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Christine Buyce
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Attribution of Pageant Experience: Participants Self-Perceptions of Past Pageant Experience Examined as a Communication Competence Tool

Christine Buyce
Instructor
Marist College

This paper presents the results of an investigation into the relationship between women's past beauty pageant experience and communication competence. The study employed scale-based surveys to measure the attributions women make to their past beauty pageant experiences with regards to their personal construct development. The overarching paradigm of communication competence found origins in personal construct and attribution theory to ground the communication construct concepts researched. This paper's central purpose is to compare those with and without pageant experience and to identify any differences in their self-perception of communication competence, personal attractiveness, and job satisfaction. This study aims to close a research gap in the fields of interpersonal and organizational communication with pageant experience as the mediating variable. From both interpersonal and organizational perspectives, personal attraction and interviewing skills appear to be positively correlated with pageant experience, demonstrating the attribution of beauty as a communication competence development tool.

beauty pageants | personal construct theory | attribution theory | women | communication confidence | interpersonal communication

Introduction

Research into contemporary beauty pageants as variables for communication competence is limited. In the United States, pageants have long been used to define the "ideal" American woman, as a marketing or promotional tool, and yet today they spark controversy as modern women strive to balance the concepts of empowerment and objectification (Ades & Klainberg, 2001; Anuakan, 2004). Yet, the influence of past pageant experience on professional development and communication skills remains underexplored. We know that "beauty" is important as a 2009 report by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons found that three out of four working women believe that in today's competitive job market beauty plays a role in getting hired and getting promoted.

Beauty as a supposed critical component in a woman's career success creates contradictions where the public perception of pageant contestants is negative despite the fact that women's self-reported personal beliefs prove otherwise (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991). Measuring the communicative role that past pageant experience takes in a woman's perception of her own attractiveness, job satisfaction, and communication competence is themselves the catalyst for this study, especially since more than 73 percent of women in the United States, believe outward appearance is a major factor in their careers (The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2009, p.1). Yet, there remains a lack of research that analyzes the beauty pageant experience on women's perceptions of themselves. Nevertheless, self-perceptions or personal constructs relate to the

current body of princess literature, which include the princess as a constantly recurring symbol or motif. Females grow up being read to and later reading this body of literature as they are developing personal communication construct systems. The scripts emerging from the princess literature include mythical descriptions of princes and princesses that women tend to internalize as ideal and which they may carry throughout their adult lives (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991). Anuakan (2004) noted "The thematic structures in this body of literature, where the heroine is described as a princess, draw conclusions among femininity, beauty, race, and success, creating a perceptible formula-the measure of ideal womanhood" (p. 122). Princess literature over the past centuries has carved out a strong idealized western cultural image of beauty embodied in the fairy-tale princess with golden skin and long hair (Anuakan, 2004).

Western women historically are judged initially on their outer appearance (Feingold, 1992). Thus, to be successful, a woman should know what is considered attractive in any particular environment including cultural definitions. It is possible the feedback used, as part of pageant training develops the soft skills women need to present themselves more effectively in both social and workplace contexts (Muir, 2004, Rose, 2011; Schulz 2008). The interpersonal communication skills discussed in the literature review reflected the differences in an individual's self-perception of their own communication competence, personal attractiveness, and job satisfaction.

Professional soft skills are interpersonal communication skills that vary in degree based on an individual's personal behavioral competences (Muir, 2004; Schulz, 2008). Within any given context, soft skills reflect our personality traits and abilities. Abilities can be enhanced with practice through participation in a beauty pageant, which would serve a woman's intent to apply her own personal attractiveness and interviewing skills. Rose succinctly observes, "It's often said that hard skills will get you an interview, but you need soft skills to get and keep the job" (2011, p. 1).

Pageant experience provides valuable insight into the importance of soft skills needed to be successful in competitive professional environments, such as interviewing for a job or a promotion. Soft skills define the interpersonal dimension of life at work as people support what they help create, making soft skills essential tools for job satisfaction. (Muir, 2004).

So, a question remains. Are pageants symbolic of the oppression or the advancement of women? Studies have shown that women connect their appearance to their level of engagement in activities (Brodbeck & Evans, 2007; Feingold, 1992). For example, researchers analyzing the Dove beauty campaign found that "67% of all women aged 15-64 withdrew from life-engaging activities because they felt bad about their appearance" (Brodbeck & Evans, 2007, p.1). Measuring the attribution of past participation in beauty pageants with women's perception of their own attractiveness may reveal

how women tend to translate these experiences in their own professional development.

Personal Packaging Instructions for Women

Both scholars and economists have paid attention to practices of preferential treatment that attractive people are given in the workplace. Attractive people influence others socially and professionally that they have higher personal communication competence based on their own elevated communication competence self-perception.

Holmstrom & Bureson (2011) found in their work that failure and rejections based on job performance and physical appearance negatively affect feelings of acceptance lowering self-esteem for both men and women. Self-esteem is a soft skill that can be built up with positive correlations of job satisfaction and personal attractiveness.

Today, men comprise the majority of upper-management in the workforce, as "84.4% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies are males" (Brodbeck & Evans, 2007, p.1). The increased social nature of the workplace has made soft skill development critical to stay competitive in the current job market.

A woman's physical appearance is the first obvious and accessible personal characteristic presented to others in social interactions. A woman's outward appearance influences her self-concept development as she adapts to become more competitive based on her particular environments perception of beauty (Dion, Berscheid and Walster, 1972). Beauty pageant experience influences communication competence. Women are continually judged, allowing them to measure their self-concept against others' perceptions including their communication competence, personal attractiveness, and job satisfaction. Amagoh's (2008) research found that individuals in communication interactions learn from their experiences and restructure themselves to better adapt to the environment for the next interaction. The competitive aspect of beauty pageants stresses adaptation. Contestants use developing constructs within themselves to gain control over future communication episodes based on past pageant outcomes to reduce uncertainty of how they will be perceived by future judges (Amagoh, 2008; Lewis et. al, 2006; Mowen & Voss, 2008; Stoker, 2005).

Beauty pageant experience may be a powerful career tool when it comes to developing higher personal perceptions of a woman's own personal attractiveness and level of professional soft skills. Soe & Yakura's (2008) work suggests that organizational culture and climate can significantly affect women's participation and life outcomes. The impact of looks on personal attraction in a woman's particular organizational culture may be more critical to women if relationship building is essential for successful life outcomes. According to Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo (1991), "Therefore, women may

work harder to be perceived as socially competent, accounting for women's greater interest in their personal appearance and the greater centrality of looks in their self-concepts" (p. 122).

These outcomes can be measured in career success or marital success as perceived by the individual. Personal construct development for women warrants the present study of past participation in beauty pageants as a professional interpersonal skills development tool in order to fill a gap in the research examining the attribution women make to their pageant experience. Similar research on charisma suggests charisma can be learned, but does not offer research to support how it needs to be taught or is taught (Antonakis, Fenley & Liechti, 2011). Exploring the connection between similar soft skills emerging from past pageant experience might begin to answer these why and how questions.

Another area that Soe & Yakura's (2008) research noted was that once women enter the typically higher-level and male dominated roles, they might begin themselves to reinforce the dominant culture and norms as they adapt to the competitive environment leading this research again to pageant experience as a mediating variable. The competitive experience appears in Greene's (1996) scholarly article on personal construct theory applied to sales performance, which argued that personal construct theory "is at the core of what selling really is" (p. 25). The hyper-competitive experience allows for a typically motivated learner to adapt as a contestant. This sparks examination of the language literacy that takes place as soft skills are tested repeatedly with each competition experience in a particular context, be it as a salesperson or pageant contestant (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972).

Similarly, the competitive experience relates to communication competence and the effective use of language in professional settings. The repetitive feedback loop that pageants provide can be further examined as an intervention approach using the competition/reward factor as motivation for the learner to want to increase her communication skills. Pageant contestants are given feedback on their appearance and interviewing skills providing a counseling component to address issues of self-concept and low self-esteem demonstrated in other language literacy intervention approaches (Wolter, DiLollo & Apel, 2006).

The survival of the communication fittest is what drives the interest in this area of communication research. Because women must manage cultural expectations for beauty and possess the necessary professional soft skills in order to be competitive in their careers, it is important to analyze the potential for pageants to serve as developmental tools for women. Previous research has failed to link past pageant experience with self-perceptions of communication competence, attractiveness, and job satisfaction. In linking these concepts, I aim to analyze pageants as a career-development tool in a way that is consistent with previous research finding that how people see their actions, traits, and attitudes

impacts their overall self-evaluations and opportunities for power and influence (Aldoory, Reber, Berger & Toth, 2008; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005; Scott, 1977).

Literature Review

Communication fidelity is heuristic as message production skills and message reception skills are unifying themes in communication research and theory. Current research in message production and message reception skills contribute to understanding and to the aim of reaching the highest fidelity in human interaction. Powers & Witt (2008) stated that, "Communication fidelity constitutes a unique and strategically important variable imbedded in virtually every communication event; therefore, the construct shares a conceptual linkage with a number of other communication, sociological, and psychological theories" (p.249). The concept of communication fidelity derives from internal factors that impact individuals as they aim to make sense of the environment they are in. Researchers have found that Westerners generally define situations and give meaning to objects and events as a necessary part of the explanation, so communication fidelity based on one's personal experiences (Delia, 1977; Feeny & Wang, 2010; Plank & Green, 1996; Marsden & Littler, 2000).

As such, the following review of literature focuses on past pageant experience as a mediating variable for self-evaluations of professional soft skills. The review discusses the concept of perceived communication competence as it relates to a woman's beauty pageant experience. Women with pageant experience self report their attribution the experience has for them in their careers.

Connecting Communication Competence, Attractiveness, and Job Performance

A woman's abilities to communicate competently while striking an attractive appearance are important variables in a woman's workplace success. Employers today either explicitly or tacitly require potential employees to exhibit a variety of soft skills, which in itself warrants research on tools that help women increase communication competence (Muir, 2004; Rose, 2011; Schulz, 2008). The evolution of technology including *Facebook* and *LinkedIn* has merged social media with organizational communication. Further, the increasing use of social media in today's job market requires women to manage their interpersonal communications on a constant basis (Perlmutter, 2009). Researchers have noted that communication effectiveness requires interpersonal impression formation, which has been related to such communication variables as self-disclosure, attraction, perceived communication competence, and the perception of having a voice (Cronen, 1978; Delia, 1999; Hales & Delia, 1976; Hindi, Miller & Catt, 2004).

People decide how they will communicate or whether to communicate at all. The decision aspect of communication leads to defining communication competence as the level of self-perceived communication competence prior to participating in a communication episode. It is the self-reported perception of communication competence skills that directly influence a person's confidence level in both their interpersonal and organizational experiences (McCroskey and McCroskey, 1988). Communication competence transfers with the individual from interpersonal and organizational settings and vice versa. Powers and Witt (2008) found that, "Given the infinite variety of contextual circumstances across a full spectrum of communication events, the relative importance and impact of each of these factors will vary from one communication event to the other" (p. 260).

Alliez (2008) defined speculative philosophy, as an effort to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms our experience can be interpreted, drawing this study to examining pageants as a communication competence training tool. By adopting personal construct theory as a theoretical framework, this study was able to compare self-perceptions of women who participated in pageants and those that had not. This study aimed to extend our understanding of contestants' self-perceived communication competence, attractiveness, and job satisfaction attributed to that experience compared to those without it. Roberts (1999) stated, "The key to constructive alternativism lies in the anticipatory nature of personal construing" (p. 119). Delia (1974) defined cognitive complexity by the number of interpersonal constructs a person's system produces for each context. Professional environments have increased the required soft skills levels of workers. Early research by Clark and Delia confirmed that cognitively complex children varied their communication based on their audience (1977). The ability to effectively communicate requires a strong system of interpersonal constructs. Decades later, Zorn provided evidence that cognitively complex people are more effective in professional interactions (1991).

Organizations are now taking the role of customer service as another customer service resource as social networking becomes a requirement for organizational communication. Dabholkar, Dolen and Ruter (2009) examined the study of the role of employee communication styles in enhancing relationship formation with consumers. In studying domains of competency on job performance, Holmstrom and Burleson (2011) look closely at physical appearance-messages focused on altering attributions and appraisals that improved self-esteem to a greater extent than those that focused on alternating behaviors. They also focus on making realistic appraisals about coping potential and future expectancy that are ground in past success. Beauty pageants are communication events that utilize adaptive behavior to prepare contestants for changes in communication style as

needed, which makes beauty a communication competence development tool (McGregory, (2004).

Delia (1974) found that the quality of the interaction played as much of a role as the frequency of the social interaction. This was supported by the later work of Pearson and VanHorn (2004) who noted that cognitive quality determines the depth level of impression management beyond mere surface appearances as the boundaries between work and home has blurred with the increase in technology and social media. Plank and Green (1996) noted "The number of constructs a person uses to define their environment is referred to as cognitive complexity" (p. 32). Review of the selected literature revealed many concepts related to communication competence, attraction and job satisfaction. However, there remain significant gaps in outlining developmental tools with an intrinsic motivator such as competition in the context of pageants. Nonetheless, the literature does provide some solid theoretical grounding for this study.

Theoretical Grounding

This research has grown out of a desire to understand whether pageant contestants as a group later succeed in the workplace because of their experiences in continuously testing their construct systems. The pageant participants are given the tools to anticipate what is perceived as beauty and work to change their attributes and concepts constructs to meet those expectations. The continual proactive and experimental nature of pageant training allows women to assign meaning to frequently encountered situations where they are tested. The testing of their constructs strengthens their ability to retrieve these constructs as situations call for them.

Pageant experience as a complex construct includes valuable anticipatory communication skills that can be retrieved for use in an organizational domain. Contestants have the necessary reference points in their personal construct systems to make personal decisions to change and, thus, to meet the perceptions of those judging them interpersonally or within an organization for any given situation.

Personal Construct Theory

Personal construct theory (PCT) is a theory of personal perception as each individual needs to make sense of their world and how to anticipate communication interactions. Developing personal constructs are critical to communication effectiveness in both interpersonal and organizational settings. Plank and Green (1996) noted that "Empirical work using PCT as a base has been noticeably successful in demonstrating the value of the theoretical perspectives in predicting both successful communication as well as successful persuasive communication" (p. 26). Personal

construct theory provides a theoretical framework to predict and explain communication competence as people perceive their experience, examine the outcomes and prepare for the next interaction (Plank and Green, 1996).

Relationship formation using a skilled interpersonal communication style in the workplace is critical for success as the lines have been blurred between the work/life boundaries (Dabholkah, 2009; Cowan & Hoffman, 2007; Hasinoff, 2009). The need to practice the social and professional soft skills required to build successful relationships led the research in the direction of pageants to be considered as the context for the study. The study examined self-reported communication competence, job satisfaction, the sense of personal attractiveness of women with and without pageant experience.

As contestants contend with continual critical assessment, the competition aspect inherent in beauty pageants may increase communication competence among the women who participate in them. Muir (2004) found that "Soft skills are attitudes and behaviors displayed in interactions among individuals that affect the outcomes of such encounters (p. 96). Titles are the public display of successful pageant outcomes that influence professional soft skill development of the contestants long after the pageants are over. Clark and Delia (1979) stated, "conceptual clarification provides in devising means of assessing perspective-taking abilities" (p. 197).

North American culture tends to nurture and reinforce individual values through socialization whereas East Asian culture tends to nurture and reinforce group values. This leads to cultural differences in cognitive construct development based on cultural values. Feeny and Wang (2010) found that personal constructs are influenced by social interactions. Social and organizational context both appear simultaneously in today's professional workplace (Schulz, 2008).

Women tend to be much more effective communicators in terms of situational adaptation, which pageants continually necessitate and test (Plank and Green, 1996). The competitive drive allows pageant participants to translate pageant presentation skills into their social and professional environments. The transfer of those skills appears to be driven by a perceived internal motivation to improve personal construct systems based on the western culture formula of idealized beauty (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972). The consistent practice of feedback during pageant competition regarding professional soft skills should the participants to more effectively construct a more complex understanding of skills useful in a professional context.

Attribution Theory

Personal construct theory intersects with attribution theory in line with what women (with and without pageant experience) ascribe their communication competence, personal

attractiveness, and job satisfaction to. Scholarly work seeks to understand the underlying processes of relationship formation (Dabholkah, 2009, Cowan & Hoffman, 2007; Hasinoff, 2009). Roberts (1999) observes that, “as researchers, we should be open to a wide variety of ‘ways of seeing’, so that we do not become enslaved by a particular approach or theory” (p. 122). Clark and Delia’s Constructivism work in the early seventies examined the cognitive complexity of interpersonal communication (1974). Later scholarly research has provided evidence that cognitively complex people are more effective in professional interactions (Pearson & VanHorn, 2004).

Campos (2007) states that “social perception of communication theories such as grounded theory approach, attribution theory which identify casual dimensions on which behavior falls as success and attributions are intertwined [since] high ability and effort are attributed to success and why a particular outcome occurred” (p.387).

Attribution theories of emotion posit that emotional reactions to events depend on beliefs about their cause. Holmstrom and Bureson (2011) define attribution theory by asking, “What do you attribute the behavior to?” (p. 362). Attribution Theory relates to the overall study as success and its attributions are intertwined. Feeny & Wang (2010) found that the placement of cause and responsibility guides subsequent behavior. Attribution theory was used in this study incorporating pageant experience as one of the mediating variables.

Scott (1977) noted that new studies are needed which systematically examine the effectiveness of influence strategies, which can be used to test relationships between mediating variables. Pageant experience needs to be examined as a mediating variable in the development of professional soft skills through the lens of the beauty pageant contestants themselves measuring their perceived view that the experience had on their attraction and interviewing skills. Ross and Holmberg (1992) report that women state more vivid memories of relational events. This may be due to the widespread perception among women that their personal life outcomes, such as career or marital success, depend largely upon their personal attraction and soft skills. People work to make sense of their world and how to operate their communication constructs in it. Women may attribute winning a beauty pageant title as affirmation of their attractiveness, which may, as a consequence, correlate with a rise in their self-esteem. Feeny & Wang (2010) found the following:

This study took interest in understanding how people perceive success, what they attribute to success, and what they consider to be the drives for the pursuit of success. The study further looked into cultural differences as the explanatory agents. Western cultures tend to use personal agent, think analytically, and perceive the world as made of different categories of objects, and

therefore are more likely to make internal attributions to observed phenomena. (p. 64)

The descriptive phenomenon of beauty pageants provides fertile ground for examining what survey participants with pageant experience attribute their communication competence to. Delia (1974) found that, “such developmental changes however, may be a function not only of the number and range of a person’s social interactions but also of their quality” (p. 120). Cognitive quality determines the depth level impression management beyond surface appearances (Delia, 1974; Pearson & VanHorn, 2004).

Communication in the workplace enhances perceptions of status, power or esteem in women. As Plank and Greene (1996) state “this stream of literature is instructive” (p. 28). The review of past research literature is used to re-assess the contributions that each theory makes to contemporary understandings of human communication. Clark and Delia (1979) used “personal construct theories as the basis for an interpretive or attributional analysis of the perspective taking capacity” (p. 197). To that end, I propose the following hypotheses and research questions based on the relationships between women and beauty pageant experience attribution:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between beauty pageant experience and women’s perceptions of their communication competence.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between beauty pageant experience and women’s perception of their own attractiveness.

Research Question 1. Do women’s beauty pageant experiences necessarily correlate with their job satisfaction?

Methods

To fill the existing research gap evaluating the influence of past pageant experience on the key factors influencing career advancement, the present data were collected through surveys of men and women both with and without past pageant experience. The survey was released on July 3, 2012 and remained open until July, 20, 2012.

There were 118 emails sent out by myself to request participation in the survey ranging from friends, acquaintances, co-workers and pageant community members. I visited every state pageant website to obtain any emails available from current titles holders to board members. I visited each *Facebook* page of each current state titleholder and posted a link to the survey as well as posting it on my own *Facebook* page. The survey was also posted on my *LinkedIn* page.

Snowball sampling provided a further reach as participants forwarded the survey onto others and shared the link via their social media pages. VonBreitenbuch noted that,

"With snowball sampling a large sample can be reached in a relative short time period" (p.35). Snowball sampling is cost effective as the survey is set up via email and directed to the surveymonkey.com website. This resulted in 113 total participants with 93 female and 20 male participants. There were 18 women and no men with previous pageant experience that participated in the survey.

The study asked the eighteen female participants details of their pageant experience to measure the impact on those variables including years of pageant experience, number of titles, and if they were coached or not to test for correlations.

Measure

Refer to Appendix A for the full scale and adaptation for the present study. However, the measure borrows from three established scales for the majority of the measures with additional items tailored to the study itself. First, Franzio and Shields (1984) body-esteem scale was included to measure on a scale from 1 to 5 how male and female participants feel about parts or functions of their own bodies. Second, job satisfaction was measured using Macdonald and MacIntrye's generic job satisfaction scale (1997). The generic job satisfaction scale was included in the survey to measure job satisfaction from a broad occupational scope using a short 10 item scale.

Finally, because the present study relies on self-report data, McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) self-perceived communication competence scale (SPCC) was included to measure the concept of perceived communication competence. The scale uses twelve communication context along with a variety of receivers using a rating scale of 0=completely incompetent to 100=competence to measure both women with and without pageant experience for comparison.

Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed using Pearson Correlations that measure relationships among previous pageant experiences, communication competence, job satisfaction, and self-evaluations of attractiveness. While the correlations explain how well two variables relate as another variable changes, my survey analyzes what happens to the other. Correlations measure assumptions on a scale, interval or ratio measures of linear data. Resulting data come from measurements made on a scale and are not meant to imply causation. My study tested for any existing significant relationships among variables. The study met the sample size needed for significant Pearson Correlations exceeding 85 at the .05 level of significance (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Peck Richmond & McCrosky, 2008).

Results

See Table 1 for the full scale and adaptation for the present study. First, three reliable factors emerged from Franzio and Shields (1984) body-esteem scale. The first is physique (Eigenvalue = 13.26, with 38.99% of variance accounted and $\alpha = .93$) including participants' assessments of their thighs (.75), body build (.79), buttocks (.61), hips (.69), legs (.75), figure (.81), and weight (.75). Second is fitness (Eigenvalue = 2.73, with 8.02% of variance accounted and $\alpha = .91$) including participants' assessments of their physical stamina (.81), muscular strength (.79), energy level (.61), physical coordination (.64), agility (.72), health (.63), and physical conditioning (.67). Third is sexual confidence (Eigenvalue = 1.48, with 4.35% of variance accounted and $\alpha = .81$) including participants' assessments of their sexual drive (.80) and their sexual activity (.81).

Second, job satisfaction was measured using Macdonald and MacIntrye's generic job satisfaction scale (1997). Two reliable factors emerged from this scale including overall job satisfaction (Eigenvalue = 4.46, accounting for 49.58% of variance and $\alpha = .90$) including the following items: recognition for work (.77), close to people at work (.76), a good environment for working (.74), secure in the job (.64), get along with supervisors (.73), and feel good working for the organization (.84). Additionally, satisfaction with wages and talents (Eigenvalue = 1.08, accounting for 12.04% of the variance and $\alpha = .81$) including both satisfaction with wages (.86) and feeling that all talents and skills were being used (.77). Additional questions were asked of participants with previous pageant experience.

Finally, because the present study relies on self-report data, McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) self-perceived communication competence scale (SPCC) was included to measure the concept of perceived communication competence. Two reliable factors emerged from this measure. The first was perceived competence in communicating with strangers (Eigenvalue = 5.36, accounting for 53.63% of variance and $\alpha = .90$) and included participants' comfort in talking to strangers (.88), talking to a small group of strangers (.82), and talking in a large meeting of strangers (.93). The second was perceived competence in communicating with friends and acquaintances (Eigenvalue = 1.61, accounting for 16.44% of variance) including participants' comfort in talking to acquaintances (.67), talking to a friend (.84), talking to a small group of acquaintances (.63), and talking to a small group of friends (.91).

Hypothesis 1: Communication Competence Results

I found a significant correlation between communication competences with strangers as being stronger for pageant participants than those women without it as measured with the scale (see Table 2). The -.21 figure represents a strong relationship with a correlation coefficient closer to -.1. While

there was no significant relationship for communication competence among friends, hypothesis can be confirmed as a significant correlation appears for past pageant experience and perceived communication competence for past pageant participants and strangers.

The .526 figure signifies a strong relationship with communication competence with strangers and communication competence with friends and acquaintances for study participants. This relationship shows that if people can communicate comfortably with strangers, then they should also perceive that they will be able to communicate competently with friends and acquaintances

Another figure that merits discussion is the .278 figure, which suggests a strong relationship between communication competence with strangers and personal income. The competence level perceived by study participants communicating with strangers appears to have a positive relationship on the participant's personal income. This relationship would seem to further support conclusions drawn from studies of perceived communication competence with strangers: If people perceive they can communicate competently in this way, they may feel they can increase their income level, especially in jobs such as sales where nearly constant communication with strangers impacts sales success. A direct correlation, however, would require further research, but present data appear to suggest such a relationship

The .145 figure represents a strong relationship with education level and communication competence with strangers. The positive relationship supports the research that the more communication constructs they perceive themselves to have the more comfortable they are talking with strangers.

The .143 represents a strong relationship with education level and communication competence with friends and acquaintances. Here again the study reveals a positive relationship with participants and their education. The more knowledge a participant acquires the more constructs he or she develops for use in future communications interactions with friends and acquaintances.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived Attractiveness Results

Participation in beauty pageants relates positively to attraction and interviewing skills for women (see Table 2). However, this relationship was not statistically significant. The result may have been impacted by the small number of women who responded that had past pageant experience. When we examine those particular past contestant responses, we see a positive effect. A response of 71 percent for an agree to strongly agree response for a positive relationship of participation in beauty pageants and belief in attraction skills and a 76 percent belief result for interviewing skills. The perception that participating in beauty pageants positively affected attraction and interviewing skills supports

both hypotheses presented; however, the lack of a significant correlation means the second hypothesis cannot be confirmed, though the data is trending in that direction. The positive, but not significant, relationship between the female study participants and their belief that pageant experience helped them to be more attractive and better communicators supports past literature that examines interpersonal communication skills as they are used in organizational environments.

The .677 figure signifies a strong relationship with women who perceive much value in maintaining fitness and an attractive physique. This strong positive correlation shows that women have a perception of their overall fitness and their physique, by being physical fit they have a positive perception of their body.

Another interesting result was the .504 figure representing a strong relationship with femininity and sexual confidence. The participants positively related perceiving their own sense of femininity with their sexual confidence, which supported an original question of whether the two were necessarily connected. One conclusion that can be drawn here is that when women feel like women, they feel sexually confident.

Research Question 1: Job Satisfaction Results

Overall job and wage satisfaction along with use of talents variables relate to pageant participation with a -.12 and -.09 respectively showing a trend towards an effect for past pageant experience on job satisfaction and wages earned. While past pageant participants were more likely to be satisfied in their job and view that their employer better compensated and used their talents than those with no past pageant experience, these findings did not show a significant relationship between the variables. The results did not demonstrate a positive correlation on promotions and workplace longevity. Future researchers could examine these variables again using a larger sample of participants who have varying degrees of pageant experience.

Another interesting result that came out of the study for the entire sample was a .499 correlation representing a strong relationship with overall job satisfaction and satisfaction in wages and use of talents. This result reveals the perception that participants have toward being satisfied with their job as a result of what they perceive to be receiving a fair wage for their work.

The strong correlation among personal income related to merit raises and bonuses, reported as .501, represents a positive relationship that the participants perceived as their wages increased in their careers with advancement.

Another interesting correlation was the strong relationship that personal income had with education level coming in at .343 with a positive relationship. The higher the education the higher the personal income, as a perception, was supported. Those study participants that self-reported job satisfaction had a strong positive correlation with perception of self, along

with trending toward no relationship with cosmetic surgery either having had it or considering it. The $-.023$ represents 9 and 14. There appears to be no perceived need among participants for cosmetic surgery.

Discussion

As earlier stated, the purpose of this study was to investigate how previous pageant participants attribute their present communication competence to their past beauty pageant experiences. The present study provided support for a number of hypotheses. The findings are consistent with the "What is beautiful" and with soft skill research that "What is beautiful is good" (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Because this study focused upon comparing women with and without pageant experience, the results reflect varying degrees of pageant experience of the 18 participants with pageant experience. The range of experience was one to sixteen years. Future research warrants the examination of the number of years of pageant experience on self-perceptions of communication competence variables in relation to pageant tenure, number of titles. Examining a larger sample size of higher numbers of years of pageant experience as well as the number of titles won and comparing those figures to those of women without pageant experience would be fruitful. The study sought to gather this information, yet it would be beneficial to increase the sample of women with pageant experience so as to explore the relationship in greater depth.

If women perceive their pageant experience as valuable in their everyday lives, including in interpersonal and organizational contexts, that is what matters, not how it actually is. That is to say, their perception of this value seems to surpass objective reality in terms of importance.

One limitation of the study included a 30 percent draw in participants from the education field. In addition, there were only 18 participants with past pageant experience, which may account for the lack of significant results for hypothesis 2 and research question one. These data suggest a trend toward supporting a positive influence for past pageant experience on perceptions of personal attractiveness and job satisfaction, but future research should enlarge the sample size for comparison while drawing from a comparable number of pageant participants. Interviews and longitudinal studies would add to data for validity and provide further insight into the career path impact pageant experience has on women over their lifespan.

Social science research in the area of beauty pageants is wide open and largely uncharted, historically, with regards to the impact that participation has on a women's career. It is an area crucial to understanding the process of successful communication construct building.

The principal researcher assumed that women retrieve a system of constructs based on their past pageant experience. Finally, this study begins to provide some

empirical basis for continuing research on pageant experience and extend the research on construct systems as a perceptual frame. This perceptual frame is how these women make sense of their world and having pageant constructs to draw from increases the complexity of their construct usage in forming interpersonal and organizational impressions.

Further research could, therefore, include a qualitative longitudinal study of the lived experiences of women with pageant experience. The number of years the women participated in the pageants and their effect on their career success and longevity. Any changes in their perceptions and beliefs about the impact of their pageant experience should be recorded through in-depth interviews and consistent tracking over many years.

Conclusions

From a theoretical perspective, this study reveals a link between concepts of personal construct and attribution theory as women come to believe that their experiences in pageants help them in significant ways to develop communication competence, including soft skills. Further study of the communication constructs could aid in the development of training tools for nonparticipants who seek to develop soft skills and improve communication competence, personal attractiveness, and job satisfaction. While the positive correlations associated with women's beliefs in pageant training confirms initial hypotheses, the area of pageant experience research can be expanded. This study is a first step toward moving beyond the princess literature toward a focus on uncovering the pageant as an important factor in the development of interpersonal and organizational communication tools.

In an increasingly competitive North American job market, it is critical that studies continue of communication tools that develop soft skills and help women succeed in their careers. Women fall out of the workforce for a variety of reasons. Competition is one reason to further study how women differently attribute variables related to their communication competence based on having, or not having pageant experience. The current study is a first step in examining beauty pageant experience as a communication competence development tool.

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Table 1

Study Variables

Relationship Tested	Variable	Questions	Scale Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
Interviewing Skills	Have you Participated in Beauty Pageants	I believe my pageant experience helped me to improve my interviewing skills.	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
Attraction Skills	Have you Participated in Beauty Pageants	I believe my pageant experience taught me skills to present myself more attractively (i.e., improved grooming and/or dressing)	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
Communication Competence	Strangers	Talk in a large meeting of strangers	Scale from 0-100 0=completely incompetent 100= competent
	Friends & Acquaintances	Talk to a friend Present talk to a group of friends Talk to a small group of acquaintances Present talk to a group of acquaintances	Scale from 0-100 0=completely incompetent 100= competent
Job Satisfaction	Overall Job Satisfaction	I feel good about my job I get along with my supervisor	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
	Satisfaction in Wages and Use of Talents	My Wages are good All of My Talents are used at work	Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
	Merit Raises/Bonuses	How Many From all Jobs	Numerical

Table 2

Correlations for Survey Responses

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1 Perception of Self: Physique	-	.677	.496**	.463**	.271**	.064	-.003	.274**	.171	-.110	-.274**	.035	-.075	.177	.347**	-.143
2 Perception of Self: Fitness	.677**	-	.410**	.406**	.333**	.217*	.141	.275**	.246*	-.045	-.232*	.012	-.030	.265**	.245*	-.170
3 Perception of Self: Femininity	.496**	.410**	-	.360**	.504**	.074	.052	.298**	.235*	-.089	-.089	.065	-.037	.109	.025	-.089
4 Perception of Self: Sexual Confidence	.463**	.406**	.360**	-	.260**	.243*	.147	.357**	.110	-.077	-.215*	.003	-.092	.039	.128	-.061
5 Perception of Self: Physical Appearance	.271**	.333**	.504**	.260**	-	.225*	.232*	.356**	.283**	-.026	-.044	.005	-.015	.002	.010	-.057
6 Communication Strangers	.064	.217**	.074	.243*	.225*	-	.526**	.138	.132	.139	-.017	.145	.278**	.025	-.136	-.213
7 Communication Competence: Friends & Acquaintances	-.003	.141	.052	.147	.232*	.526**	-	.220*	.210*	.162	.006	.143	.140	.214*	-.013	-.087
8 Overall Job Satisfaction	.274**	.275**	.298**	.357**	.356**	.138	.220*	-	.499**	.078	.038	.080	.110	.003	.037	-.117
9 Satisfaction in Wages and Use of Talents	.171	.246*	.235*	.110	.283**	.132.	.210*	.499*	-	.032	-.081	.091	.193	-.023	-.051	-.091
10 Thinking of all the jobs that you have had, how many merit raises or bonuses have you received?	-.110	-.045	-.089	-.077	-.026	.139	.162	.078	.032	-	-.090	-.056	.501**	-.020	-.145	-.005
11 Gender	-.274**	-.232*	-.089	-.215*	-.044	-.017	.006	.038	-.081	-.090	-	.303**	.152	-.161	-.286**	-.202
12 Education Level	.035	.012	.065	.003	.005	.145	.143	.080	.091	-.056	.303**	-	.343**	-.083	.066	-.136
13 Personal Income	-.075	-.030	-.037	-.092	-.015	.278**	.140	.110	.193	.501**	.152	.343**	-	-.163	-.163	-.081
14 Have you ever had a cosmetic procedure	.177	.265**	.109	.039	.002	.025	.214*	.003	-.023	-.020	-.161	-.083	-.163	-	.243*	.103
15 Would you ever consider a cosmetic procedure	.347**	.245*	.025	.128	.010	-.136	-.013	.037	-.051	-.145	-.286**	.066	-.163	.243*	-	.175
16 Have you ever participated in pageants	-.143	-.170	-.089	-.061	-.057	-.213*	-.087	-.117	-.091	-.005	-.202*	-.136	-.081	.103	.175	-

Notes: N = 111, * = significant at the .05 level; ** = significant at the .01 level

Table 3**Women's Pageant Experience Impact on Career Skills**

Variable	
1 Women	<i>n</i> = 88
2 Women with Pageant Experience	<i>n</i> = 18
3 Agree Positive Effect on Attraction Skills	76% <i>n</i> = 18
4 Agree Positive Effect on Interviewing Skills	71% <i>n</i> = 18

Appendix

Christine Buyce Survey Instrument

Consent Letter for Participants

Greetings!

In conjunction with my Master's thesis project at Marist College, I am conducting research to better understand how women's perceptions of our own beauty and confidence in communicating might influence our advancement in the workplace.

You are being asked to *contribute to my successful completion of my Master's program and contribute to important research* by simply completing the following questionnaire. You are one of only about 200 people completing these questionnaires, so each fully-completed questionnaire is important – it makes a difference both in the quality of research as well as my ability to successfully complete my Master's degree.

The process is simple – you've already been given this survey link. If you choose to participate, then simply continue to the rest of the survey. It's important that you respond **NO LATER THAN July 20**. Questionnaires submitted after July 20 will not be included. Your responses will be completely anonymous. At the end of the survey, I'll ask some demographic questions – these help me to better understand your responses, but because we are using an online survey tool, we collect no other information that could identify you or your responses.

I appreciate your contribution to my thesis and if you are interested in the results, please feel free to email me at Christine.Buyce1@marist.edu and you will be included on all of the published or presented results.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you can certainly contact me at the email listed above, my thesis advisor – Dr. Audra Diers at audra.diers@marist.edu or the chair of our Institutional Review Board – Dr. Elizabeth Quinn at 845-575-3000 x2458.

Sincerely,
Christine Buyce

Section 1: Your Perception of Yourself

Directions: On this page are listed a number of body parts and functions. Please read each item and indicate how you feel about this part or function of your own body using the following scale:

- 1 = have strong negative feelings
- 2 = have moderate negative feelings
- 3 = have no feeling one way or the other
- 4 = have moderate positive feelings
- 5 = have strong positive feelings

1. body scent
2. appetite
3. nose
4. physical stamina
5. reflexes
6. lips
7. muscular strength
8. waist
9. energy level
10. thighs
11. ears
12. biceps
13. chin
14. body build
15. physical coordination
16. buttocks
17. agility
18. width of shoulders
19. arms
20. chest or breasts
21. appearance of eyes
22. cheeks/ cheekbones
23. hips
24. legs
25. figure or physique
26. sex drive
27. feet
28. appearance of stomach
29. health
30. sex activities
31. body hair
33. physical condition
34. face
35. weight

Section 2: How You Communicate

Directions: Below are twelve situations in which you might need to communicate. People's abilities to communicate effectively vary a lot, and sometimes the same person is more competent to communicate in one situation than in another. Please indicate how competent you believe you are to communicate in each of the situations described below.

Indicate in the space provided at the left of each item your estimate of your competence.

Presume 0 = completely incompetent and 100 = competent.

- _____ 1. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
- _____ 2. Talk with an acquaintance.
- _____ 3. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
- _____ 4. Talk in a small group of strangers.
- _____ 5. Talk with a friend.
- _____ 6. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
- _____ 7. Talk with a stranger.
- _____ 8. Present a talk to a group of friends.
- _____ 9. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
- _____ 10. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
- _____ 11. Talk in a small group of friends.
- _____ 12. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

Section 3: Your Work Experience

Directions: Please answer each of these questions by selecting the answer that most accurately reflects your experience or status.

1. Do you currently work outside the home?

- Yes
- No (if you currently do not work outside of the home, skip this section of questions)

2. What industry do you work in? (select one)

- Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting
- Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction
- Utilities
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Wholesale trade
- Retail trade
- Transportation and Warehousing
- Information
- Finance and Insurance
- Real estate and rental/ leasing
- Professional, scientific, technical services
- Management of companies
- Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services
- Educational services
- Health care and social assistance
- Arts, entertainment, recreation
- Accommodation and food services
- Other services (exception public administration)
- Public administration
- Other

3. Do you work: (select one)

- Full time
- Part time
- Independent contractor/ contract basis
- Business owner
- Other

4. Are you paid: (select one)

- Salary
- Hourly
- Per Contract

5. How long have you been at your current position?

___ years ___ months

6. How you received any promotions with this organization? (select one)

- Yes
- No

7. If you have been promoted with this organization, how many promotions have you received? ____

8. How many merit raises or bonuses have you received at your current job? (select one)

- 2 or less
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11 or more

9. What is the longest period of time that you have worked at any one organization? _____

10. Thinking of all of the jobs that you have had, how many promotions have you ever received? _____

11. Thinking of all of the jobs that you have had, how many merit raises or bonuses have you received? (select one)

- 5 or less
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16 or more

12. Thinking of your present job, we'd like you to evaluate how satisfied you are with your work environment. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements based on this scale:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Don't know

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

- I receive recognition for a job well done
- I feel close to the people at work
- I feel good about working for this organization
- I feel secure about my job
- On the whole, I believe work is good for my physical health
- My wages are good
- All of my talents and skills are used at work
- I get along with my supervisors
- I feel good about my job

Section 4: More About You

Directions: In this section, we'd like to learn a bit more about you. This helps me to better understand what drives you. Each of these questions is important. Please answer each of these questions by selecting the answer that best fits. Remember, your responses are entirely anonymous – I have no way to know who has responded.

1. Are you:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other

2. What is your age?

3. What is your marital status?
 - Single
 - Married
 - Divorced
 - Widowed
 - Partnered
 - Other

4. What is your sexual orientation?
 - Straight
 - Bisexual
 - Homosexual
 - Transgender

5. Indicate what your highest level of education is:
 - Less than high school
 - High school/ equivalent
 - Associates/ Professional Training Program or Certification
 - Some college
 - Bachelor's
 - Some graduate school
 - Master's/ MBA
 - Ph.D./M.D./J.D., Ed.D., equivalent

6. What is your personal income (before taxes)?
 - 0-\$25,000/year
 - 25,001-\$40,000/year
 - 40,001-\$75,000/year
 - < \$75,001/year

7. Have you ever had a cosmetic procedure?
 - Yes
 - No

8. Would you ever consider having a cosmetic procedure in the future?
 - Yes
 - No

9. Have you ever participated in pageants?

-
- Yes (please complete the remaining questions)
 - No (thank you for participating in my survey)

10. At what age did you begin your pageant experience? ____

11. For how many years did you compete in pageants? ____

12. How many titles did you win? ____

13. Did you ever have a professional pageant coach?

- Yes
- No

14. Upon reflecting on your pageant experience, indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements below using the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Not sure
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

I believe my pageant experience taught me skills to present myself more attractively (i.e., improved grooming and/or dressing).

I believe my pageant experience made me more confident.

I believe my pageant experience made me feel more attractive.

I believe my pageant experience helped me to improve my public speaking skills.

I believe my pageant experience helped me to improve my interviewing skills.

I believe my pageant experience helped me to improve my negotiation skills.

I believe my pageant experience has had a positive effect on my career.