouble* and concludes that in such a politics

> cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate or, rather, their present proliferation might then become articulable within the

> discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness (p. 149).

Other scholars (Lather, 1991; Scott, 1990) have addressed the criticism of post structural feminism on political grounds stating that it has the potential to be particularly useful in political fields. Many feminist scholars have worked over the years to raze the traditional, universalized ideas on social constructs and to give careful attention to the differences that exist within social categories. Post structuralism, with its focus on power as it fluctuates in a society, aids this work. This focus on differences is aided by feminism's attention to political action. Post structural feminism acts as a tool to deconstruct relationships and therefore illuminates and analyzes the myriad of intersections of social structures.

We do not have control over our position in life, as ascribed by post structural feminism, but we are able to recognize and choose to act within the social constructs that have helped to create the positions we find ourselves in. As Foucault (1977) pointed out, "As soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power; we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy" (p.123). In keeping with this, post structural feminist approaches can create spaces for individual agency and consciousness, according to Chris Weedon (1987). She states

> In all post structural discourses, subjectivity and rational consciousness are themselves put into question. We are neither the authors of the ways in which we understand our lives, nor are we unified rational beings. For feminist post structuralism, it is language in the form of conflicting

> discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world and to act to transform it (p. 32).

In light of the reconceptualized curriculum fields' desire to focus on individuals in a discursive sense, post structural feminism offers a theory on knowledge production that stems from dialogue and experience. Joan Wallach Scott (1990) explains this focus, saying,

> We need theory that can analyze the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations – ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective – accounting not only for continuities but also for change over time. We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them. And we need theory that will be useful and relevant for political practice… It seems to me that the body of theory referred to as post structuralism best meets all these requirements (p. 134).

Scott, in this sense, argues that post structuralism and feminism share a desire to address the "self-conscious critical relationship to established philosophical and political traditions" (p. 135). This focus on relationships, dialogue, and interactions to create

personal meanings works within the reconceptualized field as they focus on the individual to develop meaning.

Many feminist scholars have worked over the years to raze the traditional, universalized ideas on social constructs and to give careful attention to the differences that exist within social categories. Post structuralism, with its focus on power as it fluctuates in a society, aids this work. This focus on differences is aided by feminism's attention to political action. Post structural feminism acts as a tool to deconstruct relationships and therefore illuminates and analyzes the myriad of intersections of social structures.

In relation to my research, I find post structural feminism an extremely useful lens through which to conduct my study. As I have stated earlier, I do not desire to analyze the rural pageant culture in an attempt to shed light on how they are demeaning to girls, nor do I want to expose pageants as negative sites in culture. Instead, it is the way that power operates within the pageant culture to affect girls as they define their identities and the ways in which gender, social class, and pageant culture interact in the formation of this identity that I desire to study. There is not one definition of the rural, Southern beauty pageant and there is not one definition of a pageant participant or her family. Therefore, to try to categorize them as such would limit my study. I do not desire to find the Truth, once and for all, about the power issues as related to gender, identity, and class. Post structural feminism, with its focus on the fluidity of identity and the impact of culture, class, society, and gender on identity allows me, as a bricoleur, to adjust and fine tune the lens through which to conduct my research.

Completing the Research Lens: Cultural Studies

In a similar vein, cultural studies is a framework that analyzes the power of culture in various aspects of life. As with post structural feminism, there are various divisions of cultural studies and among the members of this genre, there are differences of opinion as to the definition and the purposes of this research. What can be said is that cultural studies works to explore the nature of power found in various aspects of culture (gender, race, class, colonialism, etc.) and then to see how this power is interconnected among these aspects. In addition, cultural studies seeks to "develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be utilized by agents in the pursuit of change" (Barker and Galasinski, 2001, p. 25). Cultural studies creates theoretical knowledge to act as a political manner where, according to Foucault (1977), "the theory to be constructed is not a system but an instrument, a logic of the specificity of power relations and the struggles around them" (p. 26). So, according to John Fiske (1998), "the cultural analyst studies instances of culture in order to understand both the system that structures the whole way of life and the ways of living that people devise within it" (p. 371).

Cultural studies draws from many fields to create knowledge and acts as a kind of process which works to produce useful knowledge about the broad domain of human culture. Because it draws from so many fields, cultural studies does not have a set methodology through which to conduct research. According to Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (1992),

> The choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked and the questions depend on their context. It is problematic for cultural studies simply to adopt, uncritically, any of the formalized disciplinary

> practices of the academy, for those practices, as much as the distinctions they inscribe carry with them a heritage of disciplinary investments and exclusions and a history of social effect that cultural studies would often be inclined to repudiate (p. 2).

Because cultural studies does not delineate what questions are important or what answers are correct, no methodology can be endorsed with total security and confidence. Textual analysis, semiotics, deconstruction, ethnography, interviews, phonemic analysis, psychoanalysis, rhizomatics, content analysis, survey research – these are but a few of the methodologies employed by cultural studies researchers. Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler (1992) offer this description of cultural studies, stating that

> Keeping those efforts in mind, one may begin by saying that cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field that operates in the tension between its tendencies to embrace both a broad, anthropological and a more narrowly humanistic concept of culture. Unlike traditional anthropology, however, it has grown out of analyses of modern industrial societies. It is typically interpretive and evaluative in its methodologies, but unlike traditional humanism, it rejects the exclusive equation of culture with high culture and argues that all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and to social and historical practices. Cultural studies is thus committed to the study of the entire range of society's arts, beliefs, institutions, and communicative practices (p. 4).

As such, cultural studies does not attempt to create theory that will stand the test of time. Instead, it sees its theories as subject to time and place, and if the theories continue to be useful over time, it is because the theory has been rearticulated to the new situations. It works not merely to create theories in reference to power and culture, but it works to be a "bridge between theory and material culture" (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, 1992). Cultural studies has the capacity to describe the complex nature of representation itself, as constructed through language and in the contexts of life and death. As such, cultural studies is always situated in context and must be rearticulated to fit new situations.

In relation to curriculum and the field of education, cultural studies seems to have existed outside the traditional structures of educational research and theory. In fact, it fits right into the reconceptualized field as its purpose seems to be associated with experimental designs, evaluation, and analysis of policies (Giroux et al., 1996). In the beginning, cultural studies emerged from the works of Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci, both of whom worked with adults and addressed the issues of adult illiteracy, poverty and the possibility of social change through education.

The Frankfurt school in Germany also provided the backdrop for the development of cultural studies. Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson worked in the area of literary critique in England while the focus on cultural critique was undertaken by Stuart Hall, Angela McRobbie, Paul Willis, and others at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).

Due to increased immigration and concerns about race and discrimination, cultural studies in the United States developed as a program that analyzed and discussed

the intersections between race, gender, and class. This marked a move in cultural studies away from its roots in adult education as seen in the works of Freire and Gramsci. Now cultural studies finds itself as an intellectual and university-driven research project that has multiple focuses which include race, pedagogy, media, nationalism, popular culture, science, technology, art, and many others.

The tie to power as an agent in social change is one of the characteristics that can be found in some aspects of cultural studies. In fact, in this light, cultural studies can be seen as less of a discipline than a manner of social research. It is, in a sense, a lens through which educators teach, research, and observe culture. And this "framework" has found itself institutionalized in various universities, most notably the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at England's University of Birmingham. From there, cultural studies was born as more of an activist project in education and found itself housed in the educational and mass media departments of universities.

This move to the university changed the focus of cultural studies research. Now the focus was on contemporary society and the move toward social change through a politicized agenda (Thompson, 1963). Educational research came to be informed by symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism was the driving force behind qualitative and interpretive research in education. Herbert Blumer saw three major premises upon which symbolic interactionism was developed: that people act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; that the meanings of things are derived from social interactions; and that these meanings are modified through interpretive processes. In other words, social interactionism focuses on what the world means to people. Perspectives of the people who are part of a study is a major concern,

and there must be recognition of the ways that individuals are always sustaining and challenging the social and cultural structures around them.

Through the new concern with urban areas, poor and working class people and social problems came a way of studying that attempted to capture the meanings that people made of their worlds. George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, and Everett Hughes played a major role in developing these theories. Their work, combined with that of the CCCS, gave rise to a research method that "departed sharply from positivistic or utilitarian categories of explanation" (Thompson, 1994, p. 201) and was associated both with symbolic interactionism as well as qualitative research and ethnography.

This new ethnographic form of research had two central elements which, according to Willis (1990), included an attachment to lived experience and the young create symbolic meaning based in their everyday informal life and this meaning infuses with the way they see the world in general. Young people or not, how people made meaning out of everyday experiences and thereby constructed their worlds was seen by the new researchers as influenced by symbolic interactionism and this was essential to understanding society. There grew a belief in both the constraints and structures on which social inequality is built and the abilities of people to challenge the structures and bring about change. Symbolic interactionism recognizes how culture with its structures and patterns is both produced as well as reproduced.

This social interactionism has moved into the realm of education with a focus on youth and student culture. Embedded in symbolic interactionism, ethnography, and critical theory, research in cultural studies of education has engaged youth culture and

school culture. Nancy Lesko (1996), in her study of high school girls, noted the following:

> First the understanding of teenage girls' identity construction is more complex, symbolic, and non-rational than the sub-cultural and "learning to labor" studies suggest. Second, this identity construction appears to be created through ongoing interactions among differently defined groups of girls and does not appear homogenous within social class groupings (p. 125).

These new researchers in cultural studies of education interested in the "symbolic and non rational" and "ongoing interactions" of individuals make use of symbolic interaction to argue the daily activities of school are much more complex and messy than many class-based studies of youth culture have shown.

New researchers have made improvements in research as they take seriously how interactions produce not only perspectives on the world that are gendered and raced, but categories of people and understandings about the world that are embedded in language. The focus on social categories as they are defined by language has brought cultural studies of education alongside education discourse analysis.

Discourse takes into account how language shapes social relations and how people interact with each other and the world around them. Foucault (1977) discussed how symbols of the spectacle and body integral to the public torture of criminals were replaced in the nineteenth century with what he called"pedagogy" of rehabilitation and correction based on new psychological models of deviance. The desire to change criminals rather than to inflict pain brought about new ways of thinking about and

constructing methods of punishment and discipline. At the heart of this, Foucault (1980) saw the constructions of "truth":

> Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (p. 131).

Foucault emphasized that discourses circulate in our world and have a significant effect on people's daily lives and struggles, and have real consequences on shaping our policies in schools, the building of our cities, and the development of our laws regarding sex, crime, and insanity.

This discourse analysis has combined elements of postmodernism, post structuralism, and feminism in its creation of work that discusses education as it occurs both in and outside schools. Symbolic interactionism and discourse analysis have developed alongside cultural studies and have allowed the development of a space to take seriously the daily interactions that people have with the world. This space allows for the evaluation and understanding of the individuals, the structures around them, and the interactions between them.

Within the space of people's daily interactions, popular culture found a niche. In the beginning, studies of popular culture were undertaken by those who were interested in how media in the form of mass media and advertising affected individuals, especially the young. It is through cultural studies, with its new ideas and methodologies that allowed

for this new topic of study. The research informed by cultural studies not only addressed the contemporary changes in the world, but it also challenged the public academic opinion of what was worthy of study. According to Gordon and Nachbar (1980), there are three basic ways that cultural studies views popular culture. First, popular culture is found in movies, books, videos, magazines, and other media objects that are a product of businesses that produce popular culture. Second, popular culture refers to popular activities or events like weddings, proms, and graduations. Lastly, popular culture refers to places where consumerism, culture, entertainment, education, and leisure come together, like malls, fairs, or amusement parks.

Ideas about class distinctions, behavior, exploitation, and social change are understood in new ways if seen in relation to people's ways of seeking out their pleasures, entertainment, and forms of education, much of which occurs through popular culture. Cultural studies has challenged the traditions of some academic fields that have ignored people's everyday and popular activities.

Giroux (1997) notes how critical analyses of films, done in a complex way which examines gender, race, nationality, class among other criteria can become an integral part of classroom pedagogy and can help students understand connections between their own popular entertainments, their educations, and the power and politics of society at large. Dimitriadis (2001) addresses the need to bridge this gap stating that the texts created by their everyday experiences

> are circulating in a space vacated by traditional schooling institutions and curricula, both of which have become increasingly routinized, increasingly

> at the service of corporate imperatives, and out of touch with the particular concerns of young people (p. 7).

He further states that there exists a vast chasm between in-school and out-of-school culture, with unofficial curricula and learning settings taking on increasing salience. Much of the work done by educational researchers of popular culture is committed to social critique and the improvement of society through an examination of pedagogy in the areas of both formal and informal education.

Cultural studies has been associated with popular culture, but it is not simply about popular culture. It is interested in popular culture in deeply challenging ways. It looks, first, at the "interrelationships between supposedly separate cultural domains [as it] interrogates the mutual determination of popular belief and other discursive formations" (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, 1992). Secondly, it looks at the ways that cultural practices "speak to, for and of" (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, 1992) the everyday lives of people. And both of these things must occur within specific contexts. In other words, cultural studies requires us to identify the operation of specific practices, of how they continuously reinscribe the line between legitimate and popular culture, and of what they accomplish in specific contexts.

In the study of beauty pageant culture and its effects on identity in relation to girlhood and class, I focused on the power that is exercised in this culture. Specifically, I desired to analyze the media constructions as seen in various television shows and movies and the discourses of others who observe and participate in this phenomenon. Through this I desire to find how meaning and identity are created and how these vehicles work to make meaning – for identity, class, gender, etc. – for the participants

and those involved otherwise. As Greg Dimitriatis (2001) states, "culture can be found in the material practices of everyday people" (p. 74), and the beauty pageant culture, as it impacts the middle and lower classes, certainly fits that definition.

Beauty contests allow idealized versions of femininity to be acted out on stage in a competition which awards the winner with a "royal" title and a crown. They evoke passionate interest and engagement with political issues central to the lives of beauty contestants, sponsors, organizers, and audiences – issues that frequently have nothing obvious to do with the competition itself. By choosing an individual whose deportment, appearance, and style embodies the values and goals of a nation, location, or group, beauty contests expose these same values and goals to interpretation and challenge. These controversies involve what qualities should count in a competition, how girls should act, and what the outcome means. Since beauty pageants showcase values, concepts, and behavior that exist at the center of a group's sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender and place, they become a stage where cultures and identities are made public and visible (Cohen et al., 1996).

Like Dick Hebdige (1979/2002) in his *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* as he looked at various subcultures in Britain, I wanted to study a subordinate group in our present society. These groups have expressive forms and perform rituals that have a meaning both to those involved and to the larger culture. This subculture, as the teddy boys, mods, rockers, skinheads, and punks described by Hebdige (1979 / 2002), is often "dismissed, denounced and canonized" (p. 2) and can be both seen as a threat to public order as well as a harmless event. The small events and objects of the culture take on symbolic meaning and work to separate those who are involved in the pageant culture to

stand out against the larger society. According to Genet (1967) we must seek to recreate the dialectic between action and reaction which renders these objects meaningful.

Since the pageant culture is situated in the larger culture and is "cast in a language that is generally available" (Hebdige, 1979/2002, p. 87), it creates meanings both for the members of the subculture and its opponents. Hebdige (1979/2002) suggests that

> subcultures are, at least in part, representations of these representations, and elements taken from the 'picture' of working class life (and of the social whole in general) are bound to find some echo in the signifying practices of the various subcultures. They also articulate, to a greater or lesser extent, some of the preferred meanings and interpretations, those favored by and transmitted through the authorized channels of mass communication (p. 86).

The subculture also works to bring to light some of the problems in contemporary society, either by parodying them or by showing how current culture requires girls to live by rules which dictate beauty according to unattainable body, facial features, and fashion standards. It is this situatedness in the larger culture, the exposure of cultural inconsistencies and the use of common language to describe the subculture which allow the subculture to attract new members and to continue to bring criticism and outrage from the "moral majority."

One's sense of self is often constructed in relation to one's enthusiasms. Baldwin et al. (1999) suggest that youth subcultures

> seemed to be a place for resistance and opposition at a particular stage in the life course, where movement from one set of relations in the family was managed in the process of transition to a new set (p. 356).

I see the rural beauty pageant culture as a subculture, one that involves primarily the youth culture, among others. It is a subculture that seems to be a place for resistance and opposition to certain class issues for the middle and working classes. The age-old "rags to riches" Cinderella story can be acted out on the pageant stage. And the semblance of beauty, talent, money, and status are constructed through makeup, performances, and clothing. In this way, pageants act as a subculture.

Within this subculture, there exist symbols and rituals, both of which are studied in the realm of cultural studies. Symbolism has been most widely studied in the realm of youth subcultures (Hebdige, 1979/2002; McRobbie, 1994, 1991, 1976). The varied symbols used by subcultures convey differences and distances from conventional society and challenge the hegemony (Hebdige 1979/2002). Rituals involve a standardized sequence of acts and utterances which symbolize thoughts and feelings that hold special meaning for the participants. Pageants, with their ritualistic natures and their focus on costumes, work within this realm of symbols and rituals and call to be studied from a cultural studies lens.

In addition to focusing on subcultures, cultural studies also delves into the issues of culture and its influence on the body. In fact, cultural studies sees that the body is a cultural object. Who and what we are perceived to be is bound up with the appearance and movements of our bodies. In possessing a body of any given age or gender, we are expected to be a certain kind of person, and it is not widely acceptable to breach these

expectations (Baldwin et al., 1999, p. 267). It is this focus that cultural studies has on the body and the cultural influences on it that also makes it appropriate for use in my study. The desire to use cultural studies as a way to see the body as a site for the playing out of social and cultural difference interests me. Foucault's works on the discourses and technologies through which power is imprinted on human body are of particular interest and begin the cultural studies' focus on this area. In addition, feminism has worked in this realm to suggest that analysis should begin with the specificity of girl's embodied experiences. Cultural studies goes further to divide this study of culture and its effects on the body to include both the physical embodiment of self (or the "subject") as well as an object that others can categorize and I can possess (or as an "object"). This study of power and culture and the effects on the body are central to my study of the pageant culture and the messages it conveys.

Dimitriatis (2001) suggests in *Performing Identity / Performing Culture* that there is an area of cultural studies that analyzes how particular audiences pick up and use the messages given to them about life in the culture around them. He entitles this sub-section "Audience studies" and encourages those interested in audience studies to work to stress the power that operates in the cultural phenomena as well as the facts that often these phenomena act in ways that the audience has no control over. He states that "the meanings that people create here are circumscribed by forces beyond their control" (p. 75). It is this sort of analysis that I want to begin. I want to look at how the various aspects of the pageant culture as seen in media and as experienced by some work to create meaning, and at what messages and information about power and identity in relation to class and girlhood result.

The criticisms to cultural studies mirror those found in post structural feminism. First, critics question the validity of the research. If there is no realist objectivity (one that sees an absence of human factors in observing the phenomenon) possible in cultural studies research, there must be a problem with having valid research. Cultural studies has a more pragmatic or current definition of "objectivity." This criticism is answered from the current definition – one that sees objectivity as impossible or irrelevant. The cultural studies approach, as has been espoused by Patti Lather (1993) and D. Gordon (1988), would say that validity would come from the discourse that results from the research. Research that produces further discourse would indicate that researchers and other interested parties see the findings as important in continued conversations. In this case, the validity comes not from objectivity, but from self-reflection. This allows a cultural study to be situated as a questioning of representation and reality as they have been created at a certain place and time.

Cultural studies has also been criticized due to the lack of standard methods of research. What separates it from traditional research methods is the focus on language. The self-reflexive approach to validity speaks to this. Cultural studies, like post structural feminism, sees that the world is known and constructed through language. Therefore, cultural studies methodologies often employ studies of language or discourse, rather than traditional qualitative or quantitative methods. In addition to the focus on language, cultural studies also tends to see that the mundane and everyday practices can be significant factors in knowledge making (Hall, 1980).

Common Ground : Making the Bricolage

As I have stated earlier, I do not desire to analyze the rural pageant culture in an attempt to shed light on how they are demeaning to women, nor do I want to expose pageants as negative sites in culture. Instead, it is the way that power operates within the pageant culture to affect girls as they define their identities and the ways in which gender, social class, and pageant culture interact in the formation of this identity that I desire to study. There is not one definition of the rural, Southern beauty pageant and there is not one definition of a pageant participant or her family. Therefore, to try to categorize them as such would limit my study. I do not desire to find the Truth, once and for all, about the power issues as related to gender, identity, and class. A bricolage of critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics, poststructural feminism, and cultural studies, with their focus on the fluidity of identity and the impact of culture, class, society, and gender on identity allows me the best lens through which to conduct my research.

Angela McRobbie (1999) discusses the intersection of cultural studies and post structural feminism in *In the Culture Society: Art, Fashion, and Popular Music.* She states that "the study of popular culture in its most expanded sense allowed feminists to revise the traditional stance' (p. 33). In other words, cultural studies, poststructuralist ethnography and post structural feminism all seek to find the ways that specific phenomena in culture work to create identity. She further states that

> the fact that reason and political analysis tells us that femininity is bad, while the unconscious continues to produce guilty pleasures revolving around the practices of conventional femininity, evokes at least a

> complexity when it comes to thinking about how we consume commercial culture (p. 49).

Cultural studies, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and post structural feminism also seek to understand how culture works to create meaning. Oliver and Lalik (2002) speak to this saying,

> Cultural messages of the female body are a focal point for the practical action of critique we seek to develop through this research. As has been explained by Walkerdine (1990), cultural messages about female bodies have long been persistent and ubiquitous. Through those messages female bodies have been pathologized. They have been found insufficiently developed for sophisticated reasoning. Girls are keenly aware of these messages as conveyed through pop culture (p.201).

In this way, popular culture, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and the construction of female identity are intertwined and call to be studied.

Poststructural feminism suggests studies on ways media and cultural arenas are structured by gendered themes. Feminism, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics, and cultural studies focus on the different power positions or women and men as these influence writing and reading (Agger, 2002). All see that there is no singular vantage from which knowledge is developed, but rather, they see that the knowledge of the world is structured by discourses that reflect conflicts over power. In the discovery and analyzes of these discourses and power struggles, all four methodologies seek to decode the discourses as politically salient.

Based in the ideas of curriculum as a gendered and deconstructed text, post structural feminism, critical ethnography, critical hermeneutics and cultural studies are all situated in the reconceptualized curriculum studies field. And, given their desire to analyze culture and discourse as they work to create meaning, identity, and power, they adhere to the mantra of the reconceptualized field which focuses more at understanding rather than development.

In relation to the study of rural beauty pageant culture, the focus on culture as a place where learning and meaning take place allows it to be considered as a valid topic of research. The cultural discourses which surround this subculture work to create meaning for a group of students who are learning in this out-of-school setting which is often going unnoticed in the traditional school setting. Students need to be given the tools to make sense of the cultural messages they receive.

Reflexivity

Writers are reflexive in their work, as the two areas (writing and reflexivity) are inseparable. Reflexivity gives the researcher voice as it brings to light the research process and acts to bridge interpretation and the ways that meaning is expressed in a text (Brewer, 2000). As a result, reflexivity implies reflection on the processes that influenced the data. For Brewer, there are two types of reflexivity: descriptive and analytical. Reflecting on all possibilities that impact research outcomes (location, researcher preconceptions, power relations, interactions between researcher and subjects, historical context, social context) comprises the concept of descriptive reflexivity. More difficult to define is analytical reflexivity, as it is concerned with epistemology and knowledge claims that work to form an "intellectual biography" (Brewer, 2000, p. 130).

Analytical reflexivity allows for the explanation of the process of data understanding and interpretation. The focus becomes finding changes in the data and how those changes occurred. On the other hand, descriptive reflexivity has several aspects. It shows how field notes were kept, how the coding, recording and organization of data was performed, ways the key ideas were identified, and how the process of data analysis was performed. Analytic, however, is more intense than descriptive reflexivity. This is due to the reflection on and highlighting of the theoretical framework and methodology used in the research. This allows for the acknowledging of values and commitments that the researcher brings to the research. The researcher must identify the passion and issues she brings to the process and then allow thoughts connected to the research to be acknowledged.

In conducting this research, I adopted a reflexive approach in all stages and was careful to be both descriptive and analytical as I worked to illuminate all of the processes I employed to the reader. As I became a bricoleur – one who builds a bridge between various research methodologies – it was important for me to support reflexivity and acknowledge the diverse roles that were required of me in conducting the research. The metaphor of the bricoleur sheds light on all the various stages of the research process moving between theoretical, interpretive, and political bricoleur roles.

Analysis

Critics to research concerning popular culture often cite that it lacks the academic discipline and scholarship associated with methodologies from the older, established disciplines. I argue that approaching this research from a critical stance through the lenses of cultural studies, poststructural feminism, hermeneutics, and ethnography, my

research is interested in finding and unearthing questions in relation to the power structures in the rural child beauty pageant culture. As I study the media surrounding child beauty pageant culture and the works written about that culture, my research is most definitely challenging with changes around every corner and with a beginning that lacks the usual assumptions associated with research.

Since my research finds its roots in the cultural and poststructural condition, it is taking place in a "re-determined and re-defined" (Steinberg, 2004, p. 26) arena of research methods and practices. Being able to view videos at my leisure and with the option of stopping, or rewinding, or skipping forward afforded me options to better map the messages and unearth codes and themes in the documentaries and movies. As Steinberg (2004) notes,

> Unlike viewer/historians of the past, we are able to re-visit an event, a text, and look for the tacit assumptions that reside within each signifier, floating signifier, code and ideology presented within the film (p. 26).

Working as a methodological bricoleur and a bricoleur theorist, the critical theory and methods that provide the foundation for this study have been discussed in detail. The detailed discussion works as part of the analytic reflexivity discussed earlier, as the framework used for the analysis of data in this dissertation is outlined in chapter two and chapter three and is applied in chapter four. Up to this point, there has been no account on the process of analysis. Descriptions will be given on how field notes were kept and how data was recorded, and details of how themes and ideas surfaced and data were analyzed prior to writing will be described. The idea of creating a bridge and a quilt will become the metaphor for the creation of the final product using the data collected. As

documentaries and movies were viewed, and pageants were watched and evaluated and themes then began to emerge, it became obvious that the copious amount of data and material would require a monumental amount of editing to craft an end product that would be understandable and coherent.

In the process of watching and recording the themes and patterns in each of the documentaries and videos, the methods I employed were important. As it was essential for me to be able to view the media several times and to visit the themes and patterns over and over, it was paramount that I had copies of the documentaries and videos of my own. Numerous hours were spent in front of a television with my remotes in hand, one to control the television and one to stop, rewind and fast forward the videos to review certain points of content. I also used a large scrapbook type notebook with plain pages for initial note taking and also grid-like divisions to record the patterns and themes as I watched the various forms of media. Using different colored inks and pencils helped to identify the different ideas and patterns as well.

I viewed each video 2 -3 times before beginning detailed note taking . Notes were taken using a large scrapbook type notebook (see Diagram 1). I also read typed transcripts of documentaries where they were available, making notes in the scrapbook as well. I made comments and highlighted the emerging themes from the notes taken. These themes were used as codes to guide analysis. This resulted in all the data being coded which then gave me access to and application of the data in various forms beyond the initial viewing. Using the codes , I was able to discover data about power, girlhood, perception by participants, perception by world, reasons for entry, impact on families, and more. Before writing this dissertation, I went back to the pages of notes and the

videos themselves and watch and read them again to be absolutely certain that I had not left behind any necessary material.

Using the bridge and quilt metaphors made this research all the more real to me. I was able, as is seen in the diagrams of my notes and coding, to capture visually important aspects of the beauty pageant culture and its depiction in the media that were central to the analysis. Finding the themes and patterns in all of the field notes made sure that all the coded information that was pertinent and important was included. These coded sections were compared to other notes taken during my reading research to make sure I had not missed any details.

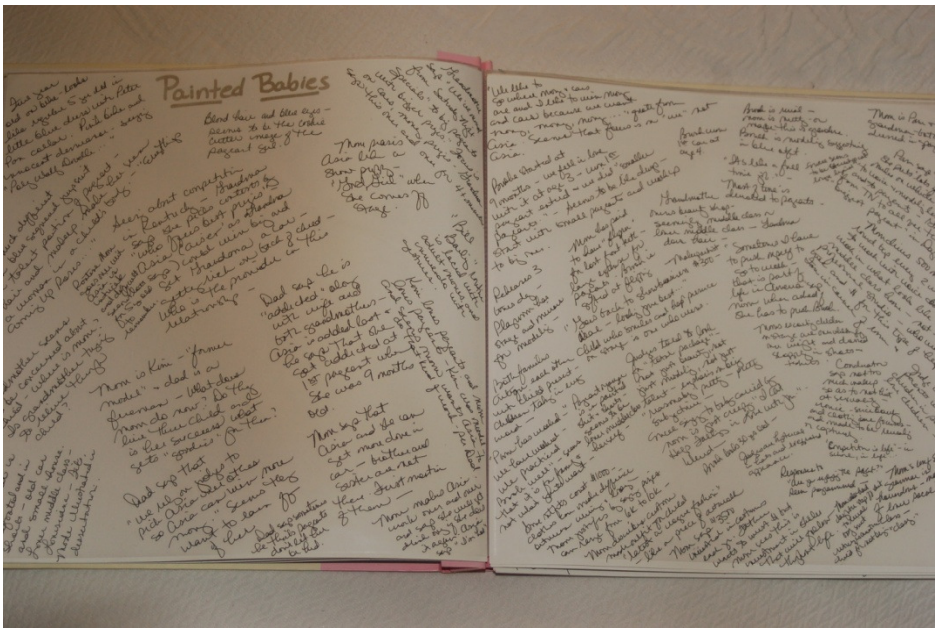

Figure 2: Media Transcription

This figure gives an illustration of the notes taken while watching the documentaries and videos. These notes brought to light the uniqueness of

each video as well as the similarities between the videos once all of them were coded.

Figure 3: Themes found in videos

The large scrap book allowed me to be able to flip back and forth to review my notes and check my progress. The diagram above shows the ways I cross checked the codes and themes in the viewed works. Emerging themes became the headings at the top of the page and the titles of the videos were headings for the individual rows down the left side of the pages. Each box contained notes on aspects from the videos that illustrated the themes and as new themes emerged, they were added. It was fascinating to watch the emergence of patterns amongst the recognized themes in the works.

The process of analysis took place in layers, as the early revelations and understandings led to questioning that, in turn, revealed other possibilities for research. A process of intellectual inquiry was employed, with constant questioning and engagement with data was supported with technology. As Thorne et al. (2004) suggested that researchers avoid line-by-line coding as this takes away from the ability to recognize patterns and retrace thought events in the data, I decided to use visual aids and mind mapping.

Diagrams 1 and 2 show the steps used when viewing and analyzing the documentaries and videos used in this research. These records show how patterns were kept regardless of a need to leave behind small amounts of raw material. In crafting my quilt or bridge as a bricoleur, I was able to include other materials into the final product. Including critical material constructed a picture that was different to the descriptions I originally crafted and this was made possible without giving up the original ideas and while still creating possibilities for using several different perspectives for viewing the final product.

Validity and Credibility

Qualitative research is often criticized in the area of validity establishment and this issue must be reviewed so that results and conclusions from qualitative research will be considered reliable, believable, and authentic (Cutcliffe and McKenna, 2004; Sparkes, 2001). With the development of new and cutting edge approaches to inquiry are developed, the questions of validity are revisited in light of what constitutes valid research. The differences found in these new methodologies calls to be acknowledged

and there must be the development of criteria to outline the internal framework for these modes of inquiry (Caelli, Ray, and Mill, 2003).

This does not mean that there is an attitude of all is okay in qualitative research, but it does demand the construction of criteria for determining validity of research that reflects the findings and purpose of individual studies. To do this, acknowledgement of the validity debate must take place and acknowledgement that inflexible formulas and rules cannot be applied must be understood. Since qualitative research does not hold itself out as holding a universal set position, there are many different positions from which research can be evaluated (Sandelowski, 2002).

Meeting credibility requirements presents challenges in light of the validity in qualitative research argument. In quantitative research, validity is established through rigorous method observance. However, when qualitative research is viewed through such a lens, it is found to be unscientific and without rigor (Angen, 2000). Approaching research from a cultural position loosens the boundaries of validity as researchers attempt to legitimize work without giving in to scientific authority (Angen, 2000). With the attempt to move away from positivist science comes the difficulty of needing authority in an academic environment and the difficulty of needing legitimacy for research. Many qualitative researchers have been led to adopt practices similar to those found in quantitative research in an attempt to keep validity issues from making research void.

Issues are raised by qualitative methods of ethnography. First, there is the relationship between the research process and writing of the text. This leads to an emphasis on the author, authenticity, and responsibility. In revisiting ethnography, thinking has embraced critical processes in the relationship between the researcher and

the researched. Reflection of this relationship led to writing's being seen as creation of meaningful data. Writing became a way of self-consciously showing different views and situating researcher in relation to the text and point of observation. Therefore, research merit rests with the researcher.

My goal in this research was to act as a bricoleur using the quilt and bridge metaphors to symbolize the individual and collective voices and messages of the media and pageant culture. In addition, I wanted to see these different media in light of a critical methodology. As the structure of this dissertation was developed using the bricolage process, I was guided by the ways I pieced the different versions of media and texts together. In chapter four views of the videos and the texts are represented as I become a quilt maker and bridge builder attempting to join similar themes and patterns and create a work that leads to a construction that blends these themes and patterns. The different versions of reality are preserved in this interpretive chapter and in chapter five which discusses the conclusions from the research, and as the critical texts are placed within these interpretations then other patterns emerge.

The intent of research is found in the aspects of credibility and trustworthiness. In the critical position of cultural research, there is a reflection of this in the revisiting of interpretive research with respect to quality. If the purpose of research is to question, create dialogue with, or provide emancipation for members of a community, then reviewing process beyond methodology is important in developing conclusions to affect change in learning (Thorne, 1997).This means researchers are charged with the job of insuring findings are not just evaluations but are able to be interpreted and used in specific fields.

This interpretation must be logically situated in relation to the research questions posed and the research conducted. Thorne (1997) sees this as based in the theoretical basis for research leading to interpretation of data and creation of knowledge. The reader must have the guarantee that the decisions made by the researcher are competent and the analysis is conducted with interpretive authority. Thus, the researcher's aim of knowledge revelation of a specific subject is easily discernable by the reader.

For research to be considered credible, it seems that there are four important areas to consider: the researcher's theoretical positioning, the similarity between method and methodology; the establishment of strategies to insure rigor; and the definition of a clear, analytical framework to illustrate how the researcher will interact with the data collected (Caelli, 2003). Within these four areas, there are four themes that work to insure the research conducted is of high quality:

1. "Process" or honesty and trustworthiness.
2. "Writing" which allows for well-written, impacting, and believable reports.
3. "Outcome" which indicates that research relates to practice and points to further study.
4. "Excellence" to be established by rigour relating to process, writing, and outcome.

Using these themes by Emden et al, (2001) in conjunction with the areas outlined by Caelli et al. (2003) gives the researcher the tools to develop a product that illustrates quality, rigor, and credibility in relation to qualitative research. As I conducted my research on the rural child beauty pageant culture and the ways that power operates in

that culture, I paid close attention to the areas outlined above and employed the themes discussed in order to ensure the trustworthiness and consistency of the project.

As a researcher, it is important for me to present my findings in such a way as to appeal to and ring true with the audience I target (Thorne, 1997). This requires me to approach my research and to write my dissertation using artistic methods to create an aesthetically pleasing product that allows for a relationship between the product, myself, and the reader. My role becomes more artistic in construction rather than just objectively reporting.

As a bricoleur, I worked diligently to create a project which is a great mixture of an interesting and intriguing story with a strongly grounded intention for research and scholarship. The findings and knowledge produced by this study does have a real impact on sections of society and I have a very real responsibility to those whose ideas of the positive or negative aspects of rural childhood pageant participation are impacted (even though I am not working to delineate the positive or negative aspects of participation, but am working towards a dialogue between the aspect of social class, media construction, and the subculture's power). This calls for me to identify those ways that my research may well initiate unintentional effects on the subculture and to insure that I have ethically considered the consequences.

As I did not engage in traditional ethnographic research that involves interviews or pageant observation of specific subjects, the question of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality are not concerns. But I must be certain to frame the findings in relation to my personal recollections and experiences in such a way as not to have a negative impact on any other person who was involved. This was tricky for me as a researcher and

bricoleur, and I worked diligently to make certain my research was ethical, trustworthy, rigorous, and credible.

CHAPTER 4

PAGEANT CULTURE, SOCIAL CLASS, MEDIA, AND POWER

I did not grow up in the midst of the pageant culture – or at least I did not think I did until I began a study of it. Now, I realize just how much a part of my life that the beauty pageant – and the culture that surrounds it – has been and continue to be. I have spent years learning about it – both directly and indirectly.

I remember watching the Miss America and Miss USA pageants on television each year – and calling my friends during commercials to comment on Miss Tennessee's hair, or Miss Iowa's dress, or how Miss Texas would certainly be in the top 3, because Miss Texas always did well. And I remember being able to go backstage at the Miss South Carolina pageant in the early 1980s, as one of my mother's friends was the state pageant director. Seeing all the beautiful girls and watching them from the other side of the stage was eye-opening and awe-inspiring. I was envious of their beauty, grace, talent and glamour. I wanted to be like them.

For me, it was the whole package – the clothes, the hair, the make-up, the cameras, the lights, the stage and the attention. All of these women had beautiful headshots and they spent much time signing their autographs and giving them to their adoring public – mainly throngs of little girls, wide-eyed at their presence. I was one of those in the throng – and I was able to "dine out" on this experience for weeks on the middle school playground and lunch tables.

My friends and I played beauty pageant at home, learning the rituals from watching numerous pageants on television and having participated in a few. We had the dress up clothes, pretend judges, and a crown and sash. We all had saved our allowances

and had bought our own tiaras at the local jewelry store – for none of us had ever really won a pageant. Our exposure to pageants was limited to the ones we saw on television and the yearly school pageant (where we all wore our Easter dresses and the older girls wore their prom dresses) and the Forestry Pageant (which was held in honor of our area's major industry and fed into a state pageant). We were not born and bred into pageants – but we knew about them – and the ritual that surrounded them.

Since I was tall, big-boned, and a tomboy, my pageant dreams fell by the wayside as I grew older. I know the "pageant look" from friends that participated in them – and I certainly did not fit that image. That, and my parents did not condone it. So I was destined to never see the real side of pageantry. I watched girls from Swainsboro and Emanuel County – pageant Mecca as we called it – who had pageant hair (it looked like cotton candy in the back and had perfect wings in the front – just the right place for a tiara to sit perfectly for pictures) and pageant dresses (not the Easter dresses and church shoes I had) and got to wear eye shadow, mascara, blush and lipstick. These girls were amazing, and creatures I did not understand.

I entered their world a day late and a dollar short. At 19, I entered a local Southern Sweetheart pageant preliminary in my hometown of Louisville. As I was the only entrant in the Miss division, I "won" the title by default and was the delegate to the state contest. My mother (June Cleaver, at her best) and my sister (who could not be more middle America if she tried) worked with me to prepare. We thought my choices for hair, makeup , interview suit, casual wear, and evening gown were perfect – and my application was above reproach. It was not until we arrived at the Sheraton in Downtown Atlanta that we realized how far out of my league I was. It seemed the stereotypes I had

seen since my childhood were true – and then some. The women – and I say women because this was all business and not just a girl's dress-up game – were prepared to win and had been groomed and prepared far beyond my wildest imagination. It was then that I realized the industry and the culture that surrounded pageantry and I finally saw the codes, signs and behaviors that dictated and determined the success and mobility in the pageant world.

From there, I competed in two Miss Georgia preliminaries (in the Miss America System) and then went on to work in various capacities in the pageant culture on various levels within the Miss America system and in local pageant systems. As a coach and pageant coordinator, I have seen the positives and negatives of beauty pageant involvement and the ways that power operates within this culture. However, what began to interest me was the phenomenon of identity development in the pageant sub-culture. For many girls and young women, who they are, how they view their bodies and their self worth, and how they view the world is largely shaped by their participation in beauty pageants. And, I noticed that in rural Georgia, the titles that have been won do not fall by the wayside as one ages; instead, they are continually used to define who a woman is and why she is credible in a certain arena. All of this prompted me to inquire why this happened and what in the pageant culture worked to formulate the identities of these women.

Media Influence: What is a Pageant Girl?

What is a pageant girl? How does the media work to create how I view pageant girls and pageant culture? It was when I began to ponder this question that I realized how varied – and how important the images of pageantry the media had given me had been.

The pervasive idea was of pageant girls being low class or middle class, two-faced, bitchy, superficial, back-biting, over-achieving girls who false personalities coincided with their heavy makeup, physical enhancements, undergarments, expensive wardrobes, and unbelievable pageant hair. In other words, there was nothing real or uncoached about them – as they were depicted in the media. I began to look back at the pageants I had watched, organized or participated in. I also viewed the documentaries *Smile Pretty* (1999), *Painted Babies* (1995), *Living Dolls* (2001), and *Little Beauties: The Ultimate Kiddie Queen Showdown* (2007), the television show *Designing Women* (1983-1989), and the movies *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), *Beautiful* (2000), and *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (1999) which have given us views into the world of child beauty pageants. It also gave depictions of a pageant girl stereotype: Suzanne Sugarbaker in *Designing Women*, Mona in *Beautiful*, and Amber Atkins and Becky Leeman in *Drop Dead Gorgeous.* Were these depictions the same as others I had known who participated in the pageant culture experienced? Did they agree with the experiences I had had – or did they fly in the face of them? And what did my observations and experiences along with the themes found in these videos say about the ways power operates in the rural child beauty pageant culture and the impact of social class in this realm?

The focus of this dissertation and the research centers on the following questions:

1. How does power operate in the beauty pageant subculture?

How does it create and maintain this subculture? What effects do media and socio-economic status have on this culture and the power that works therein?

2. What inspires entry into a beauty pageant for a girl or for the parents of a girl? Is there a correlation between the media representation of why girls enter pageants and the reasons stated by participants? What is the correlation between socio-economic status and pageant entry?

3. What dichotomies exist in the pageant subculture? What can we assume about the relationship between representation and the "real" when considering beauty pageants and beauty pageant contestants? How do the girl participants (or their parents) in rural beauty pageants reconcile the fact that they are both rewarded and victimized or do they realize that they are both winners and victims? How is the discrepancy between the adultification of children and the childification of adults reconciled?

This search into the development of meaning through culture is nothing new. Henry Giroux (1994) states that

> the politics of representation that has occupied the center of its analysis has become indispensable for understanding how politics reaches into everyday life to mobilize particular lived experiences, desires, and forms of agency. While certain visions of postmodernism may have overestimated the degree to which the boundaries between images and reality have become blurred, the postmodernist approach does not underestimate the expanding power of representations, texts, and images in producing identities and shaping the relationship between the self and society in an increasingly commodified world (p. 3).

The view of how what we view on television and in the media has constructed and crossed the boundaries of reality – to even call us to wonder what reality really is, is what is at question. Why is it important to see what images are being presented as real in the movies and in the media and how do these images impact the perception that I, and others in the society at large, have of pageantry and the girls and women who are a part of it. Giroux (2002) later states that the visual culture found in television and the media becomes a new form of pedagogy which signals a "new form of literacy, and exemplifies a mode of politics in which culture becomes a crucial site and weapon of power in the modern world" (p. 5). This use of power through the media is insidious – we use these images to create our vision of reality – and often that vision is wildly incorrect. Was that the case in pageantry?

Social Status and Pageant Participation: What Motivates Participation?

What prompts lower-class parents to enter their little girls into pageants? In order to make the decision to pay the entry fee and buy the clothing and other necessary items, there has to be some driving force, some reason behind these actions. And what is the relationship between these reasons and the class status of the contestants and their families? After observing parents and girls at pageants, working as a pageant coordinator, watching various television shows, documentaries and movies on pageants, and reading works by authors on pageantry and popular culture, I have found several possible reasons for pageant participation.

Henry Giroux (2000) sees the lure of beauty pageants stemming from the opportunity for fame and class mobility. In order to justify pageant participation, many legitimate the child beauty pageant culture as

> a route to get their kids into lucrative careers such as modeling, or to win college scholarships, financial rewards, and other prizes. The most frequently used rationale for defending pageants is that they build self-esteem in children, help them to overcome shyness, and teach them how to grow up (p. 53).

Many take these arguments further and point to evidence that those involved in pageants, and especially those who excel in the pageant culture, tend to be success stories. Lovegrove (2002) echoes these comments citing that the contestants and their supporters "all have one thing in common – a desire to win. The lure of fame, and perhaps of a small fortune, at least in product-sponsorship terms, means big business for the organizers" (p. 5). Giroux (2000b) further states that many see child beauty pageants as "good, clean entertainment" and they defend them "for their civic value to the community" (p. 58). Cohen et al (1996) indicate that "the beauty pageant is a fundamentally bourgeois play form: the winners get material goods in the form of money, trips, cars, scholarships, clothing, modeling contracts, and so on" (p. 41).

Beauty contests allow idealized versions of femininity to be acted out on stage in a competition which awards the winner with a "royal" title and a crown. They evoke passionate interest and engagement with political issues central to the lives of beauty contestants, sponsors, organizers, and audiences – issues that frequently have nothing obvious to do with the competition itself. By choosing an individual whose deportment, appearance, and style embodies the values and goals of a nation, location, or group, beauty contests expose these same values and goals to interpretation and challenge. These controversies involve what qualities should count in a competition, how women

should act, and what the outcome means. Since beauty pageants showcase values, concepts, and behavior that exist at the center of a group's sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender and place, they become a stage where cultures and identities are made public and visible (Cohen et al., 1996).

So, it seems that parents and contestants enter these pageants for one of several reasons. It could be the focus our society places on winners and the desire to be seen as one. It could result from class issues stemming from the idea that the pageant makes them some kind of royalty and could move them from lower or middle class to the upper crust. It could be so that they have a visible sign that they measure up to the cultural definitions of beauty. Possibly, and tied to the beauty and class issues, the parents and the contestants could see the pageant as a vehicle for a launch into stardom and fame. Still others may enter pageants as a way to build self-esteem and self-worth, or to become an embodiment of a value or ideal as espoused by a group or locale. A few may participate in pageants as a rite of passage, something that all girls of a particular age do in a particular area. The evidence points to any of the above reasons.

Opportunities of Future Success

In *Smile Pretty*, one contestant comments, "I think pageants can open a lot of doors for you – it can speed up your future." She goes on to say that she has aspirations of becoming a news anchor and knows that her experience in pageants will help open doors for her and prepare her for this field. The idea that pageants provide a platform for future careers is furthered by Brooke's dad in *Painted Babies*, as he discusses Brooke's mother's career as a model and the aspirations both of them have for Brooke's following in her mother's footsteps. As the prettiest of the three children they have (the other

children are referred to only briefly and are not seen on camera), Brooke is the likely candidate for becoming a model, as her parents hope.

As a career platform, pageants are seen as a step into the more glamorous fields of work. The parents and grandparents of the children featured in *Painted Babies* are staunchly middle class, holding jobs as beauticians, housewives, firemen, and the like. They dream of "show business jobs" (as Asia's mom describes it) for their daughters – and they focus on the money and glitz of the pageants. The girls in *Living Dolls* seem to be groomed for a life of performance and appearance, as much is invested in their clothing, appearance, modeling routines, talent routines, and so forth. As careers go, these girls are being groomed for performance careers – in one capacity or another. One just wonders if their dreams come true, or if they become images of their overweight mothers in spandex or jersey short outfits living dreams through their young daughters, hoping this time they "do it right" and launch them into stardom.

Little Beauties, a documentary created by and aired on VH1, could have had an influence on the careers of the girls included in their view of child pageants. For these contestants and their families, notoriety in the pageant realm and in popular culture in general was increased. As a result, it is certainly possible that their goals of having pageant or show business careers will have a better chance of becoming reality.

The opening scenes of *Little Miss Sunshine*, the Indy and Oscar winning film of 2006, show Olive, a pageant wanna-be, watching the crowing of Miss America and mimicking the motions and actions of the winner. From this, and from other aspects of the film, it is apparent that Olive wants to be considered a winner – and doing whatever the women who win Miss America do is a step in that direction. Her dream in life – and

for the moment – is to be in the limelight. A career in show business or dancing (not exactly the type her grandfather teaches!) or some other performance area certainly appeals to her.

Likewise, Mona in *Beautiful* sees her goal in life – and therefore her career – becoming Miss American Miss. She wants the glitz and glamour associated with the pageant world and desires a job that will allow her to perform duties required of a pageant queen. Her whole life and purpose becomes a performance – not who she really is, but who she imagines the world (or the viewing public) wants or expects her to be. All of these examples work to support Giroux's (2000b) belief that pageants provide "a route to get… kids into lucrative careers such as modeling, or to win college scholarships, financial rewards, and other prizes"(p. 53).

Pageants as Platform for Fortune and Prizes

Pageants, indeed, are platforms for fortune and prizes, as Giroux (2000b) suggests. My personal experience as a pageant coordinator, pageant judge, and pageant observer has allowed me to see the tiaras, trophies, savings bonds, scholarships, donated gifts, jewelry, and other prizes awarded to the winners and runners-up. And many contestants and their mothers talk openly about the vast number of prizes and the amount of money and savings bonds won as a result of competition. For them, it is quantity more so than quality – but quality does play a large part. This is further evidenced by Brooke's comment in *Painted Babies*, "We like to go where money and cars are, because we want money, money, money." Brooke's grandmother supports this idea earlier in the documentary by stating, "We have moved from the Saturday Night Specials to pageants with bigger prizes." The focus, for them, is the money and the prizes – cars, to be

specific. And Asia's mother and grandmother make a big production out of discussing the car Asia has already won as a result of her competition, in addition to the thousands of dollars in prize money.

The girls in *Smile Pretty* discuss the prizes associated with pageant participation, focusing more on the scholarship money and the attention that boys often afford the winners of pageants. It also seems that girls who spend time in the pageant world are perceived as being more attractive to boys – a by-product that is not scoffed at by the young ladies. The long-term fortune aspect is echoed by the mothers in *Living Dolls* who see the importance of goal setting and achieving success in the future as a platform for fortune and good things for their daughters. And the girls in *Little Beauties* have chances to win huge crowns (some of them appear to be 3 feet tall), clothing, photography shoots, modeling contracts, prize money, and cars – all aspects of fortune that move the contestant and her family up in their perceived social status and allow for tangible evidence of their success and "wealth."

In the motion picture and television depictions, this idea of pageants as a way to increase one's fortune is illustrated as well. Mona in *Beautiful* sees those who are outwardly beautiful and accepted as successful and rich, as she is trying to overcome her humble and modest beginnings. She treasures the crowns, sashes, trophies, and awards she has acquired through pageantry, as she displays these in her bedroom even though she is an adult who should have moved past this "displaying" stage. She becomes the contestant and the "proud Mama" rolled into one, since her own mother is not supportive of Mona's pageant career. *Little Miss Sunshine*'s focus on winners and what it takes to be a winner allows for the continued idea that winning a pageant leads to fortune. Olive

desires to be a winner – something she knows is prized by her family, dysfunctional as they are. And with being a winner will come the crown, the banner, the accolades, the trophies, and so much more – in Olive's perception.

Even Suzanne Sugarbaker still has her tiara and awards from her pageant days – and she lives through the fortune and fame she gained from this participation. The shows that center around her return to the pageants that made her "famous in Georgia and in her own mind" allow for the viewer to better understand how the *Designing Women* character is shaped by this previous competition. And the desire for having fortune and fame associated with pageant participation becomes the basis for the dark comedy in *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, as Becky Leeman and her mother want all of the awards for Becky – even resorting to killing off any competition to insure the prizes go to Becky. And this idea is not too far off the competitive mark – numerous accounts exist of parents who work by questionable means to lessen the number of competitors for their daughters in cheerleading, ice skating, gymnastics, and other competitive events. The focus then moves from winning to have the intrinsic satisfaction of doing one's best, and becomes winning to have all the "trappings" to be able to physically show others how much of a winner an individual (or one's daughter) is. Ironic, to say the least!

Pageants as a Ticket to Stardom

For many parents and contestants, being chosen the winner in a beauty contest is seen as the ticket to stardom. In *Pink Think*, Lynn Peril (2002) comments that the quickest way to a rich husband and stardom as his wife is to become the ideal beauty – by using the latest products and adhering to the latest fads. Being in the public eye is key. Giroux (1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2002) attests this repeatedly as he says that the desire for

success and celebrity are key in becoming the best kid on the block. Parents see the need to success and push their children into this mode in an attempt to see them rise to fame and fortune. Most often it is the middle class parents who spend fortunes on lessons and chances at having that "one big break."

Valerie Walkerdine (1997) comments that "fame is one of the few promises and hopes open to many of these [middle class] girls. It is also one of the few ways that they can stop being a schoolgirl" (p. 143). The desire for fame, and the possibility of fame that rises from pageant participation, is the one thing that can "counter boring school, it is the dream of escape, of fame. Escape is what the working classes are sold, from holidays in Marbella to Honda cars" (p. 157). The desire for that one big break that will vault them into stardom and take them away from the middle class reality is certainly a drawing point for some pageant participants. Candace Savage (1998) indicates that the fame might be more in line with the Cinderella story (or more likely, the "Fancy" story from the Reba McIntyre song). A girl never knows who might be in the audience; a talent scout or modeling agent, but if not that, then a possible rich, handsome husband (pp. 50 – 51).

Tied into the belief that pageants are a vehicle through which to start a career or to gain fortune is the idea that participation in rural child beauty pageants is an entrance into a life of stardom. Asia's mom in *Painted Babies* discusses on numerous occasions the "show business" aspect of pageants. She drives 500 miles round trip twice a month to have Asia work with singing and modeling coaches – a sacrifice of time and money that would not be worth it unless there was some hope of payoff in the end. Since Asia's mom hopes that a career on stage is in her daughter's future, pageant participation and

hours of coaching are investments in a showbiz future. Brooke's parents also invest much in singing and modeling coaches and lessons and their aspirations are for Brooke to have a modeling career more successful than her mother's. In *Smile Pretty* and *Little Beauties* several contestants, mothers and girls refer to judges and people in the audience who potentially could give a contestant a "big break" into performance or a career on stage.

From motion pictures the idea of stardom coming from pageant participation is depicted again and again. Olive in *Little Miss Sunshine* discusses the importance of being considered a "winner" with her grandfather and her parents, as she sees being a "star" on the pageant stage as a step into a world of winners. In addition, she worships the winners of the Miss America Pageant, watching the crowning scenes over and over and mimicking the expressions and motions of the victors. This seems to be a version of "stardom" for Olive and she longs for that status. This is also the case for Mona in *Beautiful* as she sees becoming Miss American Miss as the pinnacle of life – that is the ultimate stardom and sign of success. It is there that Mona feels she will be a "star" – loved and envied by those who have shunned her or whose love and adoration she has craved. Even Becky in *Drop Dead Gorgeous* sees becoming queen as a step towards being a hometown star – and Amber makes reference to the pageant as the way for girls to escape a life of doom in Mount Rose.

Pageants as a Ticket to Class Mobility

In reference to class issues as they apply to culture, Dick Hebdige (1979) comments that "we must first consider how power is distributed in our society…we must ask which groups and classes have how much say in defining, ordering, and classifying

the social world" (p. 14). In the pageant culture, many see royalty, the highest class, as the group that has the largest say in defining the social world. And with that view, they see that winning a "royal title" is a step toward wielding the power it takes to change the world. John Fiske (1998) continues this discussion on class as he sees that

> the boundaries of working-class experience or of female experience leave plenty of room for different inflections, for any one person is subjected to a wide variety of social determinations (p. 81).

In this way, Fisk sees that the desire for class mobility may be interpreted and is interpreted differently for each female who participates in the pageant culture.

Being in a pageant is seen as a way to move up in the world. In *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, Amber lives in a trailer park with her single mother and works as a makeup artist for cadavers in a funeral home. She says, "Guys get outta Mount Rose all the time for hockey scholarships … and prison. But the pageant's kinda my only chance." That is, the pageant seems to be the ticket out of a low class, trailer park life. And this sentiment is shared with Suzanne in *Designing Women*, as she often refers to the fact that what allowed her the opportunity to have several rich husbands and the access to so much affluence is her participation in pageants and her being named as Miss Georgia US 1975. It was her ticket to stardom. Even Mona in *Beautiful* is trying to escape her low class, incestuous home by becoming Miss American Miss.

Pageants Provide Way to Live Up to Society's Focus on Winners

Society places value upon winners in all aspects of life. Reality television is full of shows that focus on competition and winning – and we are inundated with images of being the best at our jobs, having the best house or the best vehicle, or the best clothing

and more. Being the best – being a "winner" – is exceedingly important in our culture. And this carries over to the world of child beauty pageants. The contestants in *Little Beauties* show that it is important to have the right hair, makeup, and clothes in order to be considered a success and to win the crown and titles. The parents and girls who "buck" the system and do not follow the examples of the "winners" do not do well. For these competitors, winning is indeed everything. And with winning comes an increased status level in the pageant culture.

"When you finally get that crown and title, you feel really good because you're like, 'Wow! She's really hard to compete against and I beat her.' It's not just competition. We want to be all as one, but we want to be competitive more, 'cause that's the basic fun of it also," says a contestant in *Smile Pretty*. This girl verbalizes the perception of winning and competition that society impresses upon young and old alike. Although she tries to include the politically correct "we want to include others and be as one," she focuses in the beginning and end of her statement on the glory and feeling of glee that comes from beating someone else and being declared the winner. That is a strong incentive for those who compete in pageants – the lure of being named "the winner."

In *Painted Babies* and *Living Dolls*, the girls and their parents focus on the winning of bigger and bigger awards. Swan's mother comments that competition is healthy and good for Swan, and that it is no different from sporting events or other childhood competitions. And since she is former military, she treats Swan's preparation for competition as a drill sergeant, demanding perfection and telling Swan that nothing less than the crown will do. Asia and Brooke's parents in *Painted Babies* also focus on the crown. They watch tapes of each other in order to know what competition exists and

in order to plan strategy to defeat the other in the various divisions of the pageant. And when Asia is named "Supreme Winner" and Brooke is just a queen in her age division, Brooke's mother is quick to say that the judges were not fair and the competition was not conducted correctly. There is no way they will admit to actually losing. Being a winner is of paramount importance. Society does not have much of a place of those who are not first.

Society's focus on winners is also reflected in *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Beautiful*, as well as *Drop Dead Gorgeous*. Olive's family in *Little Miss Sunshine* is obsessed with winning. When she learns she is able to go to the finals for the pageant, Olive worries aloud about her chances. Her father asks her, "Do you believe you are a winner? Then you are…" His thinking is that winning is a matter of believing – but the pageant realm squashes that dream readily. Many – I daresay most – pageant mothers and fathers believe that their daughter should and will win any pageant entered. But the reality is that only one girl can be named the winner of any division – that is the nature of the competition. So just believing is one step of many to achieve that goal. As Foucault's theory of docile bodies reflects, the behaviors that lead to the desired results are the ones that the individuals will employ to be accepted. And those who become pageant winners learn the behaviors and tactics demanded by the pageant systems in order to obtain the title and wear the crown. Asia and Brooke's reviewing of each others' competition tapes is evidence of this.

And to further the focus on winning as all important in *Little Miss Sunshine*, Olive tells her grandfather, "Grandpa, I don't want to be a loser because Daddy hates losers." She has learned early that winning is important to everyone, including her parents. Olive

wants to win in order to measure up and be worthy in her parents' eyes. Becky Leeman in *Drop Dead Gorgeous* echoes this idea when she relates a note written to her by her mother stating, "Jesus loves winners." And Mona in *Beautiful* goes to extremes to prevent those who are her most staunch competition from winning, even resorting to sabotage to obtain the crown. Winning is indeed everything to her – so important that she denies Vanessa as her daughter in order to become Miss American Miss. Society's pressure is certainly part of the pageant realm.

Pageants Provide Way to Improve Social and Economic Standing

Improving social and economic standing through winning is another reason parents enter their daughters in pageants. And it also provides evidence for why girls are interested in competing in pageants as well. As one contestant in *Smile Pretty* states, "Everybody starts changing through middle school. It's just a peer pressure thing, to change from what you are to a girl…" In order to be accepted and to be part of the "in" group, girls must start acting "like girls." And where do they learn behavior associated with "girl-dom"? Popular culture sites like television shows, movies, pageants, magazines, and more provide definitions of "girl" and what behaviors and modes of appearance are deemed "feminine." Being a "pageant girl" solidifies, it would seem, one's place as a girl in society.

Pageants also provide a way to ensure that a girl will move up in social status. Swan's military mom in *Living Dolls* comments that Swan's pageant work will provide her a way to "go places." Swan's brother, in contrast, will "end up in jail" according to his mother. He does not have an outlet for his energy and has not learned to play the "winning" game. As a result, his future is dim. Swan, because of her pageant

participation or perhaps because her mother lavishes attention on her and ignores her siblings, is headed for a life of good things, according to her mother. This pouring of time, money, and attention on the pageant child in order to improve social or economic status is also illustrated in *Little Beauties*. Overweight mothers dressed in jersey shorts ensembles fawn over their daughters who are dressed in various outfits embellished with spangles, sequins, crystals, and the like – embellishments that symbolize money and class and "glamour" according to the moms.

As a means by which to move up in social status as an individual or as a family, pageants work in various ways. The contestants in *Living Dolls* spend much time watching videos of other winners or contestants who consistently do well in the pageants. This teaches them the behaviors, dress codes, hairstyles, modeling routines, and more that are employed by those who are successful in the pageants. Once they perfect these aspects of competition, the girls become "winners" in the pageant realm and are revered and emulated by others. This affords them a higher "social status" among those in the pageant culture. Interestingly enough, it seems that even though they have the trappings of winners and the expensive wardrobes and the numerous tiaras and trophies and should have moved to a higher social class in reality, most of them remain as lower middle class or lower class in the real social realm.

This concept of the pageant winner being socially higher than those who are working towards the crown is further discussed in *Painted Babies*. The judges and pageant coordinator discuss the winners as being "the total package" – beautiful, well-dressed, poised, confident, talented, and more. And the rivalry between Brooke who is not a Supreme Winner and Asia who is crowned the Supreme Winners showcases the

difference in status associated with titles and winning. The parents, however, seem far more concerned with this difference in social perception.

Tied to the image of the pageant culture is the desire for success and the crown. In the media, we see that the desire to win is the driving force. Giroux (2000b) discusses the parents of the current generation who see that if their children are not winners, then they are complete losers. There is the mentality that if you are not the one wearing the crown or carrying the title, you just are good enough. No longer is it, "Did you have fun, Honey?" Now it is, "Did you win?" What message does this send to young people? And why is it seen that there must be a winner in these contests – why is improvement or having fun not emphasized? In her book, Cohen (1996) states that there is a correlation between those who are successful in pageants and their involvement and success at school and in extracurricular. The drive to be the best can be seen in all that they do.

Angela McRobbie (1991) says the culture that tells girls that being winners is what is important, even if the materials needed to achieve the look of a winner are "well-beyond the girls' reach at this moment" (p. 109). What is most imperative is that the girls be seen as winners, both in appearance, dress, and achievements.

Again, this can be seen in the media. Mona in *Beautiful* works diligently to make the money to enter in pageants – even without her parents' support or acknowledgement. She takes modeling classes and sabotages others who are seen to be threats. She even hides her motherhood in an attempt to attain the prize and be considered a winner. We are overjoyed at the end when she breaks out of this shallow shell and becomes a woman of substance – one who will take control of her life and live who she really is and not live

the lie of the beauty queen. But it was her desire to be considered a winner that led her to the place where she could take a stand.

In *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, James Brewer (1999) says that "the pageant is not about beauty, but about winning, and winning by any means necessary" (p. 2). Becky Leeman also shows us this desire to win at all costs when she discusses the gun given to her by her mother. She says that the card that accompanied the gift read, "Jesus loves winners." This points to the fact that resorting to murder (and this is a stretch- but comes to fruition in the movie) is acceptable if your goal is winning. And Suzanne Sugarbaker repeatedly states that the only point in entering a pageant is to win – there is no need to socialize or play nice. Winning is the only goal. Who wants to be a runner- up? The likelihood of filling the shoes of the winner if she is "unable to perform her duties as queen" is a remote as being struck by lightning twice.

In *Little Miss Sunshine*, Olive discusses the importance of winning and being socially acceptable with her grandfather, stating, "Grandpa, I don't want to be a loser because Daddy hates losers…" When her aunt calls with "good news" about Olive's being able to compete in the Little Miss Sunshine regional pageant, it is understood that participation in and winning of this pageant will catapult Olive into a social status that will be acceptable to her success obsessed parents. And this obsession with winning so that others will see the contestant as good, beautiful and worth knowing and emulating is also illustrated by Mona's actions and dreams in *Beautiful*. Being a winner and making it to the national finals of Miss American Miss is of utmost importance to her. She even wants the little details to be perfect, like having the right number of family members

sitting in her "section" so that when the camera pans to them during the pageant she will have the acceptable family and perceived life.

Pageants Elevate Social Status of Family

Even more than just the contestant's improved social status, the family of contestants often gain improved social status from their daughter's or sister's pageant participation and winning. Being more accepted as an immigrant to America is a social benefit for one contestant's mother in *Smile Pretty*. She states, "My mother grew up in China, so it's much different from America. She'd never seen lipstick before but she learned when she came here – eye shadow, eye liner, moisturizer, the whole regime…" And this new knowledge put to use in the pageant realm gave her the status of having a daughter who met a truly American standard of being beautiful and accepted, with the trophies, titles, and tiaras to prove it.

Brooke's grandmother in *Painted Babies* focuses on pageants that offer money, cars, and "big prizes." She spends several minutes of the beginning of the documentary explaining the process by which they decide which pageants to do – and the quality and quantity of prize money and awards are the deciding factor. She then turns to Brooke and says, "Grandma needs a new car, baby." So the trappings that come with winning become important, and they improve the lifestyles and perceptions of the family at large. This focus on what the girls who compete can do for their families is also reflected in *Living Dolls*. Parents focus on what they have done to prepare for the pageant and relish in their daughter's success. Many of them fall to the floor, weeping and screaming when their child wins, and several rush up to the stage to hug and kiss their daughter. This becomes even more interesting as a status booster for the parents and the family when

analysis of how many of these mothers and fathers are overweight and unattractive. Having a beautiful daughter – one who has been judged by outside forces to be so – seems even more important to them.

In *Little Beauties* many of the contestants are from the southern United States. For these contestants, certain pageants and pageant systems are seen as worthy or "the ultimate," as one mother describes them. Winning one of these particular pageants allows for status among mothers and families. Advice is sought from them and other mothers and daughters try to emulate their behaviors and methods. In addition, their neighbors and others who travel in their social circles seem to be in awe as they discuss recent titles won or pageants attended.

Valerie Walkerdine (1998) ponders the social status aspect of pageantry as well, as she says that her desire to be on stage as a child stemmed from her desire to be discovered and whisked away to a life of glamour, fame, and love. And in her book, Colleen Cohen (1996) states that the girls who compete in the beauty pageants across the world see them tied to social characteristics and ways to escape the lower or middle class existence they currently hold. Even the history of the beauty pageant itself is tied to a move up in class and standing. Naomi Wolf (1991) continues this discussion as she relays the fact that working class women have long known of the importance of beauty in attaining jobs that pay well and that offer chances for advancement.

Pageants Provide Proof of Beauty

From heavy makeup, taped-up bosoms or falsies, to clothing that is not normally worn in everyday, the air of make-believe is prevalent in the construction of the perfect beauty. Girls are not what they seem. It reminds me of the infomercial on Saturday

mornings that discusses the use of makeup and the proper techniques to create yourself into a beauty – and that opens the door for all the successes that life can offer. Tied to the desire to move upward in class is the Cinderella desire to look like something other than you are. It is a new twist on the old game of dress up. And the images seen in the media go to prove this.

Angela McRobbie (1991/2000) notes that tied to the notion of looking good is the expectation of being "treated as something special, even precious. Beauty like this is the girl's passport to happiness and success" (pp. 103 – 104). Culture determines what is beautiful and young women are aware that in order to be seen as worthy of love and affection, much less happiness, one must fit the images culture dictates. Pageants take this a step further by offering a tangible token that lets the "world" know that one is desirable and beautiful. It would seem that beauty would be evident and there would be no need to have to earn a title to show that one is beautiful.

The obsession with being beautiful and accepted as such is repeated in the videos and documentaries – Olive in *Little Miss Sunshine* and Mona and Ruby in *Beautiful* watch the crowning of winners over and over. It almost seems that the realm of beauty and royalty is a world away from them and they long for that type of recognition. This is further evidenced by their lack of sophistication and appearance that measure up to the "beautiful" ideal of the women and girls wearing the crowns in the television shows and videos they review. Being beautiful in the ways defined by the beauty pageant realm becomes an obsession with them. If they are able to earn the title, then they will prove not only to themselves but also to the world around them that they are beautiful, they are winners, and they are deserving of love and acceptance.

Pageants Offer Way to Play "Dress Up" and Be a Princess

Often parents excuse this obsession with pageants and the excessiveness of dress as "playing dress up." Girls seemingly live out their dreams and fantasies of being "princesses" and "queens" on the pageant stage. How many times have girls been told, "You look like a princess" when they have been dressed up in their finest? In the documentaries I reviewed, moms spent much time explaining to the videographers the amount of money spent on costumes and dresses and the importance of these items. They discuss the clothing and dressing of their daughters as a type of "doll play." The homosexual couple in *Living Dolls* not only work with their daughter to get ready for pageants, but they also do hair and makeup for other contestants. As they discuss their daughter and their clients, they repeatedly refer to them as "little dolls." Pageants, according to these parents and coaches, then take on the air of being a game of dress up and role play. Perhaps that makes the suggestiveness of the girls' dress and behavior a little easier to excuse?

This idea of the beauty aspect of the competition seen as a type of "make-believe" or "dressing up game" is furthered by Asia's mom in *Painted Babies*. She confides that she spends in excess of $3500 a year on Asia's wardrobe. She lovingly reveals the various outfits, referring to them as "little works of art" as they have been custom made for Asia. She speaks of them as little "doll clothes" – and she just loves dressing Asia in them. In fact, Asia seems to perceive the pageants as a dress up game, as she looks forward to the Western competition because she loves the Western costume. As she dons the clothing, she gets excited and dances around and around, stating that she just loves

"playing like a cowgirl." The pageant, while still dictating beauty norms for the contestants, becomes innocuous because it can be excused as a "play" activity.

It is interesting that in *Little Miss Sunshine* Olive does not adhere to the "dress up" norms. Her dress, swim suit, and talent outfits are not the excessive types seen on the other contestants. She wears her hair in a simple, straight ponytail, or down with a headband. As a result of her ignorance of the dressing "rules" (and perhaps that talent routine!), Olive does not do well in the Little Miss Sunshine pageant.

Pageants Make Winners Holders of Values or Ideals

Often, girls enter pageants in order to be seen as the holder of certain values or ideals. Candace Savage (1998) sees that many winners of early twentieth-century contests represented

> a type of womanhood America needs – strong, red-blooded, able to shoulder the responsibilities of homemaking and motherhood. It is in her type that the hope of the country rests. In the very best of fairy tales, they don't say things like that (33).

In this we see that the pageant culture allowed a young girl to surpass the class issue and even fame to become a cultural icon – someone that others aspired to be and emulate. What a wonderful role to fill! Savage (1998) goes on to indicate that the winners of current contests often go on to "become a metaphor for everything and anything that could be constructed as desirable" (p. 110) as they are used in the commodity culture to advertise for the sponsors of their titles. Within a 50 mile radius of my hometown, there are titles such as "Miss Washpot," "Miss Catfish," "Miss Rattlesnake Roundup," among others. In each of these contests, the queen is required to be a "spokesperson" for the

event and is seen to embody the values of the people who create and maintain the festivals that provide the pageants.

Many who participate in pageants have "a high profile in high school via active participation many activities: sports, cheerleading, school clubs and publications, youth groups, and so on" (Cohen et al., 1996, p. 33). These girls often are outgoing and show a commitment to their school as well as to the entity sponsoring the pageant. In this light, they seem to embody the values for which the contest they have won stands. This then vaults the queen to the status of being a sign of success and values in her locale.

Pageants Provide Definition of Beauty in Terms of Race

Another part of the construction of the beauty pageant contestant concerns race. It seems, in just looking at the movies and television show I mentioned, white women were the ones who were stereotyped as beauty pageant contestants. Even those women who were successful on the Miss America or Miss USA stage that I remembered from my childhood were "white" looking. Vanessa Williams is a prime example – as are Halle Berry and scores of women who were not "White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant" who have excelled on the pageant stage. It seems that "white is right" when it comes to being a winner in the beauty pageant realm. Most all of the main characters and contestants in the videos and documentaries mentioned – Suzanne in *Designing Women*, Mona in *Beautiful*, and Amber and Becky in *Drop Dead Gorgeous* , Olive in *Little Miss Sunshine*, and many of the girls in the documentaries – are as white as white girls can be. And even those girls who play the others in the pageants – the extras and the competition – they are all characteristically white – whether ethnic or not.

The girls who do walk away with the crown and titles of the pageants often become the embodiment of cultural ideals in the pageant world. The blond-haired, blue-eyed, slender beauty seems to be the ideal for physical appearance. The judges in *Painted Babies* comment that attractive people are the more successful in the world – and this beauty ideal is perpetuated through the pageant winner. Since pageants seem to be a "way of life in the South," according to the pageant announcer in *Living Dolls*, it is not surprising that the appearances of the little girls who participate in them are similar. Even the ethnic girls (African-American, Oriental, Pacific Islander, etc.) appear similar to the Caucasian-looking pageant ideal.

Parents become obsessed with hair color (many have their hair professionally colored), teeth ("flippers" are made to fill in gaps made when baby teeth are lost or permanent teeth are growing in), skin (girls are spray-tanned and are not allowed to play outside or be rough before a pageant), and weight. In *Little Miss Sunshine*, Olive orders waffles a la mode at a diner, and is chastised by her father for eating ice cream. He asks Olive, "Is Miss America fat or skinny?" When she responds that Miss America is skinny, he then discusses the fact that Miss America probably does not eat ice cream. The rest of the family is horrified at his discussion with Olive and they encourage her to eat and enjoy the ice cream as little girls are want to do. But the pageant ideal of a svelte body is the reality when Olive arrives at the hotel for the competition. Her pudgy, real little girl body in her real clothing stands out against the slender pageant girl physiques dressed in figure-hugging, be-jeweled costumes.

Pageants Create Moral Ideals

The ideals created by pageants include other things than just appearance, social status and modeling styles. In *Beautiful*, who qualifies as a contestant is called into question. Miss American Miss does not allow mothers to compete in the pageant. Since Mona has hidden her pregnancy and daughter Vanessa, revealing this secret on stage in front of a studio and television audience is troubling. Moral turpitude (which would include having a child out of wed-lock in the case of Miss American Miss) is not tolerated or acceptable behavior in most pageant competitions. Contestants must sign waivers attesting to their behavior and more. In this way, pageants also provide ideals for the "perfect girl" in relation to morals and behavior.

Pageants Create Beauty Ideals

But most definitely pageants provide definitions of beauty. Contestants often embrace and endure uncomfortable things in the name of beauty. Hot rollers, taped up body parts, heavy makeup, itchy costumes, painful shoes, blisters, sore muscles from practicing, and so much more can make pageant participation uncomfortable – and all of these things work to make the contestant's appearance seem effortless and perfect. In *Living Dolls*, a makeup artist comments that, "I can take an ugly girl and make her beautiful." From this, one can deduce that it is not natural beauty that is of importance in a pageant; rather, it is conforming to the requirements and expectations established by the pageant that defines what is beautiful and worthy of being named the best.

In *Smile Pretty* one contestant admits, "Pretty much at 12 or 13 is when I decided I needed to grow up and be a girl." It is interesting that she chose pageants as the vehicle through which to develop her identity as a girl. The director of the pageants featured in

Painted Babies states that, "Like it or not, the world revolves around beauty" and she sees that the girls chosen as winners in her pageants measure up to the title of "beautiful." For this group of girls, elaborate costumes, exaggerated hair, adult makeup and specific modeling routines combine to equate beauty. And for the parents in *Painted Babies* and *Living Dolls*, using hair coloring to achieve the desired blond shade, and flippers to make smiles perfect and "showy," and spray-on tanning to make children look sun-kissed and not washed-out under the lights is seen as acceptable behavior. Beauty is not natural – it is a created notion for these pageants and in order to achieve the status of being beautiful, one must conform. It is eerily allusive to the Stepford Wives. These girls seem too perfect to be real – and, in fact, they are not what they seem. Under all the gliltz and glamour and big hair and makeup are little girls.

Pageants Adultify Children

The adultification of children into sexual beauties is also part of this beauty myth. Images of Jon Benet Ramsey come to mind – with her coy grin and her adult hair and makeup moving suggestively across the stage in an adult gown pulling a harlequin mask almost seductively across her six-year-old eyes. She is not an adult, but her looks and actions seem to make her one. This is the first of many images of falsification and idealized beauty. Pageants seem to be full of this deception – and they are dependent upon it as well.

Again and again in *Smile Pretty* the contestants speak of the extremes they go to in order to submit to the definition of beauty given by the pageants. This is much like the extremes adult women go to in order to meet the demands of society – girdles, facelifts, liposuction, tummy-control swimsuits, breast augmentation… the list is endless. Stating

that “it hurts to be beautiful” and “I can’t stand wearing a lot of makeup. I hate it. But, I mean, you’ve got to…,” one contestant discusses the ways that girls are expected to conform to the beauty requirements, ways that are usually reserved for adult women. The use of makeup and clothing to create illusions of beauty are characteristically adult. What message does this send to young girls? You cannot be considered beautiful and a girl unless you use deception and illusion to create these things? What does that do to them as they grow older and attempt to find their niche in the real world?

Painted Babies, *Living Dolls*, *Little Beauties*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, and *Beautiful* all depict the adultification of little girls that happens on the pageant stage. The hairstyles are elaborate, big, and usually seen on grown women. The makeup is heavy, accentuating the eyes and lips with eyeliner, fake eyelashes, glitter, gloss, and red lipstick. Dresses are custom made or altered to fit figures and to accentuate certain areas – and they are full of spangles, cut-outs, sequins, rhinestones, and more. Bathing suits, usually associated with pageants for teenagers and adults, are readily found in child beauty pageants and are often bikinis. It is also interesting that the hairstyles and makeup are as exaggerated for the bathing suit competition as they are for the other aspects of competition.

Talent is another area in which these documentaries and movies agree in excessiveness. Girls are dressed in suggestive costumes (one little girl in *Little Beauties* dons a Vegas showgirl costume complete with headdress and gyrates in a sexualized dance) and often sing of adult situations. Asia in *Painted Babies* sings “Bill Bailey” with facial expressions, gestures, and dance steps that insinuate the relationship between a woman and the man she wants desperately to return to her. The angst in her voice and

the demands of her mother to "Come on, baby… do it, girl" allude to a much more mature meaning to the performance.

Olive's talent routine in *Little Miss Sunshine*, though an intended farce, is actually a routine performed in a strip club and taught to Olive by her irreverent grandfather. It is horrifying to the viewer that a grandfather would teach his granddaughter these moves, much less that a little girl would perform such a routine in public. However, it is just this type of adult behavior that is taught by high-priced talent coaches and modeling instructors to little girls in the pageant world. The parents of these girls discuss the lengths to which they go to have these "professionals" work with their daughters to prepare them for competition. And these parents spend hours making their daughters practice these routines on make-shift stages in spare rooms or basements in their houses. Ironically, the parents and pageant organizers in *Little Miss Sunshine* take offense to Olive's routine, even though they do not question the adult behavior and appearance of the other little girls in the bathing suit competition, the evening gown competition, or when the frightening emcee serenades the contestants.

Giroux (2000b) expands upon the adultification of children and the deception in pageantry repeatedly in *Stealing Innocence*. He discusses the pageants of the 1970s in light of the Ramsey case, citing that parents who had children in the pageant system during the 1970s had their daughters in appropriate dresses, not at all the eroticized costumes that are commonplace today. In fact, my own sister-in-law was big in the pageant scene during the 1970s and 1980s. My mother-in-law belabors the fact that the dresses and hair and makeup that they used were natural – not at all like what is presently acceptable. And the pictures and videos they have attest to this fact. The fascination

with children and the eroticization of them in the media and popular culture has crossed the line in to the world of pageantry. It was inevitable that it would do so; and it is ironic that we are doing our best to childify adult women at the same time we adultify the children amongst us. Valerie Walkerdine (1997) remarks on this problem as well, stating "popular portrayals of little girls and popular culture… engage the debates about the specifically classed meanings that enter into concerns about popular portrayals of little girls and relate particularly to sexuality, eroticism, and innocence" (139). This change in identity is closely tied to the pageant culture. And those who defend this culture cite the fact that the clothes can be changed and the makeup and hair washed out, so that the child returns. But what of the damage and identity that are created during the time it is worn? According to Walkerdine (1997) "many little girls and their families have wanted to take part in media presentations of girls which are, in many ways, highly eroticized" (139). So how do they justify the image of adulthood for the moment to their daughters who are not even adolescents?

Popular culture, specifically the pageant stage in the media depictions I viewed and in my experience, becomes a place where toddlers and little girls become sexualized women complete with the hair, makeup, and clothing. And this is further developed with alluring modeling routines and talent performances to entertain the judges and the audience. According to Ann Scott (1998) this seductiveness is seen as a form of parental intrusion, in which children are seduced into the fantasies of their parents. I might even take it a step further and say that the pageant culture seduces them into the fantasies of its culture as well. This culture seems to also provide these little girls a sphere of life that is unlike anywhere else, a realm out of reality. And in this realm, they can be as sexual as

they want and exercise a type of power over a crowd and others that they have here-to-fore not experienced. Perhaps that is part of the allure of the adultification of children. And perhaps that is why parents, or some parents, are willing to allow their daughters to participate. They are looking to give them the skills to compete in the world. What better skill than power to impart?

In *Beautiful*, Mona spends hundreds of dollars on braces, lessons on modeling and pageantry, and costumes in her pursuit of her dream. On stage, she is not at all the gangly, ugly, self-centered woman she is off the stage. And, in the coup de gras, she is a mother; a fact that she hides in her quest. She is definitely something other than what she portrays.

Pageants Are Vehicles for Developing Self-Esteem

Many who seek to justify pageant involvement cite the development of self-esteem in those who compete. Often it is "the lessons in social life the [pageant] can give them – instructions on poise, on self-presentation and good grooming, on good manners, on getting along with other members of a small-town middle class" (Cohen et al., 1996, p. 34). These lessons work together to improve a participant's self-esteem, it is said.

> Giroux (2000b) observes this with a critical eye, stating
>
> Self –esteem in this context means embracing rather than critically challenging a gender code that rewards little girls for their looks, submissiveness, and sex appeal. Coupled with the ways in which the broader culture, through television, music, magazines, and advertising, consistently bombards young girls with a sexualized ideal of femininity from which all threatening elements have been purged, self-esteem often

> becomes a euphemism for self-hatred, rigid gender roles, and powerlessness (p. 55).

There is an irony in the fact that self-esteem building is used to defend child beauty pageants, since the pageant culture provides standards of beauty and success that only a miniscule number of participants will actually meet.

Pageants Instill Skills for Competition

Parents of the children in the documentaries I viewed, many of whom seemed to be lower middle class or lower class from the depictions in the videos, cited competition as a healthy and necessary skill for their daughters to learn. For these parents, it seems that life is full of competition and those children who learn how to maneuver within the realm of competition will be the successors in life. And the social skills a child can develop from pageant participation can be invaluable. "It's a pageant. What else do I have to do but walk across a stage? It was the hardest thing. My stomach hurt. My shoulders were tight and it was uncomfortable," says a contestant in *Smile Pretty*. But this girl learned to adapt to the requirements to win the prize. This is an increasingly valuable social skill for girls to develop, according to pageant parents.

For these parents, it is important for their girls to learn how to win and to lose. And it seems that learning to read the underlying rules and messages and conforming to them is an equally valuable skill. Those people who can do that, from a social class point of view, will be the ones who can move up in the social realm. This is an invaluable skill for girls to learn. These girls also learn how to adapt their routines and other aspects of competition to the changing time requirements and entry requirements for the various

pageant systems. Again, the social skill of adaptability is key. "A child who smiles and has presence is the child who wins," remarks Asia's mom in *Painted Babies*.

Learning to play the game becomes a life skill also imparted by pageants and evidenced in the make believe worlds of *Beautiful* and *Drop Dead Gorgeous*. Mona learns to "play the game" and hide her real life from others. She is able to keep others from learning about her horrible home life and, most importantly, from learning about her pregnancy and daughter. Being able to show the "right" face to the world to achieve the goals she has set for herself and to meet the requirements of the pageant culture is a remarkable skill for her. It is what helps her eventually learn to cast off the false identity and embrace who she really is. As Grandpa tells Olive in *Little Miss Sunshine*, "A real loser is someone who doesn't even try."

Successful Pageant Girls Often Seen as Superficial

Most of the people I discussed this paper with commented on the fact that they see most of the successful pageant girls as back-biting bitches that are only out for themselves. And, if you watch the movies and see the documentaries, you would be in agreement with them. Mona's character in *Beautiful*, is banned from future contests in her home county after she is accused of gluing another contestant's hand to her fire-baton (notwithstanding the fact that the contestant in question attempted to sabotage Mona in the pageant by doing her exact talent routine and ruining Mona's chances at success – it seemed like a true case of "what's good for the goose, is good for the gander."). For those of us watching, we think nothing out of character for beauty queens to act this way. In fact, I had heard for years that there were often cases of contestants and their mothers ruining others' dresses and doing horrible things to those girls perceived to be a threat.

This is so widely believed that in every pageant I have ever directed or been a part of, it is necessary and expected for there to be security for the dressing rooms and "hostesses" in all dressing rooms at all times to monitor what happens. It seems that the lines between reality and media have been crossed!

This idea of contestants or their mothers being "bitches" and superficial is seen in many other instances. In *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, Becky Leeman's mother comments that they are "God fearing folk" and yet they resort to murder in order to assure that any competition that Becky has is eradicated before the pageant to insure her victory. Suzanne Sugarbaker is once heard to comment that she never entered a pageant in order to meet other girls and have fun. She could meet girls any old time. She was there to win and she did not care if anyone liked her. That was not the point. In a day and age where many pageant loyals cite the ability to meet others and become well-rounded, the media image seems to dispel this belief. So which is the reality? Or could it be a bit of both?

Pageants Can Be Rite of Passage

A small group of pageant supporters cite pageants acting as a rite of passage as a reason for participation. In a society that has few professional sports for women, and that does not idolize female athletes and corporate moguls in the same manner that it does males, there seems to be a lack of rites of passage to indicate that girls have moved from childhood to womanhood. In some places, the pageant is seen as this. Since the participants tend to signify social changes as "acted out in ritual performance just as they are in premodern societies" (Cohen et al., 1996, p. 14), the pageants become sites that indicate a change of status for the participant.

High school homecoming contests, fair queens, and the like often have rules that state that only girls of a certain age or status can compete. And it is seen as important to hold this title, but it is almost as important to be a part of the group that competes for the crown. Involvement in the contest marks a change in status of girls from child to young woman, ready to take on titles and responsibilities.

In researching the reasons for pageant participation, those found in reality and those depicted in the media, I came upon the many "pageant girl" constructs listed above. These were ideas that are generally put forth as truth in movies or commercials or television shows, and often were proven true in the experiences I had as a pageant coach, pageant participant, and pageant coordinator.

Conclusion

Stuart Hall (1996) states that "modern culture is relentlessly material in its practices and modes of production" (p. 233). It is easy to see that the pageant subculture uses material means through which to create ideals of beauty and definitions of success, winners, and fame. Young women who compete in these contests and their families and supporters all are changed and redefined as a result of their working in this culture. Hall (1996) sees the symbolic representations in society, as the pageant culture creates, as a way for

> men and women [to] express in their practical lives not only what they need for existence bus some sense of who they are. One should not miss the drive to take part or come on in the theatre of the social – even if, as things stand, the only stage provided is within the 'fetishized spectacle of the commodity (p. 235).

This symbolic representation in society is a type of education for the individual. And educational work is grounded in cultural politics since it is in the

> realm of culture that identities are forged, citizenship rites are enacted, and possibilities are developed for translating acts of interpretation into forms of intervention. Pedagogy in this discourse is about linking the construction of knowledge to issues of ethics, politics, and power (Giroux, 1996, 25).

It is evident that the pageant culture works in the realms of ethics, politics, and power to educate those who are part of its culture and even those who are aware of its culture.

There is much to be studied about the motivations for pageant participation, the ways that power operates in the pageant culture and in the larger culture to educate young women on their places and identities in larger society, the ways in which pageant culture influences how participants and others view themselves and the world, and the influences the pageant culture has on class and mobility. The images in the media, the comments made by cultural theorists of our time, and the actual spectacle of pageants themselves all give immense fodder for study and research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

I have reflected on the videos, documentaries, and my personal experiences and observations as part of this research many times since I spent time reviewing them via videotape and personal recollection. Additionally, I have spent countless hours agonizing over the problems, patterns, and themes reflected in the experiences of girls and the people involved in the rural Southern child beauty pageant culture. At times, I too have yielded to the feelings of being powerless and ineffectual in the task of sorting out the diverse complexities associated with issues of pageant participation. During periods of confusion and consternation the purpose and power (and powerlessness) demonstrated by those involved (girls, parents, and others involved in the rural Southern child beauty pageant culture) in this project encouraged me to complete the research. I found affirmation of my feelings in the writings of Frank (2004), where he states

> I believe we have to discover a body in our writing and we have to aspire to telling the truth, at least a truth. But the cultural sense of truth does not require an explanation that counts as a solution; cultural truth sees too many perspectives to accept the closure of explanation. If this rejection of closure can leave us feeling ineffectual and powerless in the face of complexity, we can also feel we have gained power to look hard at this complexity and not be turned to stone. Overcoming our innate fear of complexity is not small thing. We gain power to see what is and to say what is (p. 10).

In writing this final chapter, I reject a position that calls for absolute closure. Frank (2004) says that the future is open to other possibilities and Smith (2005) continues this thought with the understanding that we are searching for changes that are within our reach. Looking to the future of this research, I am optimistic because I have learned to move above and away from the media viewed and the personal experiences and observations to find different ways of disrupting the accepted and traditional suppositions by adding the difficult and unsettling questions often ignored or silenced.

By embracing the role of a bricoleur and the diverse and numerous roles that are employed by a bricoleur, I was able to augment and improve my learning. The most valuable lessons learned in this process were the importance of reading widely and the allowance to move beyond self imposed restrictive methodology boundaries. Freedom in this way enabled me to move among diverse and often competing paradigms, the result of which was the ability to be more open to scholarly support from other researchers in various fields whose philosophical beliefs found common ground with my research.

Ending this particular project is made possible by enumerating different possibilities for future directions for research. As a final chapter, this chapter identifies opportunities for viewing media and further research that are within reach. As the intent of this critical theory based research was emancipation from usual constraints, these possibilities for future studies and research are not presented as a set of structured strategies that can be employed as a "fix" or "solution" to the problem of power and the construction of girlhood found in the rural Southern child beauty pageant culture, especially as it is influenced by social class. Whether pageant coordinators, media, pageant participants, and others in the pageant culture choose to adopt these opportunities

will be up to them. However, by making available alternate ways of understanding rural Southern child beauty pageant culture and girlhood culture might stimulate those involved to consider their own ways of disrupting the structures of discipline in their worlds.

The boundaries of this research project were clearly defined from the outset and the study's purpose was to examine girlhood and the construction of identity in relation to social class in the subculture of the rural Southern child beauty pageant. This study employed media analysis and study to explore the constructions of reality and meaning as garnered from various movies and documentaries. Research within these defined boundaries allowed for the raising of numerous questions, but many of these questions were left unanswered. As a result, it is not easy to bring closure, in the traditional sense, to this research due to the identification of opportunities for further research beyond the scope of the study as outlined above.

Change as a Choice

While there were obvious common threads that emerged from the data reflecting media depictions, documentary accounts, and my personal observations from rural Southern child beauty pageants, there are clearly differences in opinion that need to be understood if power as it operates in this culture is to be studied. Rather than focusing on disparate issues that may only lead to negative suppositions, my goal is to offer direction for enhancing understandings of power as it operates in relation to social status in the creation of identity for girls who participate in rural Southern child beauty pageants. Improving the understanding of power by those involved in organizing pageants, parents of contestants, observers and contestants themselves requires a multifaceted approach.

Therefore, ideas for changes to pageant structures are also identified. Parents and contestants desire to promote independence and choice while not visible in the conformity to pageant rules the reflections and perceptions seen in videos, documentaries and observers to the barriers to participation. Contestants, parents, and pageant observers shared their experiences through observation, interviews on documentaries, and depictions in videos included discussion of potential strategies for overcoming barriers and learning skills to improve the outcome of participating in rural Southern child beauty pageants. These strategies, as well as possibilities uncovered during data analysis provide a base for the recommendations made for improving understanding of how power operates to create identity.

Acknowledgment of Power Operations

While reviewing and examining the information and data collected, I began to see patterns of contestants and parents struggling to understand the meaning of their participation in rural Southern child beauty contests. In addition, this analysis revealed that the contestant's and the parents' perceptions of their participation was limited to their involvement as part of the pageant spectacle and did not include reference to the people who were involved as vendors, judges, organizers, or decision makers in other capacities. Observation of contestants and parents included studying and questioning how they could be extended the ability to understand their participation in the larger scope and in relation to the ways that power was operating in various manners. In reflection on this, I realized that educating those involved would have to begin with specific educational sessions for contestants and their parents through the particular pageant systems. The creators of the documentaries and the writers of several dissertations and papers (Banet-Weiser and

Portwood-Stacer, 2006; Lalik and Oliver, 2005; Pannell, 2004; Levey, 2002; Gleick, 2001; and Hilbolt-Stolley, 1999) support this idea that education of power operations in child beauty pageants is a way of exposing contestants and parents to different ways of approaching participation.

In identifying education as a starting point for extending understandings of participation, questions are raised in relation to how these sessions might be organized and what practical/theoretical content might be offered. Pageant participation requires engagement with people who know the rules of participation and hold the keys to success in the pageant systems and participants and their parents need to be open to forming relationships with such people if they desire to succeed. It is this holding onto these central tenants of pageant participation that is the biggest challenge facing pageant participants and their parents in the 21st century. We need to examine pageant participation, practices, and policies to ensure that the opportunities for people involved in decision making, modes of competition and choice are maximized. Allowing for partnerships to develop between participants and those who run the pageant systems is a priority to be salvaged against the odds of dominant pageant practices and institutional spaces. It is of concern that acknowledgement of power and identity construction are seen as central tenets in pageant participation, but this philosophy has been lost in a culture which places beauty and pageant discourses in a dominant position relative to power and identity forming practices.

A focus on conforming to pageant requirements and practices is visible in pageant systems that occur across the country. I am not suggesting that we abolish current pageant systems and practices that ensure girls and their parents are prepared to

adequately and skillfully compete in all aspects of competition. Rather, I support recommendations that have come from the themes and observations made while conducting this research, which suggest that knowledge related to understanding the meaning of participation needs to be part of the orientation and communication between the participants, their parents, and pageant coordinators. Based on findings from this research, these groups need development over several areas. First, there needs to be a definition of the meaning of participation in rural Southern child beauty pageants from a perspective of the contestants and those who are viewing the pageants. This would allow for a dialogue to begin to develop that would be more evenly matched than currently exists. This would also allow for those who are contestants to better understand the ways that they hold power in the culture of child beauty pageants.

Secondly, there needs to be a way to provide for contestants and their families to engage in opportunities for promoting independence and choice in the child pageant realm. This would give them greater power in the dialogue and culture and would insure that the development of identity would not be solely shaped by the pageant culture, but would have input from the parents and contestants as well. This would certainly allow for and demand their voices in the process.

Thirdly, there must exist the promotion of information exchange which involves communication that includes listening to the views of the contestants conforming to definitions of beauty and acceptability. This might require having pageant systems begin to hold question and answer sessions to allow for contestants, judges, audience members, family members, and others to come and voice their concerns and have information disseminated. Having a forum like this provided for all the parties would continue the

dialogue and insure that power would possibly be more evenly dispersed among those involved. This would also allow for the voices of those often silenced (namely, the contestants) to be heard, if there were the development of a forum that required the contestants to be asked certain questions and required that their responses be listened to with respect and be given proper attention.

Finally, there should be understanding of how certain pageant requirements and practices prevent contestants and their parents from being aware of the ways power is operating to create identity. Often those who participate in the pageant culture do so without fully understanding the culture itself. By being involved in discussions like those listed above, or by being required by pageant sponsors to sit down one-on-one and discuss the implications of pageant involvement, both financially and psychologically, on their families, those who are involved in the pageant culture would have a much better understanding of the ways that power works in the culture to create identity. It is only through these and other methods of opening dialogue and bringing others into the conversation with education that power can be shared more equally in the beauty pageant realm.

Conversations and educational discussions need to focus on challenging taken for granted assumptions that girls and their parents in rural Southern child beauty pageants prefer to take a passive role. There is a need to advocate strategies for creating relationships based on listening and providing information. Pageant coordinators, judges, and others involved in the creation and continuation of pageant systems need to be exposed to knowledge that raises their awareness of how working to a timetable that focuses on completing a set of requirements rather than individual cycles marginalizes

girls and their families from being involved in the practices that define who they are as girls and as feminine children.

Rather than developing forums or discussion groups that focus on prescribing pageant actions in a rule governed approach, learning activities need to provide pageant coordinators, judges, and others involved in the creation and continuation of pageant systems with a forum where they can identify the participatory practices that are specific to their pageant systems based on inclusion and choice. This approach supports the performance of skills and routines based on a combination of thinking and doing. Exposing pageant coordinators and all to an understanding of the barriers to participation should enable them to come forward with ideas of how to overcome structures that inhibit girls' and their parents' acknowledgement of the way power operates to define their identities. Perhaps in a workshop style setting pageant coordinators, judges, and others involved need to have access to research that demonstrates how vulnerable, and therefore passive, girls and their parents can become in pageant environments.

Providing forums for pageant creators to reflect on taken for granted ways of practice will provide opportunities for continued identification of new directions for pageant organization and practices. Pageant organizers involved in workshops organized and created by those involved will be able to create an open dialogue with pageant participants and their parents. These workshops can provide a forum where best practices and barriers related to forming partnership relationships can be discussed. Workshops engaging pageant coordinators and the like and pageant participants and their parents could be achieved if individual pageant systems adopted this process as a means of raising awareness and indentifying power and identity forming strategies. Collaborative

processes acknowledge that power relations exist and provide some strategies to address these issues in a positive way. Commitment, creativity, and support from pageant organizers and others are required to challenge existing disciplinary structures.

Causing Change in Structures of Discipline

Creating opportunities for pageant coordinators and pageant participants and their parents to extend their knowledge of participation without accompanying changes to pageant systems may not necessarily lead to changes in practice. Disrupting existing disciplinary patterns of practice warrants several approaches to change and requires flexibility and understanding by the powers that create and operate the pageant systems. Allowing pageant coordinators to find time for workshops for and discussions with pageant participants requires resources, skills in conversation and negotiation, and a supportive method of time and pageant management.

Pageant systems need to change in ways that will encourage girls and their families to understand the ways that identity is created in relation to social class and that will also encourage pageant coordinators and others to understand the far-reaching ramifications of providing definitions of beauty that are based on false appearances. There needs to be a change in pageant culture so that pageant coordinators will see the need and will desire to make the necessary changes to their systems. This possible change to the pageant realm will be difficult and it is imperative that recognition of pageant systems resistant to these changes occur. However, appropriate leadership could overcome these issues.

Pageant coordinators, judges, and others involved in pageant operations need to review current policies and procedures with a view of bringing them into line with the

goals of the girls who are contestants in these pageants and with their parents. And examination of these policies needs to be considered in light of the identified reasons for pageant participation and the implications for identity development for these girls, as there is a responsibility for those who create and operate child beauty pageants in relation to implementing consumer participation practices. Participation practices need to move beyond rhetoric documented in research reports to embrace structured programs that follow through with actual plans to acknowledge the power structures that operate within the child beauty pageant culture; identity formation as a result of beauty standards and ideals is a good starting point.

This ethnography was confined to videos and documentaries on child beauty pageants and to my own personal pageant participation and observation. Therefore, knowledge of rural Southern child beauty pageant culture was gained through careful, repeated viewing of videos and documentaries and through careful documentation of observations and experiences of my own pageant work from a theoretical perspective. There is a need for an examination of specific individual rural Southern child beauty pageants to identify organizational change that may lead to changing processes that result in promoting acknowledgment of power operations and identity formation for girls in relation to socio-economic background. For example, the application and participation processes prior to the actual pageant competition are worthy of examination with a view to introducing contestants and their parents to partnership practices at their initial point of involvement with a pageant system. Application and pageant protocol reinforce docility through discipline and authoritative behavior and staff other than pageant officials might also benefit from education related to contestant participation beyond customer service

techniques. There seem to be "gate keepers" present in many pageant systems viewed and studied. These "gate keepers" work to insure that the "right" contestants make it to the competitions. This term resonates with Foucault's understanding of disciplinary techniques and illuminates that processes beyond application and pageant protocol need to change.

Future Research

This theoretical analysis and study of child beauty pageant movies and documentaries and personal observations and experiences paves the way for future possibilities, through both the recognition of approaches that might lead to girls better understanding the ways that culture impacts their identity and by bringing to light opportunities for further research. Working from a Foucaultian background, power and knowledge are related on a most intimate level (Foucault, 1977).

Miller and Fox (2004) warn that as we are searching (or researching) for truths, we must acknowledge the dominant discourses that are limiters of understanding of social reality. And in working with truths, we must not become immobilized by the complexity, but rather we should gain power in continuing to search for truths (Frank, 2004). In the beauty pageant world, discursive practices (dominant regimes) regulate the institution of pageantry and produce a powerful culture. As a result, there is a need to outline future research programs which focus on uncovering varying understandings that come from the exposing of dominant discourses that constrain our view of the world we live in.

Confining my vision to how we can make girls aware of the ways that power operates in rural Southern child beauty pageant culture is not good enough. The concept of beauty as a definition of success and so much more needs to be explored. This

necessitates a move beyond focusing of the physical aspects and psychological aspects of rural Southern child beauty pageant culture to the often invisible, assumed, or taken for granted constructions of what child beauty pageant participation is believed to be. Girls do not often fit into a place that has been set up around discourses of economy and efficiency; therefore, they are often categorized as not belonging or being difficult to manage in certain social settings. In advocating chage, there must be a shift in focus from "girls conforming to the rules of pageant participation" to acknowledgement of power as it operates in relation to girl's identity formation in conjunction with social class.

Smith (2005) speaks of looking beyond the front line of power by arguing that questions need to be asked, requiring us to delve deeper to identify how power is organized. While this research identified that many different reasons were given for why parents and girls entered into child beauty pageant and these reasons had enormous impact on the girls and their parents, knowledge of how to make changes for these girls and their parents as well as for the pageant coordinators themselves to change the ways power operates at an cultural level was limited. Developing a cultural ethnography in a rural Southern child beauty pageant setting would allow for observation of this sub-culture outside the confines of the media and theoretical environments in which this research was conducted. Institutional, traditional and cultural ethnography would examine records, policies, processes, and individuals to identify how specific pageant systems are controlled from outside and inside forces (Smith, 1999).

This research specifically focused on exploring the ways that power operated in rural Southern child beauty pageant culture to create girlhood identity in relation to socio-

economic status. I did not examine views or ideas of people outside this context. I also completed this research in a theoretical realm, relying on media depiction in videos, documentaries, and television shows concerning child beauty pageants and on my personal reflections and observations from my pageant participation and organization experience. Further research embracing other areas of participation in rural Southern child beauty pageants is crucial if the ways power operates to define girlhood identity in relation to other aspects of culture are to be realized. Further ethnographic studies or research embracing individual experiences, participant observation, questionnaires, interviews and more needs to be carried out at various rural child beauty pageants. Studies could be extended to include the role of the family in the network of pageant participation. Projects that include other individuals involved in girl's pageant participation would be invaluable as this research did not fully or directly embrace the views of judges, audience members, extended family members, opponents and others. A program of participatory research is possible which would provide small and larger projects that could be combined to deliver a holistic picture of this key power operation. Extending research in this area would provide clear directional strategies to guide partnership practices in pageant cultures.

I have also identified other important issues that are worthy of further exploration. Parents who enter their daughters into child beauty pageants often do so in order to teach them skills to succeed in the world, to teach them ways to handle competition and winning and losing, and to teach them poise and confidence. The parents who do this are often from lower class to lower middle class socio-economic status and see this as imparting valuable lessons and knowledge to their daughters. The same could be said for

parents who enroll their children in enrichment courses or other educational situations to teach skills for success. A study of these classes and pageants would be interesting and informative in light of the impact on success for the children as well as impact on socio-economic status and social status for the parents and the child.

Often parents see the opportunity for fame, fortune, or stardom as a result of their daughters' participation in child beauty pageants. This lower-class mindset is seen in various other social and competitive environments for children. A study of how parents use other avenues for future success for their children would be interesting in light of child beauty pageants. This might include Little League, Dixie Youth baseball, soccer, gymnastics, softball, dance, golf, tennis, performing arts, martial arts, 4-H, and so many more.

For many of the girls who compete and succeed in child beauty pageants, there is also a strong correlation with success for them in classroom and extra-curricular activities. A study on this correlation would be valuable, especially to determine if the success in pageants is a result of success in the classroom and other areas, or if success in the classroom and other areas is a result of skills learned from the child beauty pageant stage. Or is there a relationship between the discipline and practice for one on the other.

Often in my observation at actual pageants and in the viewing of the videos and documentaries of child beauty pageants, it is interesting that the mothers of the girls are overweight and unattractive. A study into the lives of these mothers – their past experiences in pageants and their physical appearance before having children – would be fascinating. Researching the reasons they believe their daughters need to compete and

the possibility of their living vicariously through their daughters would be valuable to ascertain.

Ever more prevalent on television today are beauty pageant reality shows. Most specifically *Instant Beauty Pageant* on the Style Channel, *The Swan* on network television, and others on MTV and VH1 provide divergent views on the beauty pageant culture. A study of the messages and impacts of the media in this genre would provide much for those who study popular culture and its influence on viewers and culture at large.

In a similar light, a study of reality television shows that focus on beauty and appearance in conjunction with talent, ability, or public performance would also provide fascinating research and findings. A notable focus would be the relationship between socio-economic status and those who compete and those who do well. It would also be interesting to focus on the physical attractiveness and appearance of those who succeed in these programs. Among those programs that would be of interest to study would be *American Idol*, *America's Got Talent*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, and *American Inventor*.

These are just a few of the possible research projects that stem from the research and dialogue created from studying girlhood in relation to the rural Southern child beauty pageant culture. Much more calls to be studied and others will certainly be inspired to follow other research directions.

Reflections on Findings

In December 2003 I set out with the purpose of meeting three broad research aims, working with specific videos, documentaries, and personal experiences and

observations of the rural Southern child beauty pageant. In reviewing these various mediums, it became apparent that developing a dialogue between the pageant coordinators and pageant participants would improve the ways that power operates in the pageant culture to create girlhood identity in relation to socio-economic status. This would involve understanding the complexity of what participation means to people in the child beauty pageant culture as well as knowing how the pageant coordinators and others facilitated this concept. As I bring closure to the final chapter of this dissertation I reflect on those aims and ask if the original questions outlined were answered.

My first aim was to characterize the ways that power operates in the rural Southern child beauty pageant subculture in relation to media and socio-economic status. Initial examination of data raised considerable concern as contestants and parents appeared unable to articulate clearly in the videos and documentaries viewed what pageant participation meant to them. Early entries into my personal journal reflect my struggle with uncovering the meaning of the data. As I listened to and viewed (and reviewed) the media, it became quite clear that through the descriptions of what were not reasons for participation in rural Southern child beauty pageants, determination of what was surfaced. I am now confident that for the individuals viewed in the videos and documentaries and for the individuals with whom I was involved during my pageant organization and participant days, pageant involvement means a way to improve and move beyond the current economic status of the contestant and her family.

The second aim was to identify what inspires entry into a beauty pageant for a girl or for the parents of a girl. It also concerned discovering a correlation between the media representation of why girls enter pageants and the reasons stated by participants in

relation to socio-economic status. This aim was reflected upon at length prior to commencing video review and documentation and an extensive review of the literature supported my decision to adopt a critical methodology through a bricolage. Barriers discussed by others in relation to media review directed considerable judgment and blame to contestants being passive and pageant officials for being oblivious to the ways that they impact girlhood identity. I wanted to move beyond these limiting dominant discourses. The emergence of time as such a predominant barrier was unexpected and a critical Foucaultian framework has provided other ways of seeing this scarce resource. Importantly, Foucault's (1977) understanding of power/knowledge and disciplinary techniques have raised questions in relation to the belief that girls who are contestants in rural Southern child beauty pageants and their parents prefer a passive role in the ways power operates to create girlhood identity in the pageant realm. Barriers to manipulation of beauty ideals and requirements in rural Southern child beauty pageant culture involve a network of disciplinary structures that create docile behavior and people in these pageant systems adopt various strategies to overcome these constraining forces.

My third aim was to identify what dichotomies exist in the pageant subculture. There is much we assume about the relationship between representation and the "real" when considering beauty pageants and beauty pageant contestants and there are numerous ways in which the girl participants (or their parents) in rural beauty pageants reconcile the fact that they are both rewarded and victimized thought the adultification of girls. From the outset, I was determined that this research would have the potential to make a difference to people involved in the rural Southern child beauty pageant culture. Critical theory supported my emancipatory intent and providing testable strategies is

articulated through opportunities for further research and example of approaches that can be adopted to change practice. I embraced a praxis approach which argues for a relationship between theory and practice and strategies for improving awareness of power as it operates in the child beauty pageant culture. Changing practice and believing in emancipation was influenced by the wisdom of Dorothy Smith who challenges all of us to identify changes that are within our reach.

Final Thoughts

Dominant regimes of truth regulate rural Southern child beauty pageant systems producing powerful cultures (Manias and Street, 2000). These dominant discourses privilege one truth over or above another, and can silently influence our understandings as we are tempted to accept economic truth, rather than power and the ways that it can operate to create identity. Similarly in an institution that is set up to determine beauty and acceptability and winners, judges and pageant coordinators' opinions are often privileged or valued more highly than those who are contestants.

Adopting the role of researcher as bricoleur guided me through the many methodological stages related to this dissertation. Maintaining the vision of creating a bridge or quilt has enabled me to weave multiple truths through this research. Using the metaphor of a quilt has helped me grasp the many complex issues related to participation in rural Southern child beauty pageants. To view a situation from one position would result in seeing only one pattern or discourse instead of many. As I take a step back and view this completed research project, the stories of those girls and their parents who were depicted in the videos and documentaries and in my memory are reflected in the text, and

so are the stories of the pageant coordinators, judges, and others involved in the pageant realm.

My intention was not to privilege one set of perspectives over another and my voice is very visible. I am the narrator responsible for weaving the themes gathered from my repeated viewings of media and my observations and experiences together. These stories are reflected in the themes interwoven with the many threads of a critical framework resulting in different ways of seeing the same stories. Depending on the position one adopts, this dissertation, like many patterned quilts, can look quite different from other angles and the end result can involve alternative views. I anticipate that the quilt metaphor will help others who are troubled by different perspectives to understand that participation in rural Southern child beauty pageants in a multifaceted, complex concept influenced by a network of constraining structures.

I would like to think that one day very soon we can address these constraining structures and acknowledge the forces of power that work to define girlhood within the child beauty pageant institution. I believe that through education those who coordinate, judge, and organize child beauty pageants can promote independence and choice in defining identity for girls, acting as facilitators rather than experts in managing time tables and rules driven by institutional and disciplinary structures.

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