

2016

# Social Stereotyping and Self-Esteem of Miss America Pageant Contestants

Ebony Bowers  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Ebony Bowers

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Social Stereotyping and Self-Esteem of Miss America Pageant Contestants

by

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MS, Springfield College, 2009

BS, Springfield College, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

October 2016

## Abstract

Miss America Pageant contestants (MAPCs) have been negatively stereotyped socially for their perceived lack of intelligence and nonconformance to feminist gender stereotypes of women. Stereotypes could affect an individual's social psyche and establish stigma, which could prevent a group from achieving their full potential. Stereotypes could also result in women having mental health disorders, low self-esteem, a decrease in self-efficacy, body image dissatisfaction, and eating disorders. The problem this study addressed was that women who participate in the Miss America Organization (MAO) preliminary pageants risk social stigma for taking part in a seemingly nonfeminist activity. Intercultural communication research (ICR) was the theoretical framework utilized to understand the role of cultural stereotypes, prejudice in communication, and self-perception among MAPCs. The main research question examined how local preliminary MAPC's decide to participate in pageantry in relation to their beliefs about stereotypes of MAPCs. For this multiple case study, a sample of MAPCs ( $n = 5$ ) from a Southeastern state was recruited to participate in interviews and provided narrative data that was coded and analyzed for themes of stereotypes, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The key findings from this study revealed that the participants believed that societal stereotypes of MAPCs still exist, but the stereotypes did not influence participants' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and their decisions to compete and represent their social platform. The results also revealed a need for societal education about MAO pageant system's mission. Positive social change can come from understanding the MAPC subculture to dispel societal stereotypes and through presenting MAPCs' goals as social change agents.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to all the single parents that are struggling to balance raising a family and continuing their education. Please keep your heads up, take one class at a time if need be, and do not forget to take time for yourself and your children. This educational journey seems long but every road has an end. It will be worth it, and it will make you a better person. Most importantly you will better yourself and become a positive role model for your children by showing them persistence and a superior work ethic. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to all of my family members and mentors that have passed on yet had an influence on my achieving this academic goal (“Bokey”, “Daddy”, Aunt Bridie, Grandma Teomie, Ma Bridie, “Rubba”, Dr. Kay Rush, and Dr. Clare Hodge, Jr.).

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

“There she is – Miss America” is the opening line to one of America's most iconic theme songs, sung at the oldest running beauty contest in the United States (Watson & Martin, 2000). Beauty pageants are indicators of a societally imposed definition of beauty, which can sometimes exclude entire races and ethnicities due to differing definitions of beauty, particularly when compared to the majority’s beauty standards (Larson, 2012). The construct of beauty is contradictory because social attribution considers beauty to be a tool for empowerment while also viewing it as a tool of oppression (Bioul, 2012).

Beauty pageant winners consent to represent their local community, region, or nation (Grout, 2013). Female beauty pageant contestants are potential future mothers that portray social stability through high profile visibility in which they represent the current national image of femininity and identity (Bioul, 2012; Grout, 2013, Larson, 2012; Tice, 2015). In America, the unapologetic display of the female physique in the media has allowed for beauty contestants to show their bodies (Grout, 2013). Watson and Martin (2000) stated that women viewed as being beautiful are regarded as being more reproductively successful, and men fight for beautiful women.

Female beauty pageant contestants have to do more than just use their looks to succeed. Bordenkircher (as cited in Williams, 2009, p.27) stated that there are Six P's of beauty pageant preparation: (a) plan, (b) prepare, (c) practice, (d) poise, (e) projecting the image, and (f) primp. These steps to pageant preparation has also assisted in promoting a

gamut of issues such as addressing tourism decline, endorse industry products endorsements of commodities or crops, encourage cultural pride, and to support political propaganda (Tice, 2015; Welsh, 2015). The creation of United States beauty pageants developed friendships between women and also assisted with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment that allowed women the right to vote in 1920 (Houston, 2014). Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje (as cited in Williams, 2009) stated that many scholars devalue beauty pageants as a serious academic pursuit despite scholarly evidence that physical beauty plays a role in the daily life of most societies. Houston (2014) also acknowledged that there is a lack of academic studies on the topic of pageants because the topic is viewed as frivolous, uninteresting, and unnecessary despite the fact that the changes of ideals and values in the Miss America Organization (MAO) coincide with that of the country.

### **Background**

P.T. Barnum, an amusement entrepreneur, created the American beauty pageant as a gimmick to attract paying audiences to his traveling attraction shows in 1854 (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Ferrari & Ades, 2002; William, 2009). Sixty-seven years after Barnum had introduced the American beauty pageant, it had transformed from a small, local, audience-attracting gimmick to large-scale commercial entertainment (Grout, 2013). This transformation increased the connection between women who participate in pageants and increased the societal implications of pageant participation due to increased notoriety (Williams, 2009). The current MAO was established in Atlantic City, New Jersey on September 7, 1921, Fall Frolic on the Boardwalk held a bathing beauty pageant to extend

the summer tourism past Labor Day (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Ferrai & Ades, 2002; Houston, 2014; Miss America, 2015).

This annual Fall Frolic event, currently known as the Miss America Pageant quickly grew in popularity and included contestants from the United States as well as from Canada (Watson & Martin, 2000). These MAO pageant contestants have been viewed as displaying the past and present national image of socially identified traits of femininity (Bioul, 2012; Grout, 2013, Larson, 2012; Tice, 2015). In 1955, Miss America was crowned in front of a live television audience for the first time (Watson & Martin, 2000). The Miss America Pageant has also evolved in tandem with social changes in the United States, such as the civil rights movement, into an organization that addresses societal needs, promotes academic excellence, and volunteerism (Miss America, 2015).

To compete in the MAO local, state, and national preliminary pageants, prospective contestants must be born a female, who are legal United States citizens, ages 17 to 24, and that can compete on all levels of competition (Miss America, 2015). The young women that meet the criteria mentioned above have entered in hopes of being crowned Miss America. Miss America titleholders are symbols of national pride (Houston, 2014). However, some feminists view the Miss America Pageant as being degrading toward women (Houston, 2014). In 1968, feminists protested the Miss America Pageant and stereotyped Miss America pageant contestants (MAPCs) as being mindless sexual objects (Abrams, 2012; Dow, 2003; Kreydatus, 2008; Stansell, 2008; Watson & Martin, 2000). Researchers have found that over time being stereotyped through daily communication and mass media could cause a social stigma that could

result in women having low self-esteem, a decrease in self-efficacy, body image dissatisfaction, and eating disorders (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, & Alicke 2013; Pruyers & Blais, 2014).

While conducting my research, I did not find any literature that focused on the existence and the effects of societal implications of being an MAPC. The gap in the literature was that existing studies have not determined if stereotypical feminist views of MAPCs still exist, and if so, in what ways have the MAPCs perceived the effects of being stereotyped. It is for that reason that I chose to investigate MAPCs' beliefs in the existence of MAPC stereotypes and the possible effects stereotypes have on their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and achievement.

### **Problem Statement**

MAPCs have been negatively stereotyped socially because of the perceived lack of intelligence and failure to align with stereotypical feminist views of women (Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013). For the purpose of this study, stereotypes are defined as attributes or beliefs associated with groups based on identifiable characteristics such as their gender, culture, religion, race, ethnicity, and or sexual orientation (Kurylo, 2012). Stereotypes could establish a social norm that may prevent a group from achieving their full potential (Kurylo, 2012). Rosenfield and Mouzon (2013) found that societal stereotypes of women contributed to their having low self-esteem and suffering from mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Each gender experience threatens to their social identities, which creates stress and performance reduction (Pruyers & Blais, 2014). Individuals who are in nonstereotyped



groups may experience performance enhancement due to their elevated self-esteem and self-efficacy (Pruysers & Blais, 2014). Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, and Alicke (2013) found that women with knowledge of media-driven societal expectations of the ideal feminine body have a higher propensity for experiencing low self-esteem compared to women without such knowledge.

The MAPCs are public examples of a media-driven societal expectation of the ideal feminine body (Grout, 2013). The media perpetuates how beauty pageant participants depend only on their physical appearance for an exchange of power (Wolfe, 2012). Socially stereotyped women have a fear of failure that can contribute to activity avoidance (Deemer, Smith, Carroll, & Carpenter, 2014). Such avoidance may influence women in their decisions regarding competing in MAO preliminary pageants that could provide educational and career opportunities (Deemer et al., 2014). Also, it may cause the targeted stereotyped group to underperform and undermine the achievement potential of beauty pageant contestants (Deemer et al., 2014).

Kurylo and Robles (2015) stated that they had not found research on MAPCs' exposure to stereotypical views. Women who may want to participate in the MAO preliminary pageants may feel the pressure of two different social gender stereotypes: unachievable standards of body image and negative pressures for using beauty to gain power. Social gender stereotypes may result in damage to their self-esteem and possible withdrawal from opportunities (Skorek, Song, & Dunham, 2014; Ura & Preston, 2015). The problem these women confront is twofold: if they participate in (state what they are participating in), they risk social stigma for nonfeminist behavior and ridicule of their

appearance, and if they do not compete they lose the opportunity to gain access to the rewards of scholarships and prizes (Deemer et al., 2014). Both have potentially negative consequences (Deemer et al., 2014; Skorek et al., 2014; Ura & Preston, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine how MAPCs view their self-esteem and self-image by examining their beliefs, perceptions, and decisions related to beauty pageant participation. This information may inform MAO directors and those who may consider competing in the MAO preliminaries of reasons why young women decide to compete and how their decision has affected MAPCs personally. This study also offered the possibility of a better understanding of MAPCs exposure to societal stereotypes and determined if those stereotypes were internalized. I wanted to understand the ways in which stereotypical societal views of MAPCs may influence the thinking of women, if at all, at the local level of competition among Miss America preliminary titleholders. My primary inquiry explored the ways that stereotypical intercultural communication towards pageant participant influenced local MAPCs' self-esteems, beliefs, perceptions, and decisions related to the social benefits or cost of beauty pageant participation.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were the focus of this study.

RQ1: How do local preliminary MAPCs perceive their decision to participate in pageantry, in relation to their beliefs about any existing stereotypes of MAPCs and societal views on pageants?

RQ2: How are local preliminary MAPCs perceptions of societal views of pageantry and any existing stereotypes relate to their perceptions of self-esteem and achievement?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Edward T. Hall founded intercultural communication research (ICR) in 1940 to better understand the process in which the United States addresses stereotypes, prejudice, racism, and discrimination towards minorities and subcultures.(Kurylo & Robles, 2015). ICR is the concept used to understand the existing view of one's self, which leads to relationships built with self and others as well as attention to others, dialect characteristics, and power relationship dynamics (Xu, 2013). In addition, ICR can also determine research motive as well as institutional and cultural influences (Agboka, 2014).

Hall unintentionally defined the discipline of intercultural studies that focused on communication research (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). The concepts of ICR influence languages that convey cultural norms between human beings that enable the researchers to generalize, find symbolism, and understand behavioral interactions (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Xu, 2013). Culture is knowledge of social norms, language, and nonverbal communication between people that interconnects subcultural norms or attitudes that are not communicated consciously (Hall & Whyte, 1960).

Researchers use ICR to better understand the United States with immigration, international relations, intercultural and multicultural nations that have stereotypes towards minorities and subcultures (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Kurylo & Robles, 2015). Such aforementioned stereotypes are also known as cultural stereotypes, which influence

an individual's beliefs toward different groups of people (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Kurylo & Robles, 2015). Information exchange and communication between human beings impact how cultural stereotypes evolve and persist over time (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). A complete picture of how people respond to perceived stereotypes is also part of ICR (Kurylo & Robles, 2015).

ICR projects possible findings through differentiations that are constructive and interactionism (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). The constructive approach emphasizes communication or social action, whereas the interactionism approach focuses on communication as social action and as symbolic interaction (Averbeck- Lietz, 2013). Whereas, interactionism approach emphasizes one's own existing belief about themselves in building interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Xu, 2013). This study explored whether cultural stereotypes of MAPCs still exist. The study also examined how those stereotypes related to the MAPCs' perceptions of self-esteem and achievement. Utilizing ICR as the foundation for this case study assisted with better understanding MAPCs in a social context.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The concepts used to create the conceptual framework for this study include: feminism (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014), stereotypes (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015), self-esteem (Orth & Luciano, 2015), and self-efficacy theory (McCabe, Plotnikoff, Dewar, Collins, & Lubans, 2015). This studies basic definition of feminism gave an explanation of Western gender roles. Explaining stereotypes established the foundation of how some women viewed the MAPC subculture. Self-esteem gives a basic explanation of

an individual's expected achievement and body image. Self-efficacy provided an explanation for how a person's belief in self-effects and an individual's achievement behavior. All of these concepts were used as the conceptual underpinnings of this study.

### **Feminism**

Feminism is the belief that there is a power imbalance due to gender in which men are dominant over women (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). Feminism founded through women's disassociation with many social gender role stereotypes throughout history, and it contradicts social norms to combat gender oppression (Refer, 20114; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). Feminists want women to overcome and eliminate gender role stereotypes (McPherson, 1973). Despite feminist desire to eliminate gender role stereotypes, mass media images promote a lack of feminine empowerment and displays gender role stereotypes (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, & Alicke, 2013; Watson & Martin, 2000).

The first feminist movement in the United States was in the 1920s, and what was known as the *second wave* of feminisim commenced in the late 1960s (Dow, 2003; Houston, 2014; Kreydatus, 2008; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). In 1968, a subgroup of the Western feminist movement protested the Miss America beauty pageant to express their negative opinions of Miss America participants (Abrams, 2012; Dow, 2003; Kreydatus, 2008; Stansell, 2008; Watson & Martin, 2000). Chapter 2 contains a more in-depth description of two waves of feminism and feminist movement's impact on the Miss America Pageant.

## **Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are used often to justify the relation or treatment of others due to social norms and common rules (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Kurylo & Robles, 2015). Stereotypes are viewed inherently as being negative because stereotypes can lead to discrimination (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Kurylo, 2012). Researchers are challenged by lack of academically research to determine how stereotypes are shared and reproduced longitudinally (Kurylo, 2012). One stereotype that persists is related to gender (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Storek & Furnham, 2013).

Gender stereotypes are socially constructed roles based on behaviors, motivations, physical appearance, and qualities assigned to men and women (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Storek & Furnham, 2013). Gender stereotypes have caused cultural discrimination (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015). Gender stereotypes is the significances of stereotypes that society directs towards MAPCs and it is also the foundation of my research questions in which I am in hopes of causing a cultural shift to change societal views (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015). Stereotypes are described further in Chapter 2.

## **Self-esteem**

In 1892, psychologist William James defined self-esteem as an individual's achievements divided by expected achievement (Osborne, 2014). Self-esteem is an individual's assessment of his or her own self-worth (Orth & Luciano, 2015). Self-esteem is significant to determining a person's success or failure during critical events (Orth & Luciano, 2015). People with low self-esteem have a higher likelihood of being mistreated during peer selection (Orth & Luciano, 2015).

Self-esteem is associated with self-acceptance, and it can also relate to body image satisfaction (Skorek, Song, & Dunham, 2014). Body image distortion within the mass media promotes the Western ideal of thinness equaling beauty (Ura & Preston, 2015). The mass media promotion of the thinness ideal promotes low self-esteem, negative body image, and eating disorders (Ura & Preston, 2015). This current study was related to self-esteem by providing an explanation of the concepts presented in both research questions. A detailed description of self-esteem is in Chapter 2.

### **Self-efficacy Theory**

Albert Bandura developed the theory of self-efficacy, which is an individual's belief in their abilities, as one of five core determinants of his social cognitive theory (SCT) (McCabe et al., 2015; Ng & Lucianteei, 2015; Vo & Bogg, 2015). Self-efficacy is an individual's abilities to achieve goals required for self-regulated motivation to succeed despite perceived obstacles (Bandura, 1995; Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Vera, Le Blanc, Taris, & Salanova, 2014; Vo & Bogg, 2015; Yiu, Cheung, & Siu, 2012). Self-efficacy influences a person's positive or negative behavior directly through setting goals and indirectly through peer influence (McCabe et al., 2015, Vo & Bogg, 2015).

Individuals with high self-efficacy set high goals for themselves and strive to achieve their goals, whereas people with low self-efficacy avoid setting high goals and participating in tasks (Bandura, 1995; Ng & Lucianetti, 2015; Wright, Wright, & Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2013; Yiu, Cheung, & Siu, 2012). Self-efficacy theory suggests that there are four aspects that may strengthen one's self-efficacy: (a) experiences of mastery, (b) experiences that are lived vicariously, (c) social encouragement, and (d) cognitive

response awareness (Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Lambert, Benight, Wong, & Johnson, 2013). Self-efficacy theory relates to this investigation because it described how individual's with low self-efficacy participate in desired activities (Ng & Lucianetti, 2015). This theory examines the process of an individual setting high goals for themselves, and this knowledge assisted me in defining the purpose of the second research question (Ng & Lucianetti, 2015).

### **Nature of the Study**

This study was a qualitative case study in which I conducted semistructured interviews with current MAPCs who were local Miss titleholders, ages 18-24, in the Southeastern region of the United States. The five study participants were volunteers, and each participant constituted a case. All state local MAO Miss titleholders were available to take part in the case study interview after their state competition. This study examined MAPCs' oral recount of their decisions to participate in the pageant, perceptions, attitudes, judgments, experiences, and motives that may have influenced by stereotypical views of pageant contestants, and how their experiences have possibly influenced their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Intercultural communication research (ICR) is an approach utilized to understand the role of cultural stereotypes and prejudice in communication (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). ICR is qualitative research that is either conducted through interviewing, observing, participation, or ethnography (Agboka, 2014). A qualitative case study is a cost-effective, holistic analysis of the phenomena that uses one or more research methods to either explain phenomena or to generate theories (Marshall, Kitson, & Zeitz, 2012; Thomas,



2011). Case studies utilize the participants' perspectives on the study subject, which minimizes researcher bias (Campbell, 2015).

With the cooperation of Southeastern state MAO pageant executive director, I was able to recruit participants through mass email of all current local executive directors (LEDs) and present local Miss titleholders. Informed consent forms were given to each potential participant and were signed before case study interviews took place. The semistructured interviews were approximately one hour long and were audio recorded in conjunction with note-taking. I immediately transcribed each interview. Once all interviews were completed, I coded, and cross-analyzed each interview. Throughout the study, I fulfilled the role of the data collector, analyst, and observer of participant's verbal responses regarding case study questions.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were used throughout this study.

*Feminism*: The belief that there is a gender imbalance in which men dominate women (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014).

*Miss America Pageant Contestants (MAPCs)*: Local preliminary titleholders who aspire to win their state title as well as the national title of Miss America (Miss America, 2015).

*Miss America Organization (MAO)*: The national beauty pageant's governing body, in which rules, regulations, guidelines, and paperwork are funneled to the state executive directors (SED) to give to the local executive directors (LED) (Miss America, 2015).

*Self-efficacy*: An individual's belief in his or her abilities to achieve goals through their actions of human behavior as a result of a combination of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors (McCabe et al., 2015; Ng & Lucianteei, 2015; Vo & Bogg, 2015)

*Self-esteem*: An individual's subjective view of his or her own worth (Orth & Luciano, 2015).

*Stereotypes*: Attributes, beliefs, or traits associated with groups depending on gender, culture, religion, race, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation, which can establish a psychology that may prevent an identified group from achieving their full potential (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Kurylo, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

I made the following seven assumptions about the MAPC respondents during these research interviews. I assumed that all the participants were fluent in the English language through displaying literacy abilities, verbal communication skills, and written communication. I also assumed that each participant had the cognitive ability to understand and respond to interview questions. My third assumption was that each participant would be able to relate to all interview questions, due to their experiences as local MAO Miss titleholders. I also assumed that each participant would have Internet access. I additionally assumed that the participants would be truthful, fully cooperate with this study, and would have informed me if they no longer wished to participate. The five participants validated my data collection assumptions by being fluent in the English language and being able to communicate effectively during case study interviews.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Participants in this study were limited to current Southeastern local MAO Miss titleholders from the same state, ages 18 to 24, and who responded first to the email request for participants. MAO Teen local titleholders and MAO Miss titleholders who are 17 years of age offered a different dynamic not desired in the research study. Also, participants that were 18 years of age are considered adults and do not need parental or legal guardian consent to take part in this study, unless they are part of a vulnerable population. The participants in this study were not considered to be part of a vulnerable population. The population selected is a homogenous purposeful sample of women who do not fully represent the general population.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study was a lack of scholarly studies concerning pageants, despite the changes of ideals and values in the MAO that often coincided with that of the country (Houston, 2014). In this study, MAO local Miss titleholders were interviewed within a case study interview setting. The sample population size did not reflect all of the MAO Miss titleholder population. In addition, this study did not measure or evaluate results for statistical reliability.

### **Significance**

The goal of this study was to better understand how stereotypes influence women who participate in MAO preliminary pageants. This study created positive social change by informing those who wish to support young women's self-esteem development and achievement, and by providing new information related to the lived experiences of

MAPCs for future journal entries and magazine articles. This study was significant to women ages 18 to 24, mental health care providers, MAO, MAPCs past and present, as well as parents or guardians of prospective and current MAPCs. The above stakeholders may find this study to be important because it has given an accurate depiction of MAPC experiences and perceptions of social stereotyping within the societal subculture of pageantry. This study also informed society of the social effects of societal stereotypes on MAPCs' self-esteem and self-efficacy. In addition, this study may be used to conduct future studies of MAPCs.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine how MAPC view themselves, their beliefs, their perceptions, and their decisions related to beauty pageant participation in regard to societal stereotypes of MAO pageant contestants. My goal was to provide a better understanding of MAPCs' perceptions of how social stereotypes possibly impacts MAO participation. Risk factors associated with stereotyping are body image dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and activity avoidance. This study examines stereotypes through the use of ICR as its theoretical framework.

The ICR is an approach that focuses on understanding the role of cultural stereotypes and prejudice in the way communication is formed, challenged, or maintained, which provides a complete picture of individual's responses (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). This study sought to provide current information about MAPCs specifically as it relates to their perception of social stereotypes toward MAPCs. Chapter 2 includes an extensive literature review in the history of the Miss America Organization,

feminist history, and their relation to the Miss America pageant.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

This qualitative case study examined how intercultural communication influenced Miss America pageant contestants' self-esteems, beliefs, perceptions, and decisions related to beauty pageant participation. Societal stereotyping of MAPCs has resulted in the participants being viewed as lacking intelligence and not following the traditional Western feminist standards (Abrams, 2012, Dow, 2003; Graff, Murnen, & Smolak, 2012; Kurylo, 2012; Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013). Women who are socially stereotyped may have a fear of failure, which can contribute to activity avoidance and influence women's decisions to compete in pageants that could provide educational and career opportunities (Deemer et al., 2014). In addition, stereotypes may also cause the targeted group to underperform, undermine the performance ability and achievement potential of beauty pageant contestants (Deemer et al., 2014).

In this chapter, I present the relevant literature review which includes an overview of the proposed research design, theory, and an in-depth history of the Miss America Organization. Next, I describe stereotypes in Western society about gender role differences. I also give the history of Western feminism and the Western feminist views of the MAO and MAPCs. I conclude with a summary about qualitative design and case studies.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

In researching the topic of interest, I searched multiple databases and employed many key search terms to obtain peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles. I utilized

Walden University's library multidisciplinary database, Thoreau. Thoreau can search multiple databases simultaneously. In addition to Thoreau, I also searched two additional databases: EBSCOhost and ProQuest. I obtained information from books and the Miss America Organization website. I used the following search terms and combinations of these search terms to identify relevant articles: *child beauty pageants*, *grounded theory*, *Miss America*, *Miss America Pageant*, *Intercultural communication research*, *ICR*, *feminist*, *feminism*, *history of feminism*, *female self-esteem*, *self-esteem of women*, *self-efficacy*, *self-efficacy of women*, *phenomenology*, *case study*, and *case study of women*, *body image of women*, and *beauty pageants*. This chapter highlights the most relevant sources.

### **Case Studies**

Case study research is a behavioral science that dates back to the late 1800s and is a principle means of conducting social science, speech-language pathology, nursing, therapy (physical and occupational), education, and business studies (Thomas, 2011; Unicomb, Colyvas, Harrison, & Hewat, 2015). A precise definition of a case study has yet to be determined because some scholars view it as a methodology while others see it as a design (Rule & John, 2015; Thomas, 2011; Unicomb et al., 2015). Case studies contribute to knowledge previously considered individual, group, or social phenomena complexity (Rule & John, 2015; Thomas, 2011; Vance, 2015).

Case inquiries examine the interaction of many variables in a small sample size through in-depth narratives that explain phenomena within a real-life context, when explanations for the phenomena are unclear (Rule & John, 2015; Thomas, 2011). Gomm

(as cited by Thomas, 2011) defined a case as the researcher's boundaries placed on a study, which determines the study's time and location. For the purpose of my study, the working definition of a case study is the holistic analysis of the phenomena using one or more research methods to either explain phenomena or to generate theories (Marshall, Kitson, & Zeitz, 2012; Thomas, 2011).

Even though I have decided to utilize case study methodology, there are unknown effects and criticisms. Due to the lack of control, the effects of compounding variables are unknown, and the actual cause and effect cannot be determined (Unicomb et al., 2015). Unicomb, Colyvas, Harrison, and Hewat (2015) stated that case study research has been criticized for not being as rigorous as quantitative research or lacks statistical tests to prove that outcomes imply significant change for the participants. Variations reported in case studies findings are used to find themes and patterns and not as statistical significance (Unicomb et al., 2015).

Other research designs such as grounded theory, phenomenology, and ethnography could have also been used for this study. Grounded theory would have been used to establish a theory through generalizable data collected (Johnson, 2015). Phenomenology would have been appropriate if my study wanted to explore and understand the full, rich meaning of language and experiences from the participants' perspectives about their current experiences of the phenomena (Boden & Eatough, 2014; Campbell, 2015; Ofonedu, Percy, Britt, & Belcher, 2013). Ethnography would have been utilized if I wanted to do a longitudinal study in which I would have been fully immersed in MAPCs' daily lives (Case, Todd, & Kral, 2014). Case study methodology allows a



researcher to examine a few cases in thorough detail (Rule & John, 2015; Thomas, 2011), it allowed me to have a small sample size and provide a more in-depth narrative of MAPCs. MAPCs perceive social stereotypes directed towards them and context how the perceptions affect MAPCs self-esteem, self-efficacy, and desire to participate (Rule & John, 2015; Thomas, 2011).

These cost effective studies are typically conducted pre- and post- data collection because it allows the researcher to observe closely and document the participant's actions (Unicomb et al., 2015). Positive correlations from a case study can warrant a quantitative study and may lead to policy changes within the MAO and changes in practices of how to promote MAO participation to a variety of young women throughout the US (Unicomb et al., 2015). Case studies allow careful and detailed observation of the frequency of an occurrence of phenomena for the development of new interventions, assessments, and treatment for studies that may require treatment plans (Unicomb et al., 2015). Unicomb et al. (2015) stated that case studies also convey participants shared experience. This methodology allowed me to scrutinize the MAPCs with the shared experience of competing in the MAO.

Using the participant's perspective minimizes researcher bias in addition to maintaining the studies validity when the researcher identifies his or her bias at the beginning of the study (Campbell, 2015; Finlay, 2014). This allowed the researcher the ability to focus on the participant's descriptions (Campbell, 2015; Finlay, 2014). The researcher must maintain his or her objectivity during the data analysis process (Campbell, 2015). This study was a multiple participant case study (Eraslan & Kant,

2015), of local MAO Miss titleholders'. This study obtained an in-depth understanding of MAPCs views of their self-esteems, beliefs, perceptions, and decisions related to beauty pageant participation, and how those are related to Western societal stereotypes.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Edward T. Hall is known as the founder of intercultural communication research (ICR) in the United States (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Hall & Whyte, 1960). While studying the Hopi and Navajo Indians, Hall also focused on educating America's elite and soldiers about activities overseas during the 1940s (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Hall & Whyte, 1960). Hall viewed himself as an anthropologist with an affiliation with linguistic thinking, but he unintentionally defined the discipline of intercultural studies that focused on communication research (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). Hall collaborated with Bernard L. Traver to form a *primary message system* and the *matrix of culture* (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013, p. 300).

The primary message system was defined as the interaction and association that forms communication, while the matrix of culture describes how stereotypes are shared (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). These concepts enabled generalization of data either through symbolic or behavioral interactions influenced by linguistic exchanges between human beings (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Xu, 2013). In 1960, Hall and William Whyte wrote an instructional guide to assist with relating to and understanding people of other cultures. Hall and Whyte (1960) defined culture as a normative study of social interactions of knowledge, language, and nonverbal communication. Intercultural communication was created to better understand and describe global and subcultural norms or attitudes that

may not be communicated consciously (Hall & Whyte, 1960).

ICR in the United States has to address challenges with immigration, international relations, and managing interculturalism (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). The United States has issues with stereotyping because of its intercultural and multiculturalism. This stereotyping illustrates prejudice, racism, and discrimination toward minorities and subcultures of American life (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). ICR is a subdiscipline that has three levels of communication that combine contrastive and interactional approaching (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). ICR is utilized for qualitative and quantitative methodological studies that are conducted through “observation, participation, interviewing, or ethnography”(Agboka, 2014, p.302). ICR is used by researchers to determine research motive as well as the institutional and cultural influences of stereotypes (Agboka, 2014).

Researchers also use ICR to understand the role of cultural stereotypes and prejudice in communication (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). Cultural stereotypes influence individual beliefs about and toward different groups of people (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Kurylo & Robles, 2015). Kurylo and Robles (2015) stated that cultural stereotypes evolve and remain over time due to informational exchange and communication. ICR incorporates individual opinions and attitudes toward other cultures. ICR also researches how stereotypical views are shaped, reinforced, tested, or maintained over time (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). ICR also provides a complete picture of how people respond to perceived stereotypes (Kurylo & Robles, 2015).

Constructive and interactionism differentiation within ICR would be needed to project possible findings (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). The constructive approach emphasizes

cultural differences concerning perception, time, space, and societal relationships (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). This approach of examining culture focuses on communication where social action is focused more closely on and not social behavior (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013). The interactionist approach focuses on communication as a social action as well as a symbolic interaction (Averbeck- Lietz, 2013). ICR examines the situations in which the communication took place, the dynamics of the communication, negotiations, and the settings in which communication roles and learned behaviors occur (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013).

Intercultural communication research is used to (a) understand existing belief of view of one's self, (b) which leads to relationships built with self and others as well as attention to others, (c) dialect characteristics, and (d) power relationship dynamic (Xu, 2013). The aforementioned four knowledge subsets of ICR encourage the promotion of social justice through diversity and cultural pluralism (Agboka, 2014). My study addresses all four subsets of ICR. ICR also examines cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (Hall & Whyte, 1960; Xu, 2013).

Scott (2013) analyzed the experiences of Black women pre- and post-segregation. This qualitative, phenomenological research was conducted to understand the experience, motivation, and outcome of Black women's communication strategies within cross-cultural communication within predominantly White organizations (Scott, 2013). Scott (2013) utilized focus group interviews to obtain the participants' descriptions of their experiences. The study found that Black women do use specific strategies for dispelling stereotypes and that they regularly use those strategies within environments in which they

are minorities (Scott, 2013). Scott (2013) suggested that further research needed to be conducted across demographic groups of Black women and the context of the communication.

My rationale for utilizing ICR as my study's foundation was an attempt to better understand how stereotypical feminist views of MAPCs was gradually accepted into a societal culture and explained how it was adapted to Western culture. I also tried to understand the Miss America Pageant as a symbol of American women through Western social norms. In deciding to use ICR, I also understood that ICR is primarily qualitative research that is either conducted through observation, contribution, interviewing, or describing ethnic groups (Agboka, 2014). I used ICR to identify whether the stereotypical cultural views of MAPCs within Western society still exist. I also examined rather societal stereotypes of pageantry exist and if feminism relates to the MAPCs perception of self-esteem and achievement.

### **Miss America Beauty Pageant History**

P.T. Barnum is credited with the creation of the American beauty pageant (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Ferrari & Ades, 2002; William, 2009). He used women as a gimmick to attract paying audiences for the purpose of amusement and entertainment (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Williams, 2009). In 1854, Barnum had women parade before judges who evaluated their facial beauty and physical figure (Williams, 2009). The winner, if married, would win a diamond tiara; if single, she would receive a monetary prize (Williams, 2009). The assumption was that the women who competed in this 19<sup>th</sup> century pageant represented

the Victorian social standards of femininity, in which displaying women's physiques was not considered appropriate (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Williams, 2009).

Within the sixty-seven years that followed Barnum's first American pageant, the creators of what would become the Miss America Pageant followed Barnum's outline (Williams, 2009). The socially unapologetic display of the female physic in the media has allowed for beauty contestants to show their bodies (Grout, 2013). The American beauty pageants transformed from the small local amusement to large-scale commercial entertainment (Grout, 2013). The switch to large commercial entertainment assisted in making beauty pageants more respectable, such as in the case of the Miss America pageant (Grout, 2013). The detailed history of the Miss America Pageant showed the connection between women that participate in pageantry and the implied societal implications of participation (Williams, 2009).

The Miss America Pageant was founded as "A National Beauty Pageant" as part of the Fall Frolic on the Boardwalk event in Atlantic City, New Jersey on September 7, 1921 (Ferrari & Ades, 2002; Houston, 2014; Miss America, 2015; Watson & Martin, 2000). This event encouraged hotel owners that wanted to extend the summer tourism season past the traditional Labor Day date (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Houston, 2014; Miss America, 2015; Watson & Martin, 2000). The National Beauty Pageant for the bathing beauty was a small part of the annual weeklong event festival with only had eight contestants that were judged wearing their bathing suits (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Houston, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000). Margaret Gorman, a fifteen-year-old, was the first winner that was publicized representing the American ideal of womanhood, which encompasses

homemaking and motherhood (Watson & Martin, 2000; Larson, 2012). The National Beauty Pageant Tournament grew in popularity as a festival and beauty pageant, so much so that the beauty pageant entry numbers went from eight contestants to over 70 contestants from 36 states and Canada (Farrari & Ades, 2002; Watson & Martin, 2000).

1922 brought forth the introduction of the evening gown competition (Banet-Weiser, 1999). In 1923, Mary Katherine Campbell was the first and only woman to win the title of Miss America in consecutive years (Farrari & Ades, 2002; Watson & Martin, 2000). In the late 1920s, the pageant received negative publicity, which accused the young women that participating in the pageant for having loose morals (Farrari & Ades, 2002; Watson & Martin, 2000). Combine with the nation being in the early years of the Great Depression these issues caused the festival and the National Beauty Tournament to be discounted (Farrari & Ades, 2002; Watson & Martin, 2000).

### **The 1930s**

In the 1930s, pageant producer Lenora Slaughter instituted Rule number 7, which explicitly prevented non-white contestants from competing (Farrari & Ades, 2002; Houston, 2014; Welch, 2015). The rule stated that contestants would be in good health and be white (Farrari & Ades, 2002; Houston, 2014; Welch, 2015). Rule number 7 ban was enacted so each contestant could provide her genealogy within a formal biological data sheet as far back as she could trace her white ancestry (Farrari & Ades, 2002; Houston, 2014; Welch, 2015). This rule was also used as a way to establish respectable ancestral connections to national historical events such as the Mayflower or the Revolutionary War (Farrari & Ades, 2002, World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2016). The rule

was practiced until the late 1940s because the pageant started allowing women of Native American descent Miss Oklahoma 1941 Mifauny Shunatona and Asian descent 1948 Miss Puerto Rico Irma Nydia Vasquez and Miss Hawaii Yun Tau Zanet to compete (Ferrari & Ades, 2002; World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2016).

In 1933, pageant director Armed T. Nichols briefly revived the pageant but due to accusations of fraud, married contestants, contestants falsifying residencies, and other factors the pageant was suspended until 1935 (Watson & Martin, 2000). Two years later, Bette Cooper, Miss America 1937 disappeared to stay in school (Ferrari & Ades, 2002; Watson & Martin, 2000). In 1938, Lenora Slaughter was instrumental in adding the talent category to the Miss America competition (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Ferrari & Ades, 2002; Watson & Martin, 2000). Slaughter served as the pageant director from 1941 until she retired in 1967 (Watson & Martin, 2000; Miss America, 2015). During her tenure, she restored and maintained the dignity and morals of the pageant by adding morality clauses for all Miss America beauty pageant contestants (Watson & Martin, 2000; Miss America, 2015).

### **The 1940s**

In 1940, that beauty pageant was formally known as "A National Beauty Pageant" and "The Showman's Variety Jubilee" officially changed its name to Miss America (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Houston, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000; Williams, 2009). The 40s also continued to bring about change for young women by providing the Miss America Scholarship Fund was established September of 1945, which changed Miss America to an official scholarship pageant (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Houston, 2014; Watson & Martin,



2000; Williams, 2009). Banet-Wieser (1999) stated that Slaughter believed that adding scholarship money as an award would improve the quality of the contestants.

The first recipient of the Miss America scholarship was, Bess Myerson in 1945 (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Houston, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000; Williams, 2009). To date, Myerson has the distinction of being the only Jewish Miss America national titleholder (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Houston, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000; Williams, 2009). Because of her Jewish heritage, she not only represented America but she also represented the thousands of people that Americans were fighting for in Germany during World War II (Banet-Weiser, 1999). With the shift in national and international focus in 1948, the pageant went from crowning the winner while they wore their bathing suits to Bebe Shopp, being the first Miss America crowned in an evening gown (Watson & Martin, 2000).

Jacque Mercer, Miss America 1949 was married and divorced during her reign as Miss America 1949, which caused the pageant to establish a participation clause that required the Miss America contestants to sign a pledge stating that they had never married or had been pregnant (World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2016). The 1940s also saw the pageant enlist the support of the National Jaycees Organization to assist the local and state competitions to provide the competition with a community service focus (Miss America, 2015).

### **The 1950s**

In 1950, the Miss America title year was officially postdated, which allowed the titleholder to reign during her title year (Watson & Martin, 2000). For example, Yolanda

Betbeze was crowned in September of 1950, but her title was Miss America 1951. Due to this change, there was not an official Miss America for 1950 (Watson & Martin, 2000).

Miss America reached another milestone in September 1954 when Lee Meriwether, Miss America 1955, was the first to be crowned in front of a live television audience (Watson & Martin, 2000). This decade also saw the television premier of the beauty pageant featuring the master of ceremony Bert Parks, who sang the theme song, "There She Is: Miss America," written by music composer Bernie Wayne (Watson & Martin, 2000).

### **The 1960s and 1970s**

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Miss America Pageant was going through unrest similar to the United States participation in the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, women's right movement, and the sexual revolution (Watson & Martin, 2000). In 1965, Miss America appointed Albert Marks as the organization's chairperson at a time when the pageant was being accused of exploiting and degrading women (Watson & Martin, 2000). These accusations ignited an angry feminist protest by the Women's Liberation Front (WLF) in 1968 (Abrams, 2012; Dow, 2003; Kreydatus, 2008; Stansell, 2008; Watson & Martin, 2000). It was also during this time that the Miss America Pageant was also considered to be racist by civil rights groups. In 1970, Cheryl Browne, Miss Iowa, became the first African American to represent her state in the Miss America pageant (Watson & Martian, 2000). Feminist protest and social awareness campaigns lasted until 1972 when feminist burned Miss America, Laurel Schaefer in effigy as she toured cities throughout the United States (Watson & Martin, 2000).

## **The 1980s**

In the 1980s, the pageant still had a stigma of racial bias, but the stigma began to fade in 1984 with the crowning of Vanessa Williams, the first African-American to win the title of Miss America (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Houston, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000). Not only was the 1984 Miss America historical for the first African-American to be crowned Miss America, but it was historic because Vanessa Williams's first runner-up, Suzette Charles, was also African-American (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Watson & Martin, 2000). Williams made headlines nearing the end of her reign because she relinquished her title on July 24, 1984, due to previously taken nude photos that were publicly released (Banet-Weiser, 1999; New York Times, 2015; USA Today, 2015; Watson & Martin, 2000). As a result, she relinquished her title to first runner-up Suzette Charles (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Watson & Martin, 2000).

Also, during the 1980s MAO required each contestant within its pageant system (local, state, and national) have a personal social platform with national significance (Miss America, 2015). The 1989 social platform requirement enabled Miss America to be the national spokeswoman for issues ranging from AIDS awareness and prevention, breast cancer, and homelessness (Miss America, 2015). Being the national spokeswoman for a societal issue allowed Miss America to speak to legislative bodies, civic groups, national service organizations, and the nation's media outlets such as the National Press Club (Miss America, 2015). Information posted by MAO (2015), but not verified states that these experiences enhance MAPCs personal and professional skills development to gain experience of working with issues of societal importance.

In addition, to social platforms, MAO titleholders (local, state, and national) and its volunteers annually participate in community service projects, and provide volunteer service hours to non-profit organizations and other worthy causes (Miss America, 2015). Today, the non-profit MAO claims to be the nation's largest provider of tuition scholarship assistance (Miss America, 2015). The MAO strives to provide young women with an opportunity to further their personal and professional goals, while instilling a sense of community service, allowing her express opinions, and to display her talent, and intelligence (Miss America, 2015). Within the MAO, there has been some controversy about swimsuit styles and forms of clothing the contestants wear (Watson & Martin, 2000).

### **The 1990s**

The 1990s the MAO was trying to prove that it was still relevant and not passé (Banet-Weiser, 1999). One way in which the MAO attempted to stay modern was to allow the pageant viewers vote to keep swimsuit competition in 1995 (Watson & Martin, 2000). Two years later the pageant allowed contestants to wear two-piece swimsuits (Watson & Martin, 2000). Even though the most highly publicized category is the swimsuit competition, there are four additional categories of competition interview, talent, evening gown, and on-stage question (Miss America, 2015; Williams, 2009).

Scoring each category of competition, judges scoring is weighted for single night local preliminary pageants and multiple night preliminary state and national interview 25%, talent 35%, evening wear 20%, swim suite 15%, and on-stage question 5% (Miss America, 2015; Miss South Carolina Scholarship Organization, 2011). The final night of

competition is a composite score of the top fifteen competitors (Miss America, 2015; Miss South Carolina Scholarship Organization, 2011). The categories are weighted score of interview 30%; evening wear 20%, swimsuit 20%, and talent 30% (Miss America, 2015; Miss South Carolina Scholarship Organization, 2011). This scoring system is a stark contrast to the 1923 scoring system in which judges rated women up to 15 points for the construction of their heads and eyes; up to 10 points each for facial expression, torso, legs, arms, hands, and grace of bearing; and up to 5 points each on her hair, nose, and mouth (Banet-Weiser, 1999).

The 90s also gave way to a first for MAO and individuals with disabilities, in addition to the lifting of a discriminatory ban. In 1994 Heather Whitestone, she was the first with a disability to be crowned Miss America 1995, as she had profound hearing loss (Miss America, 2015). In 1999, the ban was lifted, allowing for women that are divorced to compete (Houston, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000).

### **2000 to 2009**

In 2000, the MAO celebrated its 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as it continued to reflect its mission and goals (Miss America, 2015). Also, in 2000 MAO also lifted the ban on women that have had abortions from competing (Houston, 2014). Once again MAO broke boundaries with the crowning of Angela Perez Baraquio, Miss America 2001, who was the pageant's first Asian American and teacher to win the title of Miss America (Miss America, 2015). In 2004, the Miss America Pageant celebrated being televised for 50 years (Miss America, 2015).

Two years later, in 2006, the Miss America Pageant returned to Atlantic City, New Jersey after a stint in Las Vegas, Nevada (Miss America, 2015). In 2007, MAO signed a multi-year deal with the TLC, instead of ABC, to televise the pageant and the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals (CMNH) became the organization's national partner (Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, 2015; Miss America, 2015). The partnership with the CMNH requires that MAO Miss titleholders raise money for the hospitals and that Miss America serves as its goodwill ambassador (Miss America, 2015). Miss Puerto Rico rejoined the Miss America pageant after 50 years in 2009 (Miss America, 2015).

The Miss America Foundation (MAF) provides academic and community-based scholarships to undergraduate, graduate, and endowed scholarships for medical school, military service awareness, and performing arts (Miss, America, 2015). As the MAO's commitment to education has grown and the need for more women in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) grew MAO partnered with the Department of Education to form a STEM education initiative in 2012 (Miss America, 2015). Information posted by MAO (2015) but not verified states that the organization believes that this partnership would advocate for more women to choose STEM academic fields of study. The MAF created a \$5,000 scholarship for two of its 52 state contestants that are studying in the STEM fields (Miss America, 2015). MAO is the largest provider of scholarship to young women in the world (Banet-Weiser, 1999, Miss America, 2015).

The requirements for young women to compete in a state MAO pageant include that she must meet all of the following conditions, she must be a female, United States citizen, and between the ages of 17 to 24 (Miss America, 2015; Miss South Carolina, 2016). She must meet city or state residency requirements, meet good moral character standards set by MAO, be in good health, and must be able to meet the titleholders job responsibilities (Miss America, 2015, Miss South Carolina). Lastly, she must win a local MAO preliminary title (Miss America, 2015; Miss South Carolina, 2016).

### **2010 to Present**

The Miss America Organization returned to its original television network in 2010 and 2013 when the pageant returned to the ABC network (Miss America, 2015). The 2014 Miss America competition finals returned to the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, New Jersey for its highest rating in its previous nine years, where Nina Davuluri was the first Indian-American to win the Miss America title (Miss America, 2015). 2015 also marked the return of Miss America 1984 Vanessa Williams to judge the 2016 Miss America Pageant, and she also received an official public apology for the way she was treated by the MAO 30 years earlier (New York Times, 2015). The Executive Chairman of the Miss America Pageant, Sam Haskell, made an apology on behalf of the entire organization (New York Times, 2015). Haskell stated "I want to apologize for anything that was said or done that made you feel any less the Miss America you are and the Miss America you always will be" (New York Times, 2015).

In 2016, MAF implemented two additional scholarship opportunities for the 2017 Miss America competition. The first was the Women in Business Scholarship (Miss

America, 2016a). This \$5,000 annual scholarship was awarded to two current state titleholders majoring in the field of business (Miss America, 2016a). The second was the creation of The Former Miss America Discretionary Scholarship (Miss America, 2016b). This scholarship allows former Miss America titleholders access to a personal lifetime limit of up to an additional \$10,000 scholarship after their 10-year national scholarship funds accessibility has expired (Miss America, 2016b).

Throughout the pageant's long history thousands of young women have competed for their local and state titles in hopes of winning this national beauty title each year (Miss America, 2015; Watson & Martin, 2000; Tonn, 2003). For those young women that win the title of Miss America, each is expected to wear stylish clothing, display a humble demeanor, and embody the Western feminine image (Watson & Martin, 2000). During the pageant's history, it has represented the change within American culture, and it reflects society's changing values and beliefs towards women (Watson & Martin, 2000; Williams, 2009; Tonn, 2003). Despite the pageant emphasis on the contestant's intellect, talent, and providing academic scholarships, physical beauty remains as an "overriding feature of the ideal American woman" (Watson & Martin, 2000, p.106). Houston (2014) identified Miss America as a national symbol of pride, yet many feminists view the pageant as a form of degradation toward women.

### **Feminist History and Its Relationship to the Miss America Pageant**

Feminism is the belief that there is a gender imbalance in which men dominate women (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). The feminist movement attempts to combat gender oppression with the goal of gender equality (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). Feminism is



shaped by generational dis-identification many social factors throughout history such as race-ethnicity, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, and gender identification (Reger, 2014). Feminism is a social movement, which is contradictory to societal structures, policies, or cultural norms (Reger, 2014). These societal structures, policies, and cultural norms display images of femininity displayed through media images on television, internet, and magazines (Balcetis et al., 2013; Watson & Martin, 2000).

The United States feminist movement has taken place in two waves (Dow, 2003; Kreydatus, 2008; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). The goals of feminist were and are to change the societal views of gender roles being a necessity, alter the framework of society that supports gender-roles, or wait until societal evolution guides the changes (McPherson, 1973; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). The first wave of the United States' feminist movement started in the 1920s, and it was not until the late 1960s when the second wave of the feminist movement occurred (Dow, 2003; Houston, 2014; Kreydatus, 2008; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). The year 1920 was the era divided year between the nineteenth New Deal into the then more modern twentieth century of the Progressive Era in which new social roles, technology, media outlets and new ideas about citizenship emerged (Webb, 2012). It was a time of changes politically, socially, culturally, economic, and in which the industrial economy consolidated (Webb, 2012). During this period one of the social issues was women's suffrage movement, this was a time in which women were at the center of larger societal issues (Webb, 2012).

During the women's suffrage movement the focus shifted from the communal advancement of women forged by social and radical feminist to individual success, which

limited their goal achievement (Webb, 2012). The decade-long the first wave of the feminist movement had three objectives; (a) to continue to promote the success of the Progressive Era, (b) increase women's political participation, and (c) push for gender equality even though none of these goals were successful at that time (Webb, 2012).

The second wave of the feminist movement consisted of the "Baby Boomer" generation, and it began in the late 1960s (Foss & Foss, 2009). According to Foss and Foss (2009), the feminist criteria in the 1960s was founded on six fundamentals. The first three feminist criteria were that women work out of their homes, be politically correct, and use inclusive language (Foss & Foss, 2009). The fourth feminist criteria are that she would not change her name to her husband's surname when she gets married (Foss & Foss, 2009). Feminist criteria also stated that women participate in organizational collaborative decision-making to discuss gender, but she also mentions race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, sexual orientation, and age. Following these fundamentals would determine whether a woman was a real or false feminist (Foss & Foss, 2009). At this time, it was encouraged to question everything and to transform collective social intellect (Foss & Foss, 2009).

The Women's Liberation Front (WLF) was established in 1968 when women split from the National Organization for Women (NOW) (McPherson, 1973). This newly formed sub-organization had many small groups that averaged ten to fifteen women per group, and all males were excluded (McPherson, 1973). The WLF wanted women to learn how to overcome societal gender-role stereotypes and eliminate gender-role stereotypes so that gender could not be distinguished (McPherson, 1973). The ways in

which WLF wanted to change societal attitudes towards gender-role stereotyping was through changing the societal structure, educating society, and by use of shock tactics (McPherson, 1973).

It is vital to display the relationship between the stigma or stereotypes of being a Miss America beauty pageant contestant and public representation of that stigma (Bioul, 2012). In 1968, the WLF protested the Miss America Pageant because they felt society had a negative opinion of the participants (Abrams, 2012; Dow, 2003; Kreydatus, 2008; Stansell, 2008; Watson & Martin, 2000). The WLF referred to the Miss America contestant as being mindless, sexually objectified for the pleasure of men, personified as the weaker gender, plastic, and without power (Abrams, 2012; Dow, 2003; Kreydatus, 2008; Stansell, 2008; Watson & Martin, 2000). Also, females that are valued by men for their sexual appeal are sexually objectified (Graff, Murnen, & Smolak, 2012). These stereotypes not only reinforce societal views of lower gender status of females but it also contributes to female body image dissatisfaction (Graff et al., 2012). This WLF protest was considered to be one of the most significant actions of the second wave of the American feminist movement (Welsh, 2015).

The WLF wanted to combat women that are viewed as sexual objects and to contest falsely publicized images of women within traditional media outlets (Balcetis et al., 2013; McPherson, 1973; Watson & Martin, 2000). WLF publicized their protest of the 1968 Miss America Pageant to mock the beauty pageant (Welch, 2015). In doing so, it raised attention to the standards of beauty and to also inform that nation of the alleged connections to capitalism, racial discrimination, and war (Lee, 2014). Separate factions of

the WLF joined to form a group of 200 protestors, which possessed a large wooden barrel that was named the "Freedom Trash Can" (Abrams, 2012; Kreydatus, 2008; Lee, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000; Welch, 2015; Williams, 2009). The Freedom Trash Can was used by the WLF to throw socially identified women's instruments such as bras, griddles, makeup, and hair curls, into it (Abrams, 2012; Kreydatus, 2008; Lee, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000; Welch, 2015; Williams, 2009). Outside of the 1968 Miss America Pageant, the WLF also held signs that read, "Let's judge us as people" and "Welcome to the Cattle Auction" (Abrams, 2012; Kreydatus, 2008; Lee, 2014; Watson & Martin, 2000; Welch, 2015; Williams, 2009).

Well known African American feminist and civil-rights lawyer, Florynce "Flo" Kennedy chained herself to an effigy of Miss America to protest women's enslavement to beauty standards in conjunction with raising racial discrimination awareness at the WLF protest (Welch, 2015). The media publicity of the WLF protest confirmed the ingrained social stereotypes within American society distinction between femininity and feminism (Williams, 2009). According to Stansell (2008), the 1968 WLF movement produced the following two ideas: women are experiencing oppression, and that men ensure the oppression of women. This movement gave birth to other well-known feminist leaders such as Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pittman Hughes (Amico, 2014).

Members of the women's movement were referred to or stereotyped as "Feminazis," "man-haters," and even though no bras burned during the 1968 Miss America Pageant protest, many feminist were still considered to be "bra burning crazies" (Lee, 2014; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). The concept of feminism and those that

consider themselves to be feminist must continually evolve (Foss & Foss, 2009).

According to Swirsky and Angelone (2014), women in the United States currently have four reasons for the lack of feminist identification. The first stems from women having negative stereotypes associated with being a feminist (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014).

Second, the women are more empowered and are moving away from traditional gender-roles (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). The final two reasons for the lack of feminist identification are that women do not see the relevance, and they do not have the need to categorize themselves as a feminist or a non-feminist (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014).

### **Western Societal Stereotyping of Women**

Stereotypes are attributes, beliefs, or traits associated with groups depending on gender, culture, religion, race, ethnicity, and or sexual orientation, which can establish a psychology that may prevent a group, such as females, from achieving their full potential (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Kurylo, 2012). Stereotypes are often the reason that people justify the treatment of the group as well as relation to that group (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Historical, cultural, or social norms contribute to stereotypical views that specify groups are prone to act particular ways (Crites et al., 2015; Kurylo & Robles, 2015). Stereotype perpetuation has driven social norms (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). Goffman (as cited by Kurylo & Robles, 2015) stated social norms are common behavioral rules, which are socially acceptable for individuals to fit in.

Stereotypes are considered to be inherently negative because they can often lead to discrimination and decreases individuality among different groups of people (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015; Kurylo, 2012). Cundiff, Vescio, Loken, and Lo (2013)

suggested that a negative stereotype of one's group province contributes to dis-identification with said group's province. Dis-identification only occurs when social identity and stereotype threats are chronic (Cundiff et al., 2013). However, in some instances, stereotypes are considered to be neutral without either positive or negative connotation (Kurylo, 2012).

These stereotypical beliefs or traits can change over time due to societal shifts in culture (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015). These cultural attributes promoted through personal experiences, mass media, and socioeconomic status (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzon, 2014; Crites et al., 2015). Media images can either display positive or negative messages about behaviors and moral standards (Hall & Smith, 2012). When media images are continually displaying the same image of an individual or a group of people is when stereotyping occurs (Crites et al., 2015).

Kurylo (2012) stated researchers are challenged to determine whether stereotyping is from an individual's view or from a common societal view of understanding how stereotypes are shared and reproduced over time. Cultural shifts of stereotypes may act as a catalyst for a change of societal views of a group of people (Crites et al., 2015). Such cultural shifts within society are that of gender roles or gender stereotypes (Crites et al., 2015). Gender stereotypes are as societally constructed roles, behaviors, activities, sexual preferences, physical appearance, and qualities assigned to men and women (Crites et al., 2015; Storek & Furnham, 2013).

Gender identification forms at an early age and is well known, such as baby boys dressing in blue and baby girls dressing in pink (Crites et al., 2015). Gender stereotypes

associated behaviors of men being more independent and aggressive, whereas, women are sympathetic and passive (Crites et al., 2015). Watson & Martin (2000) stated that men fight for beautiful women, and beautiful women are perceived as being more reproductively successful. Gender stereotypes have caused cultural discrimination (Crites et al., 2015). In addition, gender stereotypes are resistant to change as stated by Northouse (as cited by Crites et al., 2015).

### **Self-esteem**

In 1892, Psychologist William James clearly defined self-esteem as being equal to success an individual achieves divided by the pretension of what the person expected to achieve (Osborne, 2014). Self-esteem is an individual's subjective assessment of his or her own worth (Orth & Luciano, 2015). An individual's talents, competencies, or social status does not necessarily reflect his or her self-esteem (Orth & Luciano, 2015). Early psychologist such as Freud, Jung, and James believed that self-esteem forms during childhood and adolescences, which creates a sense of self (Osborne, 2014).

This personality characteristic of self-esteem describes an individual's feelings of self-acceptance, respect, and worthiness (Ort & Luciano, 2015). Also, self-esteem is also related to body esteem and rather or not he or she is dissatisfied with their body image (Skorek, Song, & Dunham, 2014). When a person develops their self-concept, the individual will exhibit consistent behaviors associated with his or her positive or negative self-concept (Osborne, 2014). Self-concept and self-esteem influence how a person interprets social feedback (Osborne, 2014).

Once an individual establishes positive or negative self-esteem is hard to change because it continues in a perpetual cycle (Osborne, 2014). A person that believes that she is a failure will allow herself to be in situations in which she is destined to fail (Osborne, 2014). Negative social feedback to a person with low self-esteem easily strengthens the individual's negative self-view of themselves or their appearance (Osborne, 2014; Skorek, Song, & Dunham, 2014). If the cycle of negative self-esteem were broken, it would be due to the individual's interpretation of the social feedback through directing long-term positivity and loving messages towards the individual (Osborne, 2014).

Once individual's self-esteem changes from negative to positive the individual can make realistic expectations of their abilities in addition to he or she being able to understand the causes of their success and failure (Osbourne, 2014). The three levels of attributes of success or failure are that person must determine if the events occurred because of internal or external factors, whether or not the event was temporary or reoccurring, and if the event occurred because of lack of ability or a specific circumstance (Osborne, 2014). One influence on an individual's self-esteem is the media (Ura & Preston, 2015).

Ura and Preston (2015) stated that researchers have agreed that the media molds and reinforces the social ideal of being thin, which influences adolescents and young women's mental and physical idealism. Media has been shown to affect the levels of internalization, which distorts body image and promotes negative body image and it also promotes eating behaviors that cause eating disorders (Ura & Preston, 2015). Within the Western culture, beauty is determined by a women's thinness (Ura & Preston, 2015). In a



longitudinal study of Miss America winners indicated that their weight was 85% lower than the weight reported by the Society of Actuaries measurements based on age and height (Wonderlich, Ackard, & Henderson, 2005).

Since 1972 the number of women that experience body image dissatisfaction has increased from 23% to 56% (Balciotis et al., 2013). According to Balciotis, Cole, Chelberg, and Alicke (2013) 76% of the women on television sitcoms were below average weight of women. Skorek, Song, and Dunham (2014) stated, young adults receive social body image pressures from parents, peers, and mass media. Women that accepted the social belief that thinness equals Western beauty, but did not meet those standards experienced low self-esteem (Breines, Toole, Tu, & Chen, 2014; Ura & Preston, 2015; Vartanian, Smyth, Zawadzki, Heron, Coleman, 2014). Women may also experience body image dissatisfaction, and eating disorders are more susceptible to physical appearance concerns (Breines et al., 2014; Ura & Preston, 2015; Vartanian et al., 2014).

Body image dissatisfaction may also contribute to risky eating habits, such as dieting or fasting, caused when women are pressured to alter their eating behaviors to maintain the societal standard of beauty (Ura & Preston, 2015). Awareness of the thinness ideal has contributed to eating disorders, which happens to be prevalent among girls and women in the Western culture (Breines et al., 2014). Breines, Toole, Tu, and Chen (2014) stated 91% of college-aged women reported dieting to lose weight. However, less than 30% of college-aged women develop an eating disorder (Arigo, Schumacher, & Martin, 2014).

In contrast, not all women with low self-esteem respond to the social thinness ideal through eating disorders (Ura & Preston, 2015). Some women are likely to engage in clothing avoidance by wearing baggy clothes to disguise their natural curves (Ura & Preston, 2015). Others decrease their chances of participating in body scrutiny activities (Ura & Preston, 2015). Nor would they take part in strict or painful appearance management procedures, avoiding social events (Ura & Preston, 2015). Women with high self-esteem feel confident with their bodies, and they find it unnecessary to improve their appearances or too harshly self-criticize themselves (Breines et al., 2014; Ura & Preston, 2015).

Stressful life events have been found to be a possible contributing factor to an individual's self-esteem (Orth & Luciano, 2015; Skorek et al., 2014). The Big Five personality traits have also been found to contribute (Orth & Luciano, 2015; Skorek et al., 2014). The Big Five traits of leadership, also known as cross-cultural generalized traits of leadership are (a) neuroticism, (b) extraversion, (c) openness, (d) agreeableness, and (e) conscientiousness (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Skorek et al., 2014). Orth and Luciano (2015) stated life events, at any age, could influence an individual's self-esteem, Big Five, and life trajectory. Self-esteem is an extensive process that increases from adolescence to middle adulthood, which can peak at the ages of 50 to 60, and it decreases with older age (Orth & Luciano, 2015).

Osborne (2014) stated that for adults to lead lives that are productive, healthy, and satisfying, they must feel positive about the direction their lives are going and feel good about his or herself. Self-esteem has been found to be consequential in an individual's

success or failure within significant life events (Orth & Luciano, 2015). People with low self-esteem have a greater probability of being mistreated during role or peer selection (Orth & Luciano, 2015). In contrast, those individuals with high self-esteem chose more positive role models and peers in which strengthens relationships and decreases the likelihood of conflict (Orth & Luciano, 2015). My rationale for highlighting self-esteem is that it further explains my first and second research questions. My first research question asked how do local preliminary MAPCs perceive their decision to participate in pageantry, in relation to their perceptions of any existing stereotypes and societal views on pageants? My second research question I asked if stereotypical views of pageant participants influence MAPC's self-esteem. (Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Vera, Le Blanc, Taris, & Salanova, 2014; Vo & Bogg, 2015).

### **Self-efficacy**

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) fundamentally based on the theory that an individual's belief in his or her abilities (McCabe et al., 2015; Ng & Lucianteei, 2015; Vo & Bogg, 2015). The belief in self can make things happen through their actions of human behavior as a result of a combination of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors (McCabe et al., 2015; Ng & Lucianteei, 2015; Vo & Bogg, 2015). Bandura's specified five core SCT determinants, intentional goals, self-efficacy, expected outcome, perceived obstacles, and it facilitates change (McCabe et al., 2015). The individual's intentional goals designed to perform specific behaviors (McCabe et al., 2015). Expected outcomes are what an individual anticipates achieving that can be either social, physical, and self-evaluative which is the gauge by a person's self-efficacy

(McCabe et al., 2015). Perceived obstacles and facilitators of change, which referred to as socio-structural factors, can influence or impede an individual's behavior (McCabe et al., 2015).

Efficacy determines the amount of effort, time, and persistence in trying to achieve a goal as well as to how we feel and think about ourselves (Vera et al., 2014; Vo & Bogg, 2015; Yiu, Cheung, & Siu, 2012). Efficacy is the foundation for self-regulating motivation “as they determine goal setting, effort, perseverance, and resilience to failures” (Vera et al., 2014, p. 134). Bandura determined that one similar construct within cognitive and social psychology was self-efficacy (Momsen & Carlson, 2013; Vo & Bogg, 2015). The most central determinate in SCT is self-efficacy because it, directly and indirectly, influences an individual's behavior (McCabe et al., 2015, Vo & Bogg, 2015). The second research question I asked if stereotypical views of pageant participants influence MAPC's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995; Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Vera et al., 2014; Vo & Bogg, 2015; Yiu, Cheung, & Siu, 2012).

Self-efficacy is an individual's knowledge of abilities to execute actions required for the belief and motivation to succeed, through adversity (Bandura, 1995; Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Vera et al., 2014; Vo & Bogg, 2015; Yiu, Cheung, & Siu, 2012). Bandura's self-efficacy theory gauges the outcome expectations of how an individual feels, thinks, motivates themselves, and determines his or her positive or negative emotional behavior despite adversity (Bandura, 1995; Vera et al., 2014; Wright, Wright, & Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2013). Individuals with high self-efficacy set high goals for

themselves, strive to achieve their goals, have a strong sense of accomplishment, and better personal well-being (Bandura, 1995; Wright et al., 2013).

Ultimately, individuals with high self-efficacy have been found to be risk takers such as entrepreneurs or inventors and have rates of depression due to the ability to control stressors (Bandura, 1995; Ng & Lucianetti, 2015; Vera et al., 2014). Also, individuals with higher self-efficacy have an overall positive physical and mental well-being and have been found to have a greater sense of human accomplishment (Bandura, 1995; Vera et al., 2014). In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy avoid setting high goals as well as avoid participating in tasks in which the individual feels has a lower level of self-efficacy (Ng & Lucianetti, 2015; Yiu, Cheung, & Siu, 2012).

Bandura's self-efficacy theory has four processes; cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection (Bandura, 1995; Reivich, 2010; Yiu et al., 2012). According to Wright, Wright, and Jenkins-Guarnieri (2013) without these processes scholars have proven that pessimistic thinking is an indicator of depression and anxiety. Self-efficacy is developed and exercised during one's lifetime (Bandura, 1995; Lambert, Benight, Wong, & Johnson, 2013). The following ways can strengthen and influence one's self-efficacy; (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experience, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological response awareness (Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Lambert et al., 2013).

An individual that masters experiences have been shown to accomplish his or her desired tasks or goals (Bandura, 1995; Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Poortvliet & Darnon, 2014). Vicarious experience, also known as social modeling, occurs when an individual observes peers and the individual models their behaviors and accomplishments (Bandura,

1995; Bumann & Younkin, 2012). Social persuasion happens when like-minded peers and colleagues encourage and provide feedback on an individual's attempts at a new behavior (Bandura, 1995; Bumann & Younkin, 2012; Millner, Rodgers, Bloch, Costa, Pritchett, & Woods, 2015). The fourth way in which to strengthen self-efficacy is to be aware of an individual's physiological response to stressors and finding ways in which to manage stress related to goal achievement through modifying one's behavior (Bandura, 1995; Bumann & Younkin, 2012).

### **Summary**

The objective of this qualitative case study was to describe the perspectives of Miss America local preliminary titleholders, which pertain to their perceived exposure to stereotypes towards pageant participants and in what ways their experiences may have influenced her beliefs in completing a task as well as her self-esteem. As such the primary research questions are the following: In what ways do feminist societal stereotypical views of (MAPC) exist in the local level of competition among local Miss America preliminary titleholders? Supplementary research question explored the following: in what ways do the feminist societal stereotypical views of pageant participants influence local MAPC's self-esteem, beliefs, perceptions, and decisions related to competition participation? Perspectives of Miss America local preliminary titleholders have limited past research.

The aim of this study was to address this gap in research, which specifically addresses MAPCs perceptions of societal stereotypes towards pageant participants. Women are affected by societal views of gender stereotypes, media promoting thinness

as beauty. These effects have been found to contribute to body image dissatisfaction, eating disorders, lack of motivation to achieve goals and activity avoidance. Studying MAPCs promoted societal change through providing a better understand of the impact of social stereotypes on this subculture of women.

Chapter 3 described the research methodology for this study. I described the role of the researcher in detail with an inclusion of researcher biases and possible ethical issues. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study was addressed along with a concise summary.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the perceived effects of societal stereotypes on MAPCs' self-esteem and self-efficacy. The goal was to understand the phenomenon of participating in MAO preliminary pageants and the effects social stereotypes have on the participants. In this chapter, I present the research design and rationale for the study. The methodology section discusses participant selection and my research plan for data collection and analysis. The participant protection procedures address trustworthiness and ethical concerns of the study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

My research sample consisted of local MAO Miss titleholders ages 18 to 24 who had recently participated in their Southeastern state MAO pageant competition. This study was designed to better understand MAPCs' perceptions of Western feminist social stereotypes and its perceived impact on their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and their decision to participate in the pageant. It was possible that some MAPCs perceived feminist social stereotypes as having negative effects, while others felt they had no effect. Understanding the MAPCs' perceptions of Western feminist societal stereotypes contributed to scholarly body of knowledge about the MAO and potentially facilitated future research examining the cognitive effects of adult pageant participation.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions below were the focus of this study.



RQ 1: How do local preliminary MAPC's perceive their decision to participate in pageantry, in relation to their beliefs about any existing stereotypes of MAPCs and societal views on pageants?

RQ 2: How do local preliminary MAPC's perception of societal views of pageantry and any existing stereotypes relate to their perceptions of self-esteem and achievement?

### **Role of the Researcher**

I began competing in the MAO local preliminary pageant in 1998. In 2001, I won my only MAO preliminary title and was able to compete in my state MAO preliminary pageant in 2002. I competed in several local preliminaries until I turned 24, "aged out," and was no longer eligible to compete. I am currently a local executive director (LED) for the MAO, and I am also an approved state MAO judge. Being a former contestant, current LED, and approved MAO judge, I have biases concerning MAPCs' perceptions of social stereotypes and how those stereotypes may affect MAPCs' self-esteem and self-efficacy. These biases exist because of my experience in the MAO pageant system.

To manage my bias I kept a reflective journal, created audit trails, and conducted member checks. I kept a researcher reflective journal to record my personal reflections and responses to the participants' experiences. I used this journal to monitor my biases during data collection and analysis by including data comparisons and researcher assumptions in the final findings of the study. Audit trails were put in place to create a specific interview protocol, which strengthened data collection. After the completion of the data collection, transcription, and analysis, member checks engaged participants in correcting any misinterpretations that I may have made.

I wrote an email introduction about my study to the Southeastern MAO state pageant executive director (see Appendix A) and I requested that the pageant's executive director participate in the study (see Appendix B). In addition, I requested that the state MAO pageant executive director forward my request for participants (see Appendix C) through the sanctioned state pageant email to their LEDs and local MAO Miss titleholders. The letter outlined the purpose of my study, which was to determine how MAPCs view their self-esteem, beliefs, perceptions, and their decisions related to beauty pageant participation in relation to societal stereotypes to determine if there was MAPCs internalization of stereotyping. To conduct my case study interviews with MAPCs, I was first granted cooperation from the Southeastern MAO state pageant and Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Interviews took place at an agreed upon method of interview, through videoconferencing, or by telephone. The method of interview was set prior to the scheduled interviews so that it was convenient and accessible for the participants. The five interviews were audio recorded in conjunction with note-taking. The participants were not given any compensation. Participants were assured of confidentiality. Because of my experience within the MAO, it was necessary for me to bracket any preconceptions about MAPC stereotype exposure, and perceptions of stereotypes on participant's willingness to compete.

As the primary researcher, I entered this study with prior experience and as someone who may be known by several potential participants. Throughout the study, I

fulfilled the role of the data collector, analyst, and observer of participant's verbal cues while answering the case study questions.

### **Research Methodology**

Case study methodology was used to explore the participant's perceptions of a similar phenomenon (Baker & Edwards, 2012). I explored the perceptions of five local MAO Miss preliminary titleholder respondents, ages 18 to 24, who had recently competed for their state title. To determine the number of case studies to be conducted depends on the research purpose, questions, and type of methodology used in the study (Baker & Edwards, 2012). A single-subject design allows a researcher to investigate a homogeneous population (Unicomb et al., 2015). I decided to conduct 5 case study interviews. Over the course of 2 weeks, I conducted an approximately one hour-long, semistructured, case study interview with five different participants. I obtained understanding of MAPCs perception of stereotypes through participant's (a) opinions, (b) attitudes, (c) beliefs, (d) judgments, (e) experience, (f) needs assessments, and (g) motives (Connelly, 2015; Gaižauskaitė, 2012).

### **Participants**

I selected five current MAPCs who were local MAO Miss titleholders, ages 18 to 24, in the same Southeastern state of the United States. Generally, between four and 10 participants are used to add depth to the understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In contrast, if the purpose of this study were to generalize my findings saturation theory would be applied (Dilshad & Latif, 2013), I would have collected data until the researcher obtains considerably new information. The study

participants consisted of MAPC local Miss title holders age 18 to 24 that were first time and repeat pageant Miss contestants that have recently competed in their state MAO pageant. The five participants took part in individual one-hour interviews that were held after the state MAO competition. I conducted interviews through the methods of either video conferencing (such as FaceTime, SKYPE, Adobe Acrobat, or Zoom) and by telephone for the convenience of the participants.

Recruitment of participants began with the state MAO pageant forwarding a prestructured mass email message to all state MAO LEDs and local preliminary Miss titleholders who were ages 18 to 24 (see Appendix C). The letter explained the purpose of the study, the scope of the study, and case study confidentiality procedures. I used a purposeful sample of current MAO local Miss preliminary titleholders who indicated interest in participating in the study. I told the participants that the interviews would take approximately one hour. I also informed the participants that they could decide not to participate in the study at any time. No identifying information about participant's name, location, or preliminary title was released or published. Selection criteria were as follows:

1. Participants had a willingness to participate in the study.
2. Each participant must have been a current local MAO Miss titleholder.
3. Local MAO Miss titleholders must have been 18 to 24 years of age to participate.
4. All participants must have spoken and understood English fluently.

The five exclusion criteria for this study were as follows:

1. Former Miss "aged out" titleholders
2. MAO local Miss titleholder that were 17 years of age,

3. Any local MAO preliminary Miss titleholder in which I was or am currently her local executive director (LED)
4. I did not accept any participants whom I have judged in the past crowning year,
5. I also disqualified myself from judging my study participants in the following two crowning years.

### **Data Collection**

Before the interviews were conducted, all participants signed an informed consent form. For a sample consent form used in this study (see Appendices D). Data were collected during the case study interviews based on the interview protocol (see Appendix E) and seven predetermined research questions (see Appendix F). The data collection method consisted of semistructured, open-ended questions designed to ascertain participants perceptions (Cheng, 2007; Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Gaižauskaitė, 2012; George, 2012; Then, Rankin, & Ali, 2014), were used in this study. Interviews were audio recorded and I immediately transcribed participants' responses. It was imperative for me to journal preconceived notions about the study subject, including any opinions about particular participant experiences. It was necessary for me to present myself as a researcher to my interviewees to distance myself from my role as a former MAO local titleholder as well as a current LED and MAO state approved judge.

### **Instrumentation**

Each participant completed an audio recorded interview. Interview questions are drawn from the literature review (Williams & McCarthy, 2014), which are located in Chapter 2. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Each case study consisted of

the participants following the same protocol and answering semistructured questions regarding their experience and perceptions of societal stereotypes of MAPCs. See the attached interview protocol in Appendix E and interview questions in Appendix F.

### **Data Analysis**

I transcribed each audio voice recorded interview and field notes verbatim by hand typing data directly to Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Using Microsoft Excel allowed me to align questions with answers, as well as highlight and code identified themes or patterns. I transcribed each case study immediately following each interview.

During the process of data analysis data was interpreted into themes and patterns (Basit, 2003), I attempted to gain a more thorough understanding of the phenomena through conducting case study interviews, Following the directions as outlined by Löfgren (2013), I first read each transcript from start to finish without any notations, then I re-read the transcript highlighting the keywords from the literature review and ICR theory: beauty, stereotypes, self-esteem, self-efficacy, or their equivalents in context. During the second cycle I followed Basit (2003), Henderson (2016), Janesick (2011) and Löfgren (2013) color coding, I color coded the participant's language to identify themes or patterns of information descriptively in words, phrases, or sentences. During the third cycle, I followed Cooper (2009) and Löfgren's (2013) descriptive coding, in which I determined categories to cross-analyze and interpreted the connections between the identified themes and patterns.

Additional background information on the MAO was not obtained through local, state, and national preliminary pageants. The participants presented no artifacts, such as

photographs, certificates of achievement, awards, academic scholarship notices, ribbons, banners, or other pageantry related items that could have been included in the data analysis. Upon completion of the data analysis phase, member checks were used before participants exited the study. I provided the executive director of the state MAO pageant and participants with a one to two page summary of the study's results, once member checks and the study was finalized.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

To enhance the credibility of a study, Cope (2014) stated that the researcher provides a thick description of the identified participants. I provided rich descriptions of MAPCs that had a shared human experience by using direct quotes from their audio-recorded interviews. Reilly (2013) stated that case studies gain credibility through member checks, which allow participants to correct researcher misinterpretations, correct errors, and gauge the results. I conducted five case studies that were member checked after data collection, transcription, and analysis were completed. I also used audit trails to provide interview protocol during the interviews. In addition, I also used preconstructed interview questions, which were crafted to strengthen the data after audio-recorded interviews are transcribed and analyzed.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability is established by giving thick descriptions of the research process (Cope, 2014). I established transferability for this study by providing a thick description of the research methodology, data collection procedures, and study results. Member

checks allow the participants an opportunity correct possible researcher misinterpretations, correct errors, and gauge the results (Reilly, 2013). I used five case studies that were member checked after data collection, transcription, and analysis was completed. I used audit trails to provide interview protocol during the interviews. I also developed research questions, research protocol, and a detailed summary of the results so that the reader and the other researchers can duplicate the study in similar population settings.

### **Dependability**

Dependability can be established through interview protocol that also assists with identifying themes (Vance, 2015), I established dependability in this study by conducting semi-structured interviews that are guided by pre-established interview protocol. I also utilized interview protocol to assist me with identifying themes and patterns during the analysis of the data. Dependability also means that the study can be replicated (Cope, 2014), I found that this study's findings could be replicated with similar participants within a comparable condition. In chapter 4 the research design, operational detail of data collections, and implementation was discussed in length. This comprehensive outline provided an effective evaluation of the qualitative inquiry.

### **Conformability**

Conformability is established by avoiding researcher bias (Cope, 2014), in this study I conveyed the participant's responses and not my biases. I did this by describing the participant's interpretations and inferences. I also used the participant's quotes to



depict emerging themes or patterns. Chapter 4 provided a detailed description of methodology.

### **Ethical Protections**

I did not recruit study participants until Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved my study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for ensuring that research complies with university ethical standards and the United States federal regulations on research to avoid coercion or harm to the study's human participants (Campbell, Vogeli, Rao, Abraham, Pierson, & Applebaum, 2015). In addition to receiving IRB approval number 06-29-16-0363883 with an expiration date of June 28, 2017, I also obtained a letter of cooperation (see Appendix B) from the designated state MAO pageant Executive Director. Once I received Walden University's IRB approval and letter of cooperation from the state MAO pageant office, I provided informed consent forms to each potential research participant before the first case study interview, as well as before the interviews began. Recruitment occurred through current Local Executive Directors (LEDs) and MAPC that were local Miss titleholders in the Southeastern region of the United States. All participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D) before being interviewed.

The three- page informed consent form provided an overview of the study to participants and contains my contact information, Walden University IRB approval number, and the projected time frame of the study. In addition, the informed consent form also outlines that participation in this study is voluntary and that the participants have an option to withdraw without repercussions. The form also assured participants that

all interview transcripts would be confidential and would not include names, geographical locations, or their local titles. All data collected during this study, informed consent, audio voice recordings, and transcribed electronic paper copies, are being kept in a secured locked location for five years and then destroyed (a) paper data will be shredded, (b) electronic data files will be deleted, and (c) audio recordings will be erased.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 explained the methodology utilized to conduct this study. The purpose of research design, rationale, and the theoretical framework was described to establish trustworthiness. Data collection and analysis procedures were outlined to strengthen the studies framework. I reported the detailed process, findings, and data analysis thoroughly in chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of societal stereotypes and the possible effects these might have on MAPCs' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and willingness to participate in pageantry. The primary focus of this study was to determine if stereotypes of MAPCs still exist. Two main research questions guided this study. The first was: How do local preliminary MAPCs perceive their decision to participate in pageantry, in relation to their beliefs about any existing stereotypes of MAPCs and societal views on pageants? The second question was: How do local preliminary MAPCs perceptions of societal views of pageantry and any existing stereotypes relate to their perceptions of self-esteem and achievement? In the following sections, I described data collection procedures, data analysis, data results, and the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Setting**

There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants' responses, or that would have affected my ability to interpret the study's results based on the participants' responses. I conducted four of the interviews in a designated room in my house, and one took place outside, in front of a martial arts studio.

### **Demographics**

The five participants who volunteered for this study were current local MAO Miss titleholders within the same state. I obtained the participants' ethnicity and ages by using the state MAO program book. Of the five participants, two were Caucasians, and three

were African Americans. The study participants' ages ranged from 18 – 22 years old. Each participant represented various parts of the state. In addition, each participant was also given a pseudonym to protect her confidentiality. Table 1 represents participant demographics, location, and interview times.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics and Location Represented*

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Location Represented
Emma	22	Caucasian	Low Country
April	21	African American	Pee Dee
Denise	18	African American	Low Country
Julie	22	African American	Piedmont
Kim	20	Caucasian	Piedmont

### **Data Collection**

I collected data from the five participants. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded; I created separate interview files that included my notes taken during the interviews for each participant. The interviews lasted between 6 and 17 minutes either over the telephone or FaceTime. The interview method, locations, times, and consent types are in Table 2. When the interviews were completed, the data were transcribed in Microsoft Excel directly from the digital recorder. The transcripts were color coded for themes and patterns that were based on the participants' lived experiences. Data were also retrieved from my field notes.

Table 2

*Participant Interview Method, Location, Times, and Consent*

Participant	Interview Method	Location	Interview Time	Consent
Emma	Telephone	Home	14 min. 8 sec.	Written
April	Telephone	Martial Arts Studio	16 min. 10 sec.	Verbal/Written
Denise	Telephone	Home	9 min. 38 sec.	Written
Julie	FaceTime	Home	6 min. 34 sec.	Written
Kim	Telephone	Home	15 min. 42 sec.	Written

**Data Collection Variations**

There was one variation for obtaining written consent before data collection. I allowed one participant to give me verbal consent prior to conducting our only interview. The variation was due to the participant experiencing extenuating circumstances of having to take care of an ill elderly family member unexpectedly during the agreed upon interview time. The ill elderly family member did not have internet access, a computer, a printer, or a scanner. The participant did not know when she would have internet and accessory access. The participant was able to gain internet and electronic accessory access 3 days later, at which point she was able to sign and email me her written consent. There were no other variations from the data collection plan, as described in Chapter 3 of this study.

**Data Analysis**

I began the process of data analysis by transcribing the interviews into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet immediately after I collected the data. I had to vary from the procedure of transcribing immediately after interviews for two interviews, due to the timing of the interviews and the pre-existing commitments. Those two interviews were transcribed at my earliest convenience, either later that day or early the next morning.

First, I read each transcript individually and in its entirety without any coding. The second time I read through the individual transcriptions, I highlighted in bold black keywords from the literature review and ICR theory the following terms: beauty, stereotypes, beauty pageant, Miss America, or their equivalent in context.

During the second cycle of my coding phase I color coded the participant's language to identify themes or patterns that described stereotypes in green, self-esteem in blue, self-efficacy in purple, and for all other themes and patterns that may relate to more than one category, I highlighted yellow. During the third and final phase of descriptive coding, I cross-analyzed and interpreted the connections between the identified themes and patterns. Table 3 represents data analysis themes and patterns that were revealed during analysis. Data was also retrieved from my field notes. Participants did not provide any additional artifacts such as photographs, certificates of achievement, ribbons, banners, or other pageantry related items were given to me for additional background information.

Table 3

*Data Analysis Themes and Patterns*

Stereotypes	Self-esteem	Self- efficacy
Participants are unintelligent	Changed my life	Connections & Friendships
Just pretty faces	Gave confidence	Positive motivation.
Only care about their image and looks	Influence life goals beyond pageantry	Acknowledge weaknesses to improve upon them
The girls are mean	Driven to compete more and become more active	Competition preparation.
Pageants are rigged	You can be who you are and still win	
Participants have a lot of money	Can see a change in their communities because of work she has done with her platform.	

**Evidence of Trustworthiness****Credibility**

Credibility was established in this study by performing member checks. Reilly (2013) stated that member checks were conducted by making sure each participant is provided a copy of their transcript to review it for accuracy. Therefore, I provided each participant with a copy of her transcript to review. This process allowed me to understand if I had transcribed the participant's intended perceptions from the audio recordings accurately. I also utilized audit trails, which provided specific data collection procedures in conjunction with research topic related interview questions, which strengthened the data that were transcribed and analyzed. There were no adjustments to the Chapter 3 credibility strategies.

**Transferability**

Cope (2014) stated that providing thorough descriptions of research methodology, data collection protocol, and results create transferability. Therefore, I utilized a case study to better understand a phenomenon by provided in-depth descriptions of research methodology, data collection protocol, and the use of narrative to formulate my results. Cope (2014) specified that studies could be duplicated in another setting if the reader and other researchers follow the developed research instruments, research protocol, and a holistic overview of the study results. I followed the study as mention above duplication guidelines. There were no adjustments to the Chapter 3 transferability strategies.

**Dependability**

Dependability should be established through protocol and data analysis (Cope, 2014); I ensured dependability by following interview protocol and data analysis were performed for identifying patterns and themes. Vance (2015) stated that semi-structured interviews, which provide a foundation for the participants' perspectives of the research phenomena reinforce the study's focus and to reduce bias. Therefore, I utilized a semi-structured interview. Dependable studies can be replicated within comparable conditions (Cope, 2014); hence, I provided and in-depth description of methodology, data collection protocol, and data analysis. There were no adjustments to the Chapter 3 dependability strategies.

**Conformability**

Conformability minimizes researcher feelings and bias through use of participant's direct thoughts and feelings (Cope, 2014), so I focused on describing the



participants' inferences through the use of participants' direct quotes. There were no adjustments to the Chapter 3 conformability strategies.

## **Results**

Participants were informed that their participation in this study would remain confidential. I created pseudonyms for each participant that was shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3 and that will be referenced throughout the remainder of the study. All interviews took place between July 14, 2016 and July 23, 2016.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was: How do local preliminary MAPCs perceive their decision to participate in pageantry in relation to their beliefs about any existing stereotypes of MAPCs and societal views on pageants? In the analysis of this question, the participants expressed their exposure of social stereotypes. In addressing the existence of stereotypes, Denise reflected on her exposure to the stereotypes about MAPCs:

Sometimes, I've heard that pageant girls aren't as smart as they seem because like I said, they [society] say pageant girls care about their, you know, outer image because they [society] think that we [MAPCs] are all about the glitz and the glam, but I feel like we are very intelligent.

Julie had a similar thought on MAPCs being stereotyped:

[I have heard] That pageant girls are just pretty faces, that they're not intelligent and that they are worried about one thing: if their make-up is melting off of their face and that their outfit is put together the way they want it to.

Julie also reflected on overall societal stereotypes that she faces and how these have

influenced her decision to achieve her goals:

The stereotypes have allowed me to use the downfalls that society says...I'm an African American woman, woman, or because I am young that I don't have an impact in this world and that I, whatever I have to say will not make a difference, and it doesn't matter...it's actually given me confidence and the encouragement to prove them wrong.

Emma reflected on her independent thinking and its impact on her decision to participate in the MAO pageant system:

I don't think that they [stereotypes] necessarily, especially starting out, influenced me at all because that's kinda always been the type of person that doesn't really care what society says, and I saw an opportunity, and I ran with it.

Kim echoed a similar thought about participating in MAO despite stereotypes:

Nothing really held me back from doing it [pageant participation].

Denise also identified another reason to overlook societal stereotypes of MAPCs:

Well, I decided to enter the Miss America Organization preliminary pageant because it was a great way to get scholarship money for me. I'm a child of a single mother, and it is hard for us to save for college. When I found out that [the state MAO pageant] was one of the best and biggest scholarship organizations, I definitely wanted to get involved with that.

In the analysis of my first research question, I found that the participants expressed that

societal stereotypes (see Table 2) of MAPCs do still exist. The themes that correlated with this question were stereotypes that did not affect MAPCs' decisions to participate in MAO preliminary pageants. Despite participants identifying an awareness of the societal stereotypes related to MAPCs, the participants still wanted to compete.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question was: How do local preliminary MAPCs' perceptions of societal views of pageantry and any existing stereotypes relate to their perceptions of their self-esteem and achievements? In the analysis of this question, the responses from the participants provided insight into MAPCs' self-esteem and self-efficacy after competing in their state MAO pageant. The research themes associated with this question are listed in Table 2. Julie stated her view of her experience:

I think that it was a life changing experience for me. Even though I didn't bring home the crown, it still allowed me to be a winner.

Emma echoed the MAO's effect and the transformation that took place for her:

Overall, when I look at who I was before I started the journey, this year specifically, and now I'm a completely different person in the most positive way possible. I've made so many connections through my work with my platform, that will you know, completely transform my opportunities as far as my career goes. But other than that I'm just already looking forward to the next year and to all of the work that I know can improve my chances of going to Miss America next year.

Kim echoed Julie and Emma's feelings but with a more detailed description that included her change in self-esteem and self-efficacy:

Afterwards [after the state MAO pageant] and I was truly happy for the other girls and when I got home my life literally like blew up. I mean I was on my way home from the [state] pageant and an attorney that I had sent a sponsorship letter sent me a message to come and work for them. Now I work for two different attorneys. I didn't expect that you know. All kinds of things people messaged me about my platform and how they feel about my on-stage question, my website got a lot of people to notice it. So, I had teachers that went and saw my website and messaged me about coming and speaking to their classes and like I wish I knew all this stuff going into it. It was like I really set a foundation for myself for next year I think. It's pretty cool.

April echoed the thoughts of the previous participants, but she also added the influence of peer motivation:

I guess everyone goes with the goal of being [the state MAO titleholder] but it is way more than that; it is way deeper than that it is all about the connections and the friendships. And I know that sounds cheesy or cliché but it is honestly the truth and basically pushing myself because once I found myself around other females who were just as ambitious as I was or as I am. It just motivated [me] to work towards my goals.

Another perception of each participant was self-efficacy. April offered a specific example of a weakness that she needs to work on to be successful in MAO competitions as well as

in her life:

I'm still learning how to speak, and I acknowledge that I am weak in that area, and it's just, I don't really see it as a weakness but it's something that I can work on. So overall, preparing for [state MAO competition] has influenced my goals outside of the pageantry world.

Emma gave an example of how preparing for competition gave her direction:

After this year of preparation and platform work and you know, just everything that comes with competing in the [state] pageant, I know exactly where I want to be.

Kim also echoed Emma's thoughts on pageant preparation:

I was going to take a year off, but I was like I can't take a year off because my platform just got all these people to start noticing my platform and it's so big and to stop right now when everything is kinda skyrocketing, I feel that would just be a waste. So, I am planning on doing it again because of really the reaction [to my platform] that I got afterwards.

In the analysis of my second research question, I found that the participants expressed that the stereotypes that do exist towards MAPCs did not have an effect on their self-esteem, self-efficacy, or their decision to participate in the MAO pageant system.

However, what did have an effect on their self-esteem and self-efficacy was preparing for competition, either focusing on a specific competition category or through the work with their platform. Each participant expressed that being a MAPC has changed her life in one

or a combination of ways through having a new purpose, friendships, networking, career opportunities, and preparing for life beyond pageantry.

### **Summary**

The answers to the research questions illustrated a need to examine the subculture of MAPCs further. The ability to study the complexities of why young women compete in the MAO pageant system will not be simple and it will take the MAO to educate society about its goals and the possible effects that it has on young women. Societal stereotypes of MAPCs still exist, but they do not easily influence participants' decisions to compete in the MAO pageants.

The participants in this study also expressed that societal stereotypical views and the existence of stereotypes towards MAPCs did not have an effect on their self-esteem or self-efficacy. However preparing to compete in their state MAO pageant by promoting their platforms and working to improve in specific categories of competition did have a positive effect on their self-esteem and self-efficacy. The following chapter will discuss the study results by providing interpretations of my finding, study limitations, and conclusions. Recommendations for future research studies were also made.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to determine if societal stereotypes of MAPCs exist and whether potential stereotypes affect the participants' perceived self-esteem, self-efficacy, and their potential to participate in the MAO system. The study was qualitative and used personal interviews of local MAO Miss titleholders to ascertain their perception about societal stereotypes of MAPCs and the potential effects on their self-esteem and goal achievement. I conducted the study to gain a clearer understanding of MAPCs' perceptions and experiences to create social awareness based on the needs of the women who participate in this subculture.

The major findings of this study revealed that current MAO Miss titleholders who took part in this study had been exposed to stereotypes toward MAPCs. Participants' self-esteems and decisions to participate were not affected by the existence of those presented stereotypes. In contrast, the study participants expressed that their self-efficacy increased through peer motivation and platform promotion. The study revealed a need for further studies to be conducted with MAPCs to focus on societal stereotypes, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Researchers using intercultural communication research (ICR) studies examine stereotypes about minorities and subcultures and the impact, evolution, and persistence of those stereotypes (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Kurylo & Robles, 2015). In comparing the literature review with participant responses, I confirmed that societal stereotypes

influence individual beliefs toward this subculture. The comparison also offered some insight into the remaining cultural stereotypes. Participants' responses highlighted their exposure to stereotypes towards MAPCs. All of the participants mentioned two shared stereotypes that were also the focus of the 1968 WLF protest of the Miss America pageant; those stereotypes were that MAPCs are unintelligent and that they are just pretty faces. The other identified stereotypes were that the other participants are mean, the pageants are rigged, the participants have a lot of money, and that MAPCs only care about their image and looks.

Kurylo and Robles (2015) stated that stereotypical societal views of a minority or subcultural group are established through information exchanges longitudinally either culturally, historically, or through social norms. This study provided additional insight into how the participants perceived societal stereotypes toward MAPC subculture. The participants stated that stereotypes did not influence their decisions to participate in the MAO pageant system. Participants also indicated that societal stereotype defiance could also influence women to take part in this pageant system.

According to Rosenfield and Mouzon (2013), societal stereotypes cause women to have low self-esteem and suffer from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. In addition, Deemer et al. (2014) stated that women who are stereotyped might also experience activity avoidance. The participants' responses and researchers' opinions differ regarding the influence of societal stereotypes on low self-esteem, mental health disorders, and activity avoidance. According to the participants' responses, their



participation in the MAO enhanced their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and their desire to continue to compete within this pageant system.

Crites, Dickson, and Lorenz (2015) and Storek and Furnham (2013) defined gender stereotypes as socially constructed roles given to men and women founded on behaviors, motivations, physical appearance, and qualities. Limited participant information was obtained regarding their perception of gender stereotyping. Gender stereotyping of the participants was directly discussed by only one of the five participants. Due to the lack of an emerging pattern concerning the influence of socially constructed roles, no interpretation could be provided for this societal gender stereotype.

Ort and Luciano (2015) described self-esteem as an individual's feelings of self-acceptance of one's self-worth, body image, competencies, social status, and worthiness. Osborne (2014) stated that self-esteem contributes to how a person interprets societal feedback. The participants indicated that they were not influenced not to compete. However, they did interpret the social feedback regarding MAPCs as a challenge to overcome. The study participants emphasized that being an MAPC had changed their lives.

Their lives have changed because they were more confident in themselves and their abilities after participating in the pageant. The participants also stated that after competing they felt that they could compete without needing to change who they are to win. The participants expressed pride in seeing the changes that they have made through the work promoting their platforms throughout their communities. This pride has driven them all to want to compete more and become more active in the communities in which

they live. Also, each participant indicated that competing in the MAO pageant system influenced her life goals beyond taking part in pageantry. These findings indicate that there has been a positive change in the participants' self-esteem and hints at a possible change in their self-efficacy.

According to Vera et al. (2014), self-efficacy is self-regulating motivation in which the individual sets a goal and determines the amount of effort and perseverance one needs to achieve the target goal. In addition, Bumann and Younkin (2012) and Lambert et al. (2013) stated that an individual's self-efficacy could be strengthened through mastering an experience, being exposed to various experiences, experiencing peer influence, and awareness of physiological response. All participants involved in this study stated that they had a desire to become their state MAO titleholder. Even with each MAPCs' desire to become the state MAO titleholder, each acknowledged the fact that there could only be one state MAO representative.

Despite this knowledge, each participant recognized the amount of work it took to prepare for their state competition in case they were chosen to represent the state on the national level at the Miss America pageant. The participants mentioned that preparing for the state MAO pageant consisted of working out, practicing their interview skills, making appearances in their communities, fundraising for ad pages, and promoting their platforms. While the participants were preparing to compete for their state MAO title, each expressed a need to improve in at least one of the five MAO competition categories phases.

In addition, the participants also stated that their motivations for wanting to compete in the MAO pageant system were a combination of two or more of the following factors: either MAO peer influence, community support, scholarship opportunities, networking, or platform promotion. Despite the participants' motivations to compete, each expressed an interest in competing during this next crowning year because each would like another chance to win their state MAO title. These findings indicate that the young women that compete in the MAO pageant system may be affected by stereotypes in a positive rather than negative way.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were limitations in the completion of this study in addition to those listed in Chapter 1. Only African American and Caucasian women participated in this study. The participants were localized to one Southeastern state and did not represent the opinions of other local MAO Miss titleholders. This study's participants provided insight into the studied phenomena and the possibility for future research development.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for future research include using this study's identical methodology and research design to examine specific social stereotypes related to MAPCs, such as gender stereotypes. Also, the effects that stereotypes have on MAPCs could be studied further. This study contributes to scholarly knowledge of MAPCs, and future research must be done to generalize findings.

I am recommending that researchers use either a quantitative or mixed methodology. Use of one of these methods would enable the researchers to utilize larger

MAPC population sizes from various states, and it would make the findings more statistically reliable, as well as increase the opportunity for a more ethnically diverse population. Future researchers should continue to focus on raising awareness about the experiences of young women while competing in the MAO pageant system. These recommendations could create an atmosphere for further academic discussion about how competing in the MAO pageant system impacts its participants.

### **Implications**

The problem for this study was that MAPCs have been negatively stereotyped socially and that they failed to align with feminist gender stereotypical views of women, which could contribute to MAPCs having low self-esteem, mental disorders, and set low achievement goals. Contrary to the concern, participants in this study expressed that while societal stereotypical views of MAPCs still exist and despite being exposed to these stereotypes, the participants indicated that the stigma did not have an effect on their self-esteem or self-efficacy. On the contrary, the study participants indicated that preparing to compete in their state MAO pageant had a positive effect on their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Participants do not buy into the social norms categorizing MAPCs and overcome social stigma with their personal resilience. Their resilience validates the subculture, and it is keeping their overall achievement goals for pageantry and outside of pageantry, with the subsequent opportunities that arise.

This study is important because it highlights why the MAO pageant system appeals to young women. Validating the MAPC subculture and creating a better understanding of it will create an atmosphere of empowerment for all stakeholders.

Individual opportunities are there for MAPCs to defy social stereotypes, and not to allow the stigma to stop them from succeeding. The study participants demonstrated capability, intelligence, and determination, which were displayed by honing their skills through preparing to compete. The dominant skill expressed by the study participants was learning how to improve their interview abilities. The interview skill set improves articulation, which implies that MAPCs could enhance their employment marketability in this modern day job market.

In addition to the value of the lessons individual potential participants can learn, it is important to educate the community by providing missing information that may help to revise societal stereotypes. That information comes from the lived experiences of MAPCs. Educating the community about the realities of MAPCs could possibility decrease the negative stereotypes associated with the MAO competitors, which would reduce the barrier of stigma and make the opportunities that are part of the pageant more available to an increased number of women. Also, the MAO could also revise and promote their pageant system as more than a beauty pageant; but as a possible self-esteem and self-efficacy booster for young women. The more discussion in the public domain about the potential value of MAO participation and the opportunities it brings, the better the chance to influence existing stereotypes. MAO and its partners can provide new marketing, new image for the MAO to reposition the competition as a way of highlighting the best and the brightest young women in America. The sharing of new information could create advocates who would spread this information within their families, jobs, and communities.

This study used ICR to explore ways in which social stereotyping affects MAPCs. Hall and Whyte (1960) stated that ICR assists in describing subcultural norms or beliefs that may not be expressed consciously towards MAPCs. This study identified that social stereotyping of MAPCs still exists, and for the participants in this study, that these stereotypes have no effect on their self-esteem, self-efficacy, or decision to participate. In addition, MAPCs become more socially conscious of the issues facing their direct communities and society due to their work promoting their MAO social platforms. This result implies MAPCs present a different voice for women as developing social change agents and the skills they develop in competitions continue to be advocates for social causes beyond their competition years. Continuing to conduct further research on MAPCs will increase awareness of the subculture and the possibility that participation in the MAO pageant system could have encouraging effects on MAPCs self-esteem and self-efficacy. The implication for future studies could be to follow MAPC's in post-competition years to determine the sustainability of skills developed through participation in pageantry.

### **Conclusion**

This study focused on how MAPCs view their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and their decision to participate in the MAO in relation to societal stereotypes of MAO pageant contestants. The knowledge of risk factors associated with stereotyping, expected societal norms, communication of those norms, and media exposure assisted with building that foundation for providing a clearer understanding of this subculture. According to the participants, stereotypes concerning MAPCs were based on the WLF beliefs that they

were unintelligent with pretty faces. Through this research, I explored and articulated MAPCs' decisions to participate in pageantry concerning existing stereotypes and societal views on the pageant. The participants indicated that societal stereotypes of MAPCs still exist, but that they competed despite the societal stereotypical influence.

The supplementary research question of this study inquired about the ways that the feminist stereotypical views of pageant participants influence local MAPCs' self-esteem, beliefs, perceptions, and decisions related to competition participation. The participants indicated that societal stereotypes had no influence on their decision to participate in the MAO. In contrast, participants did express that the acts of preparing for the state MAO competition positively influenced their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The recommendation for future studies is to use a larger sample size from a greater number of states to examine specific stereotypes for statistical reliability. Also, future studies of MAPCs will need more ethnic diversity among participants. The study of MAPCs not only affects local MAO Miss titleholders, but it also affects those who are a part of their families, jobs, and communities. By conducting this study, I attempted to contribute to the scholarly knowledge of this rarely studied subculture and my hope is that further research will be carried out on this topic to expand my findings.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Support

Miss State Scholarship Organization  
C/O Executive Director  
Mailing Address  
Mailing Address

Dear Executive Director,

My name is Ebony Bowers, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on the influence society has on Miss America Organization (MAO) preliminary titleholders beliefs and perceptions related to MAO pageant participation. My study is entitled the study entitled Social Stereotyping and Self-Esteem of Miss America Pageant Contestants. There are a small number of studies detailing the effects of pageant participation. What is not known is the Miss America Pageant Contestant's (MAPCs) perspective. This research will provide insight into MAPCs societal and pageant experiences.

Your assistance in conducting this study is much needed. If willing, I need one thing from you. What I need is for you to allow me to pre-construct an email, in which you will forward to all current Local Executive Directors (LEDs) and their Miss local preliminary titleholders (ages 18 to 24). The email will be used to identify possible participants and will allow them to know that this study is sanctioned by the state MAO preliminary pageant. It will also enable me to invite identified possible MAPCs to discuss the nature of this study and also provide them with a copy of the informed consent form. The participants are free to choose whether or not to participate and can discontinue participation at any time. Information provided by the participants will be kept strictly confidential.

I would welcome a telephone call from you to discuss any questions you may have concerning this study and your role in identifying research participants for the case study interviews to be conducted. Thank you, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Ebony F.M. Bowers  
Doctoral Student  
Walden University  
(XXX) XXX-XXXX  
Ebony.Bowers@waldenu.edu

## Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Ebony Bowers  
Mailing Address  
Mailing Address  
Date

Dear Ms. Bowers,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Social Stereotyping and Self-Esteem of Miss America Pageant Contestants. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct your case study interviews with our current local MAO Miss titleholders that are ages 18-24.

Ms. Bowers will not recruit study participants until Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves her study. Once the study has received IRB approval recruitment of participants will begin with Ms. Bowers pre-constructed email, in which the state pageant will forward to all current Local Executive Directors (LEDs) and their local Miss titleholders (ages 18 to 24). Before the interviews are conducted all participants will sign an informed consent form. Data will be collected during case study interviews based on the interview protocol and seven pre-determined research questions. Interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by Ms. Bowers. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their discretion.

I understand that our organization's responsibilities include: allowing Ms. Bowers to pre-construct an email that will be sent to the state office to be forwarded to all current LEDs and Miss contestants a copy of the letter to participate, the consent form, one hour case study interviews either conducted face-to-face, video conference, or by telephone at the participants convenience. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in these setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB and the Miss State Scholarship Organization.

Sincerely,  
President and Executive Director of the Miss State Scholarship Organization  
Miss State Scholarship Organization  
Mailing Address  
Mailing Address

## Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

To: MAO Miss Local Titleholders

Date:

Dear MAO Miss Local Titleholder,

You are asked to consider being a voluntary to participate in a Walden University study entitled Social Stereotyping and Self-Esteem of Miss America Pageant Contestants. This study will entail one case study interview per participant. These case study interviews will be conducted to better understanding how societal opinions shape participation and opinion of young women that participate in the Miss America Organization (MAO) preliminary pageants.

The idea is that with more information available on the influence of society has formed MAO preliminary titleholders beliefs and perceptions related to MAO pageant participation. This study will contribute by increasing the information currently known on the topic by adding another dimension of information that is currently unknown. The idea of the study is to create an environment that enhances societal knowledge of the possible effects that stereotypes have on Miss America Pageant Contestant's self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Your participation in this study is appreciated and does not have an effect on your future state competition standings. To participant in this study you will need to be a current local MAO Miss titleholder ages 18 to 24. The following exclusions will also be applied to protect participants from bias or pressure; 1) any local MAO Miss titleholders that I have or are currently the LED for will be eliminated in participating, 2) I will not accept any participants whom I have judged in the past crowning year, 3) I will also disqualify myself from judging my study participants in the following two crowning years, and 4) I will not be adding any identifying information such as participant's name, location, or preliminary titles.

For those of you that will be able to participate, upon completion of the study, you will be asked to review, verify, and clarify the data that I collected, transcribed, and analyzed. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience. Thank you, and I look forward to meeting or speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Ebony F.M. Bowers  
Doctoral Student  
Walden University  
(XXX) XXX-XXXX  
Ebony.Bowers@waldenu.edu



## Appendix D: Informed Consent

## CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study about better understanding how societal opinions shape participation and opinion of young women that participate in the Miss America Organization (MAO) preliminary pageants. The researcher is inviting current MAO local preliminary titleholders ages 18 to 24 to take part in the study. When recruiting participants electronically, I will obtain your name/contact information directly from you, the participant, or from your Local Executive Director (LED). If you would like to participate in this study, you will directly respond to me by email or telephone after you receive my pre-constructed recruitment letter from the state MAO office. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Ebony Bowers, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. This researcher may be known to some perspective participants as a former MAO Miss titleholder and as a current LED and MAO judge. This study is separate from Ebony’s past and current roles within the MAO.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to determine if society has formed MAO preliminary titleholder’s beliefs and perceptions related to MAO pageant participation.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Take part in either a face-to-face interviews, video conferencing, or telephone please either arrive, log in, or call at least fifteen minutes before the scheduled interview.
- During this time, you can ask questions, read, print, and sign informed consent form.
- Keep or print a copy of the consent form for your records.
- Participate in the case study that will take no longer than an hour.
- Answer proposed questions, and you will have an opportunity to add your observations and perceptions within a convenient environment.
- Allow that data to be collected through audio recording and note taking.
- Provide data that I will transcribe immediately following the interview.
- Review transcribed data (member check) so that you can correct any misinterpretations that I may have made during my data analysis.
- You and the participating organization will be provided with a one to two page summary of the studies results.

**Here are some sample questions:**

1) Why did you decide to enter a Miss America Organization (MAO) preliminary

pageant?

2) What are your feelings after competing for your state MAO title?

3) What stereotypes have you heard from your friends about competing in the MAO pageant system?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Walden University or Miss America Organization State Preliminary Pageant will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you choose to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Please note that not all volunteers will be contacted to take part.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue and becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose a risk to your safety or well-being.

This study may or may not have a direct benefit to its participants. Instead, it will benefit the larger community by providing understanding of the ways in which stereotypical societal views of MAPCs may influence self-esteem, beliefs, perceptions, and decisions related to social benefits or cost of local MAO Miss titleholders.

**Payment:**

There will be no payment for participating in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name, local title, or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by storing names separately from the electronic data in a locked environment. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now, or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email [ebony.bowers@waldenu.edu](mailto:ebony.bowers@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-29-16-0363883** and it expires on **June 28, 2017**. For face-to-face research, use: The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent for face to face, video conference, or telephone research that is not anonymous, use: signing below

Printed Name of Participant

---

Date of consent

---

Participant's Signature

---

Researcher's Signature

---

### Appendix E: Interview Protocol

My name is Ebony Bowers, and I will be conducting today's interview of current MAO Miss local preliminary titleholders (age 18 to 24) beliefs and perceptions of societal opinions that could shape participation and opinion of young women that participate in the Miss America Organization (MAO) preliminary pageants. To be mindful of your time this interview will take no longer than one-hour. I want to assure you and the other participants, that your name, title, or location will not be used, and a pseudonym will be assigned for your protection. Please be aware that since you are a volunteer for this study, you have the right not to answer any questions. Also, if you decide not to participate any further, you can discontinue your participant at any time.

I will be taking notes, and voice recording our interview session today.

My notes and voice recordings will ensure that I convey your exact thoughts and feelings. It is for that reason, I will be providing you with a copy of this transcript as well as this recording in order to make sure that I have everything conveyed the way you would like. Thank you for volunteering to assist me with this study. Do you have any questions? If there aren't any questions let's proceed with the interview

This is the end of my interview. I will be sending you a copy of the transcripts for you to review and clarify your meaning if it was misinterpreted. Once again thank you for participating in my study.

## Appendix F: Interview Questions

- 1) Why did you decide to enter a Miss America Organization (MAO) local preliminary pageant?
- 2) What are your feelings after competing for your state MAO title?
- 3) What stereotypes have you heard from your friends about competing in the MAO pageant system?
- 4) What stereotypes have you heard from society about competing in pageantry?
- 5) In what ways have societal stereotypes influenced your decision to participate in your state MAO pageant?
- 6) In what ways, if any has preparing for this competition influenced your determination to achieve your pageantry goals?
- 7) In what ways, if any do you think that MAO preliminary titleholders are changing societal stereotypes towards Miss America pageant contestants?