

**PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN TELEVISED BEAUTY  
PAGEANTS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MISS GHANA AND  
MISS MALAIKA**



**BY**

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DECLARATION

I, Daniella Asare Adu, hereby declare that, this dissertation towards the Master Of Arts in Communication Studies degree, is my own work, except where specified. All sources used have been properly acknowledged. This dissertation was supervised by Dr. Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo.

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## **DEDICATION**

This is for you, Eunice Akpene Quarshie

My mother and friend,

You're my world. God bless you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I acknowledge the Lord's strength and favour in bringing me this far. I could not have done it without Him.

My supervisor, Dr. Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo, you're the reason why I never gave this up. Thank you for your patience and guidance. God bless you.

To my friend Kweku Krufie Botwe, you've been pivotal to the success of this study.

Yaw Sompa, you're a true friend. Thank you.

To you Nii Addo, thank you for everything.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the portrayal of women in television productions with a focus on beauty pageants. Two televised pageants, Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika were studied underpinned by objectification and male gaze theories. Segments of the programmes were content analysed to ascertain manifestations of objectification. The segments were the introductory, performance, interview and evening gown sessions. The overarching question that guided this study was “Do beauty pageants (Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika) objectify or empower contestants and in what ways? The study also examined the similarities and differences in the ways the two television products depicted women. Findings showed that physical appearance (attractiveness) and body exposure were common features in two segments and that not all segments of both beauty pageants depicted women as sexual objects. Other segments depicted women in non-sexualizing ways. Sexually objectifying images were observed more in the introductory and performance segment’s than the interview and evening gown segments. However, the interview segments showed that the televised pageants depicted women in empowering ways. Key indicators of objectifications were observed as body exposure and physical appearance. Some recorded comments by judges and camera shots also directed audiences’ attention to “gaze” at particular parts of contestants’ bodies. Camera focus played a role in depicting women as sex objects. Also observed was an effort to make the ladies ‘perform’ a certain standard of ‘femininity’.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background

The power that the media has cannot be overstated. Walter Lipmann (1922) in his book *Public Opinion* highlights the power of the media by explaining that the way people understand the world is directly linked to the pictures the media creates in our heads. These ‘pictures’ he posits are drawn by the media. Therefore to a large extent, the knowledge we know about the world stems from the information the media tell us. (McCombs and Shaw 1972). In the media’s attempt to draw these pictures in the minds of people, they make use of stereotypes in their communication to send across their messages. Stereotypical messages are said to be overgeneralized beliefs about particular groups of people. Thus the media make use of such messages in order to get the masses to relate and easily comprehend (Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu 2013). These may include representing women in certain stereotypical and objectifying lights.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) suggest that the media plays a pivotal role in the culture of sexual objectification. Berberick (2010) believes that the entertainment media especially has always been exploitative. “It has, throughout the years, reduced women to being nothing more than objects to be won, prizes to be shown off, and playthings to be abused” (Berberick 2010. p 2).

Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu (2013) also contend that across the various TV genres, women, more than men in most cases are presented as decorative elements whose worth is judged solely on the way they look. According to Ali (2018), the purpose for which mass media advertising for instance, would portray a certain gender in objectifying ways is to persuade and influence the target market

for action. Women are thus presented as sexual objects for purposes of appealing to audiences and persuading them to purchase a product (Ali 2018).

### **1.1 Television entertainment and women**

Apart from providing education and information, television serves as a platform for entertainment and leisure. TV stations are replete with all kinds of entertainment products that are popular and appeal to large audiences. Gender scholars have raised concerns over the objectification of women in many such TV entertainment products. Devi (2003) notes that such poor representations impact society negatively. Volgman (2013) also notes that the lyrics of some music tend to emphasize women's body parts, often passing comments on size, shape, and attractiveness. Movies, and music videos, similarly show images of skimpily clothed women, put beside men who are fully clothed. Aubrey & Frisby (2011) also criticized the depiction of accommodating sexual attitudes, exploitation, objectification, and degradation in music videos.

Television stations across the world telecast either live or recorded beauty pageants as one of their popular entertainment products. However pageants have not been without controversies. Aubrey and Frisby (2011) for example suggest that an obvious way in which objectification can occur is through the baring of female bodies, a key characteristic of any standard beauty pageant. Wright (2017) expounds this claim further by suggesting that the development of swimwears in pageants from a one-piece bathing suit to a two-piece bathing suit, then to a bikini is a good illustration of the way societies continue to expose and objectify young women's. She argues that beauty pageants as an entertainment TV product is a perfect conduit for the objectification of the female

body. Aubrey and Frisby (2011) and Wright (2017) also mention body exposure and the bikini aspects of pageants respectively as major sources of objectification within beauty contests.

## **1.2 History of Pageants**

The origins of beauty pageants date back to 1854 and is attributed to American businessman and showman PT Barnum. It was unsuccessful because of public protests (Crawford et al 2008). He kept the show going however by making use of the women's pictures instead of having them compete physically; a practice that quickly caught on with the newspapers and was adopted by them over a long period (Crawford et al 2008). Ultimately these pageants paved the way for the Miss America Pageant in 1921 which has remained the hallmark competition in the pageant world (Daniels 2009). Thus, the Miss America beauty contest is believed to have been the pageant after which all modern pageants have been modeled. It was formed by some New Jersey merchants in an attempt to extend the tourist season at a seaside resort (Crawford et al 2008)

The first-ever live telecast Miss America pageant was in 1954. The Philco Corporation and the ABC network broadcast it on Saturday, September 11<sup>th</sup> from a venue known as the Boardwalk Hall. It is recorded that about twenty-seven million viewers watched from their own homes as California's Lee Meriwether won the title that year, hosted by American entertainer, Bob Russell.

In Africa, the history of most pageants dates back to the 1950s. South Africa, in 1956, during the apartheid, started the Miss South Africa pageant, which was only opened to white women at the time. The first edition was won by Norma Voster. Two years later, the winner, 19-year-old Penny Coelen, went on to the Miss World pageant and won. In the first 11 years of the competition, the

winners were determined by readers of the Die Landstem and The Sunday Times newspapers- the two newspapers who owned the franchise to the show.

In 1968, the format for selecting the winner changed slightly. Although the finalists would be selected by readers of the newspapers, the ultimate winners would be selected, when a panel of celebrity judges met the finalists at a venue in Johannesburg. There was no "live" event. The winners would usually be published in the papers a week or two after the judging session.

In Nigeria, the first ever pageant, Miss Nigeria was introduced in 1957. Similar to Miss South Africa, a newspaper, Daily Times, owned the franchise, and thus initiated this first ever pageant. The contest, like the first Miss America, started as a photo contest. All contestants were supposed to post their photographs to the newspaper, where finalists were chosen. The finalists were then invited to compete in the live finals, which at the time, did not include a swimsuit segment. Grace Atikune Oyehide won the first Miss Nigeria ([Missnigeria.ng](http://Missnigeria.ng)) In Tanzania the national beauty pageant started in 1967. The participants were mostly from the former capital, Dar es Salaam. In 1968, however, the pageant was banned in the country, based on political concerns that the ideals of the pageant were not commensurate with the Tanzanian culture. When in 1994, beauty pageants were allowed again, the country had its first Miss Tanzania representative at the Miss World.

### **1.3 Miss Ghana as a Televised Pageant**

Ghana's first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, introduced the very first beauty contest Miss Ghana, in 1957. The pageant aimed to honour the "independent" Ghanaian woman and give her a platform to impact society positively. It was considered a "platform to demonstrate intelligence, beauty and ultimately the will to lead an initiative to impact society" ([missghana.com.gh](http://missghana.com.gh)). Thus Miss Ghana 1957 came off, with Monica Amekoafia taking the first crown as the first ever Miss Ghana. After

its last showing in 1968, the pageant was brought back to the entertainment scene again in 1987, that is after a 19 year hiatus. Miss Ghana became a television product in 1987 when it started airing on Ghana Broadcasting Corporation TV station now GTV. That year, the maiden broadcast was sponsored by distributors of the cigarette brand Embassy. The event was promoted as “Embassy Double Do” because it was a twin event of dance and beauty on display. The Embassy Double Do edition was won by Augustina Henaku. Subsequently, Miss Ghana enjoyed monopoly in the pageant space for some time until Miss Universe debuted in 1991.

In 2012, the maiden edition of the Miss Ghana Diaries, which is a compilation of the off-stage activities of the contestants, was launched on ETV Ghana, a foreign-based television station which entered the Ghanaian television media industry following media liberalization in 1992. The Miss Ghana Diaries aired the day-to-day behind the scene sessions at the end of the season. The show also featured the recordings of the contestants as they paid visits to corporate organisations, photoshoot sessions and exclusive behind-the-scene shots as well as other ‘thrilling features’.

It started to air on the entertainment-based station ETV and gave the audiences something more to enjoy other than the usual telecast of solely the grand finale (Debrah, 2012). Aside from these, the grand finale of the pageant is usually the climax of the entire season of the event. The finalists who make it to the big day, compete against one another in various segments in a live show that usually airs on a TV station.

#### **1.4 Miss Malaika as a Televised Pageant**

The Miss Malaika beauty pageant started showing forty-six (46) years after the Miss Ghana pageant, and it was introduced by event organizers, Charter House. It was shown on the screens as

a reality show for the first time in 2003 on the Tv3 network. The Miss Malaika pageant was introduced with an added element of airing the backstage day-to-day activities, tasks and progress of the contestants. The organisers needed to show more to viewers than the grand finale of the event. To qualify for the pageant, the potential contestant has to be of African descent, between the ages of 18 and 26, sizes 10 to 14, could be of any height, should have no implants, and should have completed her senior secondary school education at least. According to the organisers, Miss Malaika was introduced to give young women the chance to identify and explore the potential of their beauty and talent. The organisers asserted that the contestants would not be assessed on ‘Western standards and criteria’ (Miss Malaika, September, 2003).

There were weekly tasks handed out to the contestants. These consisted of photo-shoots, cooking contests, charity tasks etc. Personalities who possessed the knowledge or know-how about the task at hand were brought on as judges and had the power to keep successful contestants and eliminate others. (Miss Malaika, September 2003).

A feature of the grand finale of televised beauty pageant, is an interview segment, on-stage introduction, swimsuit segments, fun fashion, casual wear, on-stage question and answer, evening gown, traditional dress, and talent portion (King-O’Riain, 2008). The Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika pageants as well as others such as Miss Universe, Miss Tourism Ghana, Ghana’s Most Beautiful and several others characterize Ghana’s pageant industry.

## **1.5 Problem Statement**

Since the liberalization of the radio and television airwaves in the 1990s, pluralism and diversity have characterized the media space (Nyarko 2016). This invariably translates into the competition for audiences with content that are not only exciting but controversial, with the aim of driving traction and to win advertisements. Television serves as both an empowering and disempowering tool, with the power to inform and educate but also pivotal in the cultivation of unhealthy mindsets. As Chen (1998) asserts, television exerts a powerful influence on the community and in the shaping of values and ideals.

Beauty pageants have been argued to objectify women, and telecasting them on screens to large audiences, reinforces these portrayals. As these televised pageants have access to a wider reach of viewers than the staged event, there is the tendency to reach a lot more audiences with these portrayed images of women. Thus there is the need to study such a platform as televised beauty pageants; a platform that has the tendency to carry across disturbing or empowering images of women. In addition, television productions like pageants put 'idealized' portrayals of femininity on public display on the screens, as well as represent and reflect social constructions of gender (Zhang 2013). Concerns have been raised in literature as well as by pageant critics that pageants are seemingly deviating from the main purposes for which they were set up (Wright 2017). Even though the young women who win these competitions may land enticing opportunities, Chen (1998) posits that, the notion that, the way to success depends largely on her physical appearance is fundamentally problematic (Chen 1998).

A lot of studies abound on perceptions of televised beauty pageants by viewers as well as the inevitable effect of self-objectification on those who go through objectifying experiences. However, not a lot of academic attention has been given to how particular media products like televised beauty pageants are themselves conducive platforms for the objectification of women or the empowerment of young women (Moffitt and Szymanski 2011). This study therefore seeks to study Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika, to ascertain their diverse depictions of women in the various segments of the programme. Given the history of beauty pageants in Ghana, one would assume that content of such productions will depict women as agents of power rather than objectify them. Do the pageants as aired on television objectify or empower the young women who participate in them? The two televised beauty pageants are the biggest in Ghana and therefore worth studying.

### **1.6 Objectives**

The objectives of this study are

1. To explore the depictions of Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika pageant contestants in televised productions
2. To examine what segments make one pageant more objectifying or otherwise than the other.
3. To examine similarities and differences in the depictions of pageant contestants of the two programmes.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

1. In what ways are contestants of Miss Ghana or Miss Malaika depicted in objectifying or empowering manner?
2. What segments in both pageants make one more objectifying or empowering than the other?

3. What are the similarities and differences in the ways in which contestants in both pageants are depicted?

### **1.8 Significance of Study**

Many studies exist on beauty pageants as a whole and the phenomenon of objectification. Perception studies as well as interviews of pageant participants have been carried out, however not a lot of studies exist exploring the existence of objectification in televised beauty pageants and what the indicators of objectification may look like in these televised pageants.

The few studies on televised beauty pageants have made use of other methods, like live observances, to study the pageants in its entirety, however this study analyses the various segments of pageants in a content analysis, thus contributing to literature. The study will also contribute to scholarship on entertainment media products within the context of Ghana. It will also provide insight into the topic of women's representation and portrayal within the media.

### **1.9 Operational definitions of key words in study**

1. Objectification- treating a contestant as an object without regard to personality or functionality/ placing worth and value on the superficial aspects of the contestant, rather than personality and agency
2. Empowerment- The degree to which the activities of the various segments show contestants as autonomous, self-determined and functional.
3. Body exposure- Parts of the body exposed, not covered
4. Physical appearance- attire/dress, makeup, hair extensions, nails and lashes, body flattering clothes, eye catching attire material. Does not include exposure of bodies.

5. Voice- Assertiveness, seductive/flirty
6. Poses/ movement- Confident, seductive or choreographed body movements, gestures, body dispositions.
7. Performance: show of originality, show of initiative, eloquence, entertainment
8. Values- principles, social phenomena they hold in high esteem.
9. Mental capacities – display of intelligence, portrayal of agency, ability to analyse and give smart and thoughtful answers to questions

### **1.10 Summary**

This introductory chapter has set the precedence of this study in the background, stating the problem the study seeks to explore, highlights the significance of the study as well the research questions and objectives the study seeks to answer.

The following chapters will be made up of the literature review and relevant theories in the second chapter. The methodology will feature in the third chapter, detailing how the study will be conducted. The fourth chapter will contain the findings observed in the analysis of the data, followed by a discussion and conclusion in the fifth chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter looks at studies carried out on women's portrayal and representation in TV products. It also provides relevant literature on objectification in beauty pageants and in televised beauty pageants. Reviewing such relevant literature provided the scope, methodology and theories for carrying out this study.

#### **2.1 How does television portray women?**

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) contend that media plays an important role in promoting objectification. A lot of studies have expounded on this point further. Flynn, Park, Morin & Stana (2015) conducted a study in which they content analysed some five popular docusoaps on MTV. These five shows were chosen because of how far they reached with their audiences and for having aired for more than two seasons each. The major characters who were listed as cast members on MTV.com were the units of analysis for the study. Altogether a quantitative content analysis was carried out on 622 characters to establish the portrayals of the bodies of the female characters as against how the male characters were portrayed. It was found that there was a lot more exposure of the female bodies more than the males' bodies. The findings also showed that the bodies of the women displayed on these docusoaps were highly salient for the audience's gaze. In other words, the women were depicted as thin, measuring up to a certain 'ideal' body standard that is invariably pleasing to the gaze of the audiences. A high degree of body exposure, which scholars refer to as an important indication of objectification, was also found. These findings support Aubrey and

Frisby's (2011) argument that a significant baring or exposure of women's bodies is a viable way for sexual objectification to occur.

Music videos, a popular music product, according to Andsager & Roe (1999) is viable media content for providing evidence on how issues of gender and sexuality are represented in the media. Supporting this claim are Aubrey and Frisby (2011) who submit that in music videos, the most significant examples of sexual objectification can be found. They conducted a study in which they studied the 'top 10 songs' on the "Hot 100" Billboard charts in the United States from March 2007 through September 2008. These songs were culled from three genres; R&B, hip-hop and country after which they were quantitatively analysed using a coding system. Findings showed that women were portrayed more in sexually objectifying ways than the men. They discovered "visual elements of music videos that serve to train viewers' eyes on bodies: the baring of sexual body parts and the use of gaze" (pp. 21). Findings also showed that the men in these videos were found to considerably indulge in the act of gazing. In other words, there was evidence to prove that the male artistes were actively gazing at the exposed bodies of female artistes or vixens sexually, in validation of Mulvey's (1975) male gaze theory. The study also coded for the usage of women as decorative objects in music videos. Consequently, the study explored the manner in which women were merely used as aesthetic or auxiliary items (dancing in the back, set decoration etc), without significant contribution to the plot. The study revealed that the male artistes used a lot more women in these auxiliary roles for their videos. It was discovered that men played no such decorative roles in any of these music videos.

Mofitt (2010) asserts that television content that predominantly feature gender roles creates an enabling environment for objectification. Thus the phenomenon of objectification is highly synonymous with the issue of stereotyping. Advertising has been established as a television product that is a viable platform for the portrayal of women in certain stereotypical ways. For instance, Kahamba and Sife (2017) in a quantitative study of 71 advertisements in Tanzania, gathered advertisements from nine TV channels namely —,Azam One, Channel 10, ITV Clouds TV, Azam Two, Star TV , Sinema Zetu, East Africa TV and TBC1. Their findings revealed that, even though both sexes participated in advertisements equally, the women were found to be more stereotypically represented in the same advertisements. Men were portrayed more as professionals or top level executives as against women who were generally represented as home makers and whose primary responsibilities were restricted to the home. Kahamba and Sife (2017) clearly illustrated how this could be a problem. This sub-consciously persuades the upcoming generation into both accepting and believing the perception that regardless of their advancement into other walks of life, the home ultimately remains their default place of true relevance and functionality. It was also discovered that the women were presented as being more physically attractive, than the men, placing heavy focus on the physical appearances or outlook of the central female characters of in these advertisements. The attempt to present the female characters as focused on physical appearance despite the role, portrays them as superficial and objectified, driving home further stereotypes.

## **2.2 Objectification within beauty pageants**

Some perception studies on beauty pageants have provided interesting insights to guide the exploration of this study. Zhang (2013) combined three qualitative research methods in her study

on neo-Liberal China beauty pageants. She did this using textual analysis to study two aired pageants episodes, a focus group discussion (in which 38 Chinese college women participated), as well as an in-depth interview with eight regional Miss World pageant contestants. As part of her findings, she asserts that, average consumers of televised beauty pageants, were of the opinion that the contestants were not being depicted as functionally competing with one another. She found, according to them, that the women were rather portrayed as inactively displaying their beauty to be rated, critiqued and awarded. Analysing the data from these focus group discussions, she found that respondents were of the view that beauty pageants in China promoted the gender stereotype that women were docile, reserved, and unambitious (Zhang 2013). Some focus group respondents of this study also stressed, the point that Chinese beauty pageants dedicated airtime to showing on the screens contestants in attires that revealed and accentuated their body shapes and curves. They expressed worry that this ‘performance of femininity’ was only potent in gratifying the interests of heterosexual male audiences (male gaze). The respondents also condemned what they referred to as sexualized performances, such as the bikini contests. They felt that this segment not only objectified the contestants, but they as viewers felt objectified and alienated as women. In their opinion, beauty pageants would “attract more female audience if they would make efforts to showcase the intelligence and individuality of the contestants in addition to their perfect appearance” (Zhang 2013 p. 203)

Crawford et al (2008), in a similar study, with semi-structured interviews and a series of focus groups explored urban Nepali women’s perceptions on the introduction of beauty pageants to Nepal. Two focus group interviews were conducted with some female residents in the greater Kathmandu metropolitan area, as well as Tribhuvan University students. They spoke to adult

women from the network of the female residents in the Kathmandu area, engaging them as participants in an in-depth interview, where some interesting findings were discovered. Their reactions were largely mixed. While some expressed hope in pageants as having the capability of fostering progress as well as putting Nepali on the global stage, they also expressed some worries as well. The respondents opined that the Miss Nepal beauty contest objectified and exploited the women's bodies. They expressed concerns that the pageant placed too much emphasis on the women's bodies and wondered why, a lot more significance was not attached to intelligence. The study also recorded concerns of the exploitation and commodification of women in order to satisfy the pageant 'consumers'. They raised concerns about the commercial use of women's bodies to sell products as being characteristic of beauty pageants.

### **2.3 Studies on objectification in televised beauty pageants**

According to Everhart (2011), in the area of pageantry, not a lot of studies exist apart from childhood beauty pageant participation. Thus, in order to fill this gap, she conducted a study looking at women who participate in adult beauty pageants and the effects the entertainment TV content has on them. Two groups of 20 women participated in this study. In the first group were women who lived in Hawaii and had participated in one or more beauty pageants in the Miss America pageantry system. The second group consisted of three women from Hawaii and 17 women from West Virginia who had never taken part in any beauty pageant. The 40 participants took part in a survey from which she made some interesting findings. It was found that the beauty pageant contestants had higher body dissatisfaction scores, indicating a higher level of body dissatisfaction than women who never competed in pageants. She argues that at the core of these reality TV pageants is a focus on measuring up to the standards of a certain 'thin-ideal'. Due to

the high degree of focus on a thin-ideal or a standardized beauty ideal, there was consequently an obsession with their bodies. There was also constant comparison with other contestants, leading to body dissatisfaction and depression. She also found that the women who had contested before also scored high in self-esteem. Thus participating in pageants increased one's self esteem, however they also facilitate a sense of body dissatisfaction and concern about diet and exercise to obtain the thin-ideal from their objectifying experiences.

Wright (2017) also took a critical look at televised beauty pageants, comparing it to the media content pornography. Wright argues that both pageantry and pornography have at its centre, the sexual objectification of women in relatively similar ways. Wright (2017) asserts through content analysis that just like pornography, pageants set unrealistic standards for who qualifies to even partake in them. She observes that in most pageants, women are valued for their beauty and physical appearance above all other values, while the male population watches on and “gazes” at the exposed female bodies. The study observed that while pageants like Miss America enforces beauty standards upon the contestants very clearly, pornography does the same with actresses who take part in sexual acts. Wright (2017) also states that, “In both industries, women are told to embrace their femininity, whether it be acting out their heterosexuality on camera or physically representing it in pageantry”. (p. 149).

Wright ultimately expresses the concern that, the images of women as portrayed by pageants on the screens, have some dire effects on the many young women who are the core consumers of pageants. These young women may be consumers of unhealthy stereotypes and portrayals.

Dwelling more on body exposure within beauty pageants is Balogun(2019). Balogun (2019) in his study of Nigerian pageants explored the controversy of the bikini wear segments as a viable objectifying conduit. He made use of nearly a year of ethnographic fieldwork with forty-eight contestants and twenty organizers of two contemporary national beauty competitions. He worked as an unpaid intern and chaperone for the Queen Nigeria and the Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria (MBGN) beauty pageants. He also analysed a lot of media reportage, social media posts, conducted interviews, as well as TV broadcasts of these two pageants.

The Miss Nigeria pageant, the first national pageant, started as a photo competition in 1954 till 2004 when it declined due to lack of sponsorship. It however resurfaced in 2010 without a bikini session. The MBGN, which started in 1986, on the other hand always included bikinis as a segment in the show and as an important part of their selection process. The organisers of MBGN make the argument for the swimwear sessions as having a global implications. They described the bikini contest as a way for judges to gauge contestants' conformance to international beauty standards. Balogun(2019) reports that some staff members in an interview, described the swimsuit segment as a critical component of measuring beauty. According to them, it would enable the judges ensure they didn't choose contestants who had "imperfections" such as stretch marks, large scars, or uneven body proportions.

Balogun (2019) on the other hand, reports that throughout his research, all oppositions raised against swimwear segments expressed their disapproval by equating them with nudity. Words such as "indecent exposure," "too revealing," "near-naked," "exposing too much," and "unclad" were used in expressing disapproval. According to his findings, the swimsuit segments were described

as the greatest obstacle to nationwide acceptance of beauty competitions, suggesting that Queen Nigeria (and not MBGN) would attract a wider audience because it has no such body exposure.

Also in Uganda, Akena(2020), takes a critical look at the Miss Curvy Uganda pageant, proposed by a Ugandan Junior Minister in February 2019. The pageant, was focused on showcasing curvy voluptuous Ugandan women as a way to attract foreign tourists and ultimately increase tourism and foreign currency earnings. Akena (2020) in his study, argued that although the organisers also claimed that the aim of the pageant was to challenge the stereotypes against plus size women, the Miss Curvy Uganda pageant was backed by “patriarchal ideology meant to commodify, exploit and dominate women”.

The study critiques the pageant, noting that, the images of curvy women, with protruded breasts and heavy backsides being presented through the media, characterizes the female bodies as an “erotic fetish enticement for male appeasement” (Akena 2020 p.5). According to the author, “It relegates them to less than human status, to that of animals caged in the zoos for the desiring appetite of tourists – mainly males” (Akena 2020 p.5)

The study analyses the core purpose of creating the contest as patriarchal, as it was initiated by a man in power in a society that is largely trying to bridge the gap between genders. Despite these concerns, the author also establishes that the contest, when it came off on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2019 in Kampala, went contrary to most views. According to Akena, 2020, the pageant seemed to have been based on physical decency and aptitude tests-quizzing the 25 contestants on what progress they would bring to the country if they won the title.

Despite these however, he sticks to the argument that, the Miss Curvy Uganda pageant allows the manipulation of women's bodies as sexual tools, aimed at exploiting the young and mostly unemployed ladies for financial gain .

Gilbert (2015) also analysed the Carnival Calabar Queen Pageant (CCQP) in Nigeria. She takes a look at pageants as a platform for encouraging the performance of certain gendered ideals of femininity as expected by society. Using about two years of ethnography as well as interviews, in the 2010-2012 episodes of the pageant, the author makes some interesting observations. The study looks into how the Carnival Calabar Queen Pageant molds the young ladies' into acting or playing the roles of idealized femininities. Partaking in the two week camp session prior to the main event, Gilbert (2015) observes that, from the onset, the mantra of the pageant,- 'grace and beauty' is drummed home , with the purpose of getting the contestants to assimilate it and become graceful, exuding beauty as much as possible.

The camps, she records are where intense proper grooming sessions are experienced. Upon arriving at their hotel for the two week camp prior to the contest night, the ladies are made up and made to attend a conference. In subsequent sessions, their mobile phones are confiscated, and in seclusion, they rehearse acting, catwalking and dancing for the main night. They are also taken on a number of educational trips. According to the author, the camp session "prepares the contestant, turning them into feminine subjects exuding success, beauty and respectability" (Gilbert 2015 p.509)

At the core of the CCQP, is the believe that the role of a woman is a prayer-one who must exude religiosity. Thus this ideal is also instilled in the contestants through sessions of prayers and inspirational talks by men of God.

The physical appearances of these young women are also transformed. They are groomed with long or wavy weave-on, make up etc. They are also provided with some T-shirts, heels, sashes and skinny jeans. Before camp, they are also given a list of clothes to purchase-the list usually contained different types of heels and dress styles. The organisers “scrutinize all hemlines, straps and other small details to discern if the clothes are appropriate” (Gilbert 2015 p.511)

The author makes the point that, although some of these contestants, refer to the opportunity to contest , as a platform to be better- more stylish, more graceful, more beautiful, and better appealing to society, the inherent problem lies in the point that, the constant performance of a certain idealized femininity and respectability supports or fuels patriarchy in Nigeria.

These studies explored above have given insights into the existing literature within the phenomenon of objectification, performance of idealized femininities, televised beauty pageants as well as some perception studies on the topic of objectification within pageants.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

### **Objectification Theory**

The objectification theory as proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997, suggests that a lot of women tend to be treated like an object that is only valued by the ability to be used by others.

(Szymanski et al 2011). The theory advances that objectification is said to have occurred when a woman's body or her body parts are separated from her person and she is perceived as an object of male sexual desire or gaze. (Szymanski et al 2011). Although many scholars have provided definitions for the concept of objectification, what they really mean by treating someone as an object may not be still too clear (Benard et al 2018). Offering some clarifications, Philosopher Nussbaum (1999) identifies seven ways in which the phenomenon of objectification may occur. She states that the person may appear "owned or possessed", the individual may "appear to lack a certain form of independence by being denied their autonomy", the person may appear "to be easily used", the "person's feelings may not appear to be considered", he or she may "lack a sense of agency", "the person is interchangeable with similar objects" and the "individual may easily be violated". According to Nussbaum, a person can be said to be objectified in either one or more of these indicators. Langton (2009) adding to these indicators suggests three additional ways in which one may be identified as being objectified. He states that the person can easily be identified as a body or body parts, there is a heightened sense of focus on physical appearance, (the person is evaluated primarily by how they look) and also the individual is perceived as lacking voice of their own. Zhang (2013) provides evidence for these indicators in her study of Chinese beauty pageants when she observed that

"On stage, the Chinese pageant contestants were rarely given the opportunity to express themselves freely, and their movements were highly confined by the choreographed dances, catwalks, and poses. Off stage, these pageant women also tended to maintain a humble and amiable image by avoiding discussions of their goals or expectations while emphasizing friendship over competition" (p. 201).

Wright 2017 also posits that the existence of pageantry swimsuit contests from a one-piece bathing suit, to a two-piece bathing suit, to a bikini is a perfect example of how society continues to expose and objectify women's bodies.

According to the objectification theory, females internalize the way they are viewed by the outside world and begin to self-objectify themselves, seeing themselves only as ‘things’ to be looked at, and valuing their worth on only how they appear, leading to some adverse consequences. Victims of objectification internalize an observer’s perspective of their bodies (i.e., self-objectification) and this internalization is, in turn, an important predictor of health problems that are more prevalent among women than men, such as eating disorders, depression and sexual dysfunction (Bernard, Gervais & Klein (2018). In agreement with this claim is Calogero (2012) who makes references to feminist theorists’ assertions that women internalize their accumulated sexually objectifying experiences over time, seeing themselves through the lens of these outside experiences. In other words, women begin to treat themselves as entities who should be assessed or evaluated based on what they look like (Calogero 2012).

Morris, Goldenberg, and Boyd (2018) throw some more light on this theory. According to them though the terms ‘sexual objectification’ and ‘objectification’ are used interchangeably, the two may be explaining different phenomena which have different implications. They conducted three related studies where they established that sexual objectification referred to the evaluation of a woman or the placing of a woman’s worth on her sexual attributes. According to them, this kind of objectification resulted in the reduction of the woman’s unique human traits, rendering them as not being civilized, irrational, lacking agency, comparing them to ‘animals’. Morris et al (2018) also established in the study that the other dimension of objectification was appearance based objectification; where there is a fixation on a woman’s superficial beauty or appearance, and not her sexual features. They state that the consequence of this kind of objectification is the rendering of the woman as without emotions, being inert, lacking vitality, etc, likening her to an object. These

distinctions are important to the study as the two kinds of objectification may be found within the media product, beauty pageants.

Moffit (2010) also points to a few indicators as characteristic of objectifying environments such as televised beauty pageants, cheerleading, female brand promoters etc. According to her, characteristic of an objectifying environment are that,

“(a) traditional gender roles exist, (b) a high degree of attention is drawn to sexual/physical attributes of women’s bodies, (c) high probability of male contact exists (physically speaking, a male-dominated environment), (d) women typically hold less power in that environment, and (e) there is the approval and acknowledgment of male gaze” (p 4)

Added to these, Moffit (2010) asserts that an environment which encourages regulated encouragement of “sexualization (i.e., flirting, smiling), and/or the promotion of competition between women” is a good atmosphere for objectification to occur. (p 4). On the other hand, others like, Crawford et al (2008) in their study established that some participants who took part in the focus groups of their study were of the view that pageants encouraged the personal growth of contestants, helped to hone useful skills, and ultimately increased their self –confidence. In fact Thompson and Hammond (2003) studying 131 women who had participated in various pageants in their lifetime, found that the women scored high on self-esteem, even though evidence of eating disorders and a pre-occupation with their bodies was established. Their studies suggest that beauty pageants could be both objectifying and empowering platforms for women. Despite attracting much controversy as a media product (Chen 1998), there is still a growing demand for televised beauty pageants due to its high entertainment value but also for its monetary value. Television stations are presented with the opportunities to make income from the numerous advertisers whose

target market may be the market reach of beauty pageants thus they strive annually to acquire the rights to air them.

The objectification theory provides for this study a framework for understanding what objectification means and what it may look like in content such as beauty pageants. It provides a framework for understanding the several possible ways in which the phenomenon may occur within the data to be analyzed.

## **2.5 Male Gaze Theory**

Tied to the theory of objectification is Mulvey (1975)'s male gaze theory. Calogero (2004) argues that even in seemingly harmless situations, the very thought of being the focus of an observer's gaze has the tendency to result in dire consequences of self-objectification. She asserts that the mere awareness that an individual is being watched and assessed a defining feature of self-objectification. She states however that it is not just the expectation of any gaze; the sexually objectifying male gaze (Calogero 2004). Conducting an experiment on the effect of anticipating a male or female gaze on appearance related issues, she (Calogero 2004) studied 105 undergraduate women at a Southeastern University in America. It was found at the end of the research that anticipating that they were being gazed at by males resulted in greater body shame, social physique anxiety, and intent to diet when compared to anticipation of being gazed at by a female. Dow (2003) explains the male gaze as a societal factor in which women want to be perceived as acceptable through the eyes of men. She states that performing onstage (eg. beauty pageants) or a screen is a good example of being a platform that opens one up to the judgment and scrutiny of viewers. Does the presence of males present on the judging panel, as well as many men in the

auditorium who may be viewing on television and on social media affect the pageant participant in any ways? Do these contestants feel at any point in time that they are ‘packaged’ to feed a certain male gaze out there? These arguments raised in the theory are relevant to answer the questions raised in the study.

## **2.6 Summary**

This chapter explored relevant literature in the area of the representation of women in television media, as well as studies done on beauty pageants. It also explored a few studies done on televised beauty pageants and the phenomenon of objectification. The chapter also expounded the theoretical frameworks to guide the enquiries that will answer the objectives of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter describes the research methodology that was used in this study. The research design, population and sample size, as well as the sampling methods have been highlighted in this chapter.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study made use of a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research, according to Bengtsson (2016) contributes to an understanding of human conditions in varied contexts and of a perceived situation. According to Shank (2002), qualitative research is a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning. As opposed to quantitative research methods that seek to explore numbers, what Shank (2002) means is that qualitative methods seek to explain the why and how of a phenomenon, bringing out its meaning. This study, with the aim of exploring the phenomenon of objectification, and understanding how it may or not occur in of beauty pageant contestants, employed the qualitative approach. The method is appropriate as the research aimed to describe into detail the phenomenon under observation. Thus, the study employed the qualitative content analysis method.

Content analysis has been used over time in studies that examined television programs for the way they portrayed race and gender since the 1960s. The results of these studies have been used as evidence to support changes in programming regulations and policies. (Martinez-Sheperd, 2006). Content analysis can be both quantitative (focused on counting and measuring) and qualitative (focused on interpreting and understanding).

Qualitative content analysis is one of the research methods used to analyze text data. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) define qualitative content analysis as a research method which subjectively interprets the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. They also clarify that text data might be in verbal, print, visual, or electronic form. It is most often than not, the ideal method in analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages. It was first used as a method for analysing hymns, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements and political speeches in the 19th century (Harwood & Garry, 2003). In analysing the recorded TV shows of the Miss Malaika and Miss Ghana pageants, the qualitative content analysis method will afford the avenue to explore texts from which meaningful codes can be generated to explain the phenomenon.

This study analyses the content of Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika pageants, using pre -determined indicators from scholarship as its analytical constructs in order to be able to answer the research questions.

### **3.2 Sample**

Two full grand finale episodes of both pageants, Miss Malaika and Miss Ghana, for the year 2019 were conveniently sampled for study. The 2019 grand finales were the most readily available live recorded events of both pageants. The 2019 edition of the grand finale of Miss Ghana was shown live on a number of TV stations including *Atinka TV* and *Joy Prime*, as well as the pageant's social media pages. The Miss Ghana 2019 grand finale production, from which data was obtained for this study was obtained from Joy Prime.

The Miss Malaika pageant also aired live on GH One TV station, and recorded live for social media purposes. The two hour 23 minute show, contained various segments including performance segments which featured guest acts from to entertain the live audiences and viewers. The Miss Malaika show from which data was gathered for this study, was obtained from the online video sharing platform YouTube. The programme was recorded live from the original production on the day of showing and later edited for online consumption. This means that not every aspect of the content was available for the study. Nonetheless, both productions, Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika, used for the study, captured the various segments of the contests.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Content of the two programmes were coded for manifest content only. The unit of analysis were the various segments of the programme. Four main segments, namely, introduction, performance, interview and evening gown session, were identified and examined for the manifestations of objectification and related depictions, as well as empowering portrayals. Borrowing from Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Aubrey and Frisby (2011), exposure of body parts was coded and described as sexual objectification. The two pageants had two separate coding guides with which coding and analysis were done.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Bauer and Gaskell (2000) define data analysis as any approach used to reduce the complexities of the data material, and to come to a coherent interpretation of what is and what is not the case. Also, Moutton (2001) asserts that, analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable theme patterns, trends, and relationships. In order to break the data up into meaningful parts, the

researcher observed the data manifestly. In manifest content analysis, the visible, obvious and observable components of the data are described. In a manifest analysis, the researcher describes *what* the informants actually say, stays very close to the text, uses the words themselves, and describes the visible and obvious in the text. The observable sights, and sounds related to the indicators of objectification in the various segments were analysed. Coding four main segments; namely introduction, performance, interview and evening gown session, the major indicators that the study sought to observe were described in the various segments. The study observed the following elements in order to ascertain whether or not the two pageants objectify or empower women- body exposure, focus on physical appearance, the voices and movements/poses of the contestants in each segment.

The introductory segments saw the contestants present themselves to and make themselves known to the judges and the audiences. The performance segments consisted of various displays, be it choreography or show of talents. The interview segment sought to reveal to viewers the intelligence and personalities of the various contestants. The evening gown sessions displayed elaborate designs and the highlight the poise and poses with which the contestants modeled the gowns. Inferences were made from these codes and observed indicators to answer the main questions of the study.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter explained the methodology that was used in the gathering of the data and the manner in which it was analyzed. It also described how the sample was chosen and why as well as how the data was analysed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on findings from the data. It is divided into four main parts. The first part describes the recorded event and its various segments as well as what the segments sought to achieve. The second part highlights findings that describe in what ways the two pageants objectify and/or empower women. The final part revealed findings that answer the question of what segments make one pageant more objectifying or otherwise than the other. The last part of the chapter presents findings that explain similarities and differences in the objectifying depictions of contestants of the two programmes.

#### **4.1 Description of live recorded events**

The Miss Ghana grand finale, which was aired on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 2019 was a 3 hour and 30 minutes show, consisting of four major segments. There were 19 contestants in all, ranging between ages 20 to 25, representing the various regions of the country. There were six judges in all made up of four women and two men. They consisted of CEO's of certain companies, as well as a TV and radio presenter. The main organiser of the pageant, Miss Ina Pati, also doubled as a judge.

The Miss Malaika pageant, aired live on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2019 was a 2 hour and 23 minute event. The grand finale saw 10 young women, ranging between the ages of 20 and 24 participating. The show was interlaced with performances from popular musicians in the country. There were five judges in all, consisting of three women and two men. There were two actors, an on-air personality, a style and fashion expert as well as a business executive.

The segments in both pageants could be categorized mainly into four; the introductory, performance, speeches and interview and the evening gown segments.

#### **4.2 In what ways were contestants of Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika depicted as objectified**

In order to answer this question, the various segments in both shows were analysed against some major indicators of objectification. Body exposure, physical appearance, voice, poses or movements were observed within the various segments under both pageants.

##### **The Introductory Segment**

The introductory segment in the Miss Ghana pageant showed that the bodies of the young women were largely exposed. The segment revealed the young women in bikinis made of African prints. The young women's legs, thighs, buttocks, parts of their midsections were exposed to the viewers in their bikinis. Their legs and thighs were also observed to have been oiled for effect.

There was however no observed body exposure in the introductory segment of the Miss Malaika pageant. This notwithstanding, it was observed that there appeared to be a significant amount of focus, or attention on making the women appear physically attractive and pleasing to the eye. Thus it was observed in the introductory segment that the women appeared in appearance enhancement elements like heavy makeup, fake nails and lashes, high platform heels. As they introduced themselves to the viewers and live audiences, they appeared almost perfect in their carefully combined attires, which were elaborately designed.

The Miss Malaika judges' comments on their judging criteria which were coded under the introductory segment was also observed. The host of the show, a female TV presenter, just before announcing the winners out of the contestants who were still in their evening gowns, was heard saying: "our judges decided on the winner based on beauty, eloquence; of course, beauty of the face and figure, beauty of the face, figure and eloquence".

One of the female judges was also heard saying: "I'm also gonna be looking for beauty of the face. We all expect them to be smart, but I'm also gonna look out for beauty of the face, their height and everything".

In order to determine the existence of objectification in the introductory segment, the voices of the young women were analysed. It was observed that in the Miss Ghana pageant, some of the contestants assumed a seductive tone as they introduced themselves to the audiences and to viewers. Contestant number one for instance as she introduced herself, assumed a flirty tone in her speech, after which she winked to the audience when she was done speaking. This observation gives credence to Moffit (2010)'s assertion that an environment in which there is regulated encouragement of "sexualization" (i.e., flirting, smiling) is one that is a good platform for objectification.

There were however no observed objectifying elements in the analysed voices of the introductory segments in the Miss Malaika pageant. Significantly noticeable in the introductory segments of both pageants were the calculated, choreographed movements and poses of the contestants. The movements in both Miss Malaika and Miss Ghana appeared limited and constrained. It was observed in the Miss Ghana pageant for instance that as the ladies appeared on the stage to

introduce themselves in the bikinis, they appeared in careful catwalks, with their hands on their waists, striking perfect poses. It was observed that before they spoke, they had to pose with their left legs forward, right leg backwards and either with their left hands on their thighs or perched on their waist.

The Miss Ghana pageant also showed the contestants in calculated movements as they appeared on the stage in the introductory segments to interact with the host of the show. As part of the segment, the young women after being introduced to the viewers by showing inserts of their profiles, came onto the stage to answer questions that gave more insight into their personalities. It was observed that they catwalked to the front of the stage up to a particular spot, struck a pose, twirled and walked to their seats. They repeated these movements after their interaction, all the while with hands on waist, and with fixed smiles.

### **Performance Segments**

The performance segments in both pageants were also analysed to establish indicators of objectification or otherwise. Exposure, physical appearance, voice and movements were analysed in both pageants.

The Miss Ghana pageant also revealed exposed bodies of contestants in the performance segments. In the performance of their opening dance, the contestants were seen in traditional attires made up of short flair skirts and tubes. The costumes left bare their chests, parts of the stomach as well as a good part of their thighs. It was also observed that due to the rigour of the dances performed, the undergarments of the ladies and thighs were exposed whenever they jumped and bent down.

Body exposure was also observed in the Miss Malaika pageant in its performance segments. To open the show, the 10 contestants were revealed in various designed attires made of a combination of glitter, leopard skin, and black fabrics. The costumes, created differently for each contestant, exposed certain parts of the young women. It was found that these elaborate attires, exposed the cleavages of some contestants. Some other contestants had deep slits at the left, right or both sides of their attires revealing a good part of their legs, thighs and upper thighs. Some contestants also wore designs with very low cut backs.

The performance segments of both pageants also showed some evidence of focus on physical appearances. The Miss Malaika pageant for example showed the young women, just like in their introduction, wearing heavy makeup, fake lashes and nails, hair extensions and eye catching costumes as they mounted the stage to perform their choreography. Performing to Columbian Singer Shakira's 'waka waka' song, the ladies performed the choreography in body flattering clothes, shining through the glittered fabrics, and other eye catching material.

In analyzing the voices of the contestants in the performance segments, it was found that there was no observable evidence of objectification. The performance segments in the Miss Ghana pageant featured dances and movements mainly and did not offer any platform for the contestants to speak. The performance segments in the Miss Malaika pageants featured a dance as well as a talent show session. There was no observable indication of objectification in either the dance or talent show sessions.

## **Interview Segments**

Under the interview segments, exposure, physical appearance, voices and movements were also analysed. There was no observable indication of body exposure in the interview segments of both pageants. The interview segments sought to test the eloquence, intelligence and agency of the young women. In both pageants, the contestants' costumes in which they appeared on the stage to answer to questions posed them, did not seem to expose any parts of the contestants.

The indication of focus on physical appearance observed in the interview sessions of both pageants, was found to be similar to that of other segments. There was still an observed effort to present the contestants as perfect looking, making use all appearance enhancement elements like heavy makeup, high heels, fake nails, lashes, etc. When the voices of the contestants in both pageants were analysed in the interview segments, there were no obvious objectification elements. Even though some contestants in the Miss Ghana pageant were observed to have faltered or stuttered in their answers, the majority of contestants, it was observed, spoke with confidence to the questions posed.

This segment also revealed the contestants as being choreographed and limited in movements. It was observed in the Miss Ghana pageant that as they catwalked to the stage, they took specific spots on the stage and did not move until the entire session was over. It was observed that the ladies stood rooted at their spots, hands on waist and with one leg forward. With the microphone in one hand and the other hand on the waist, they maintained the pose, unwavering, all the while with fixed smiles.

The Miss Malaika pageant revealed similar movements. The ladies took calculated steps to a particular spot in front of the stage, gave their speeches and answered the posed questions, with hands on their waists. However unlike the Miss Ghana pageant, the ladies were free to move about on the stage as they gave their speeches. It was also observed that a few of them took their hands off their waists and used them for gesticulations as they gave speeches on topics which were passionate to them. They however struck the ‘pageant pose’ again as they catwalked off the stage after their various interview sessions.

### **Evening gown segment**

The evening gown segments in both pageants were not observed to have exposed the bodies of the contestants. The segment however appeared to be a highlight of the ladies’ physical appearances. All ten contestants in the Miss Malaika pageant were spotted in very elaborate gowns made of various fabrics of African print, with makeup and accessories to match the attires. These eye catching gowns made of tails, glitter, sheer fabric, etc, accentuated their figures .

The nature of the segment did not provide the opportunity to observe and analyze voices of the contestants in both pageants. The segment was largely visual in nature and thus there were no utterances. In order to showcase the elaborate gowns they wore for the night, it was observed that the ladies were made to move in slow, choreographed, and very ‘lady –like’ movements. In the Miss Malaika pageant, the contestants did not catwalk as in other sections, they were observed to have glided with the aid of music unto the stage so as to display themselves carefully. This, coupled with their hands positioned on the waists, moving in formation on the stage depicted the ladies as aesthetic acts to be gazed at or as decorating the stage.

### **4.3 In what ways are contestants of Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika contestants depicted in empowering manner?**

Apart from observing indicators of objectification in the various segments of the two pageants, some literature suggest that not all pageants may be objectifying. Hamashima(2012) for instance in her study of the Miss Samoa pageant contestants and consumer, established that pageants could be good platforms for the empowerment of the young women. The voices or utterances as well as body movements in the various segments were analysed to establish the empowering elements in the various segments.

#### **Introductory Segments**

The introductory segment of the Miss Malaika pageant, despite having projected the women as being physically objectified, provided a platform for portraying the individuality and uniqueness of each contestant. As Zhang (2013) concluded in her study of Chinese beauty pageants, “pageants would be less objectifying if they focused on the individuality and intelligence of the contestants in addition to their perfect appearance” (p. 203). Viewers hear the contestants confidently introducing themselves, their aspirations, the impact the contest has had on them, most memorable moments within the contest, as well as what famous personalities their own personalities resonate with, and why.

Their movements also exuded confidence as they appeared on stage to interact with the host in the second part of the introductory segment. As they sat down to interact with the host of the show, the contestants were seen sitting with their backs straight, chests out, and heads up giving

the impression of one exuding confidence

.

The Miss Ghana pageant also, despite the exposure of the contestant's bodies, revealed them as confidently introducing themselves. Majority of the 19 ladies spoke with confidence as they told the viewers and live audiences their names, contestant numbers, ages and regions of representations.

Many of the contestants' movements were also observed as confident. Despite the rigid and calculated or choreographed movements, it was observed that the ladies moved confidently on the stage. They walked with heads up, chests out, maintained eye contacts with the audiences and judges and very used very audible voices, all pointing indicators of their confidence.

### **Performance Segment**

Analyzing the voices of the Miss Malaika pageant contestants, it was observed the talent session projected the ladies as skilled, innovative and creative. The contestants showcased their singing, acting, dancing, styling and makeup prowess. As Banet-Weiser (1999) suggests, the talents shows in pageants are a performance of personality, artistry and female subjectivity. The Miss Ghana pageant did not feature any talent sessions in the data analysed thus the show of artistry and personality was missing. Due to this, voice could not be analysed in this segment under Miss Ghana.

The movements observed in this segment however showed largely ambivalent elements of empowerment. Whiles some ladies in the dance performances of the Miss Ghana pageant seemed to execute confident dance movements, others seemed to falter in the dance steps, making them

look confused and not in control. It was observed that the more confident dancers could be observed in the front, while the less confident ones stayed at the back of the formation.

Similar observations were made in the Miss Malaika pageant, where the contestants performed some choreography. Some contestants were shown as more confident in their dance steps and in control, whereas others were observed to misstep throughout the choreography as they looked up to the other better dancers for their queues. These observations did not portray such contestants as confident in their movements under the performance segments.

### **Interview segment**

According to Nussbaum (1995)'s indicators of objectification, an individual may appear to be objectified if they are presented as lacking agency. However the interview sessions challenged this assertion by projecting the individuality, mental capacities, values, ideals and passions of the contestants. Some questions asked included ones on their favourite personalities and why they admire these characters, why they would like to win the pageant and other social issues. One of the contestants when asked why she should win the pageant expressed her thoughts saying,

“I believe I should be the next Miss Malaika Ghana because I believe I would be a positive role model and a source of inspiration to the young people out there. I want them to know that it is possible to achieve their dreams, because I have been able to combine my dream of becoming a medical doctor with my dream of becoming a beauty queen, then there is nothing that they can't do. No matter how worlds apart their dreams may seem, they should go after them”

These utterances by this contestant portray a sense of responsibility and agency, highlighting the young woman's dreams and aspirations. The second part of the interview sessions, came off after the final five contestants had given a speech each on a topic they were simply passionate about or

on a project they hoped to embark on as title holders. They were then asked questions on how they hoped to embark on those projects or further questions on the speeches they delivered. For instance one of the contestants told the judges,

“Each and every one of us here are at risk, but we can all win the fight against stroke, by understanding the health factors, regular medical checkup, and also our personal lifestyle choices. For this noble cause, I’d like to invite you, you and you, to support me to help strike against stroke. Good evening.”

These sessions portrayed the young women as purposeful and possessing substance, while showing their individual aspirations and personalities. The Miss Ghana pageant featured one interview session. The session even though it featured questions spanning across different topics, did not portray their contestants as functional as the Miss Malaika pageant. The contestants however were posed two main questions; one generic question on the matter on infertility was posed to the ladies, since the question segment was sponsored by a fertility hospital. Thus it was observed that, similar questions were posed to the ladies on issues of infertility testing their knowledge. The other sets of questions touched on many different areas to which the contestants gave answers to. Judges quizzed them on the history of the pageant, the essence of joining a pageant like Miss Ghana as general knowledge questions. It was observed that some contestants projected intelligence, confidence and knowledge, whereas others faltered in answering their questions. For instance one contestant, answered a question on the empowerment of the African woman saying,

“Ellen Sir Johnson Sirleaf won the status quo and became a president in Liberia. I am an African women, generations before mine, it was known that the place of the African woman was in the kitchen. But look at me. I am a law student. I entered law school because I wanted to, and I didn’t listen to the standards set for me by society. In my view, African women are not there but we will get there. This response portrays the answer of a young ambitious woman who seems to know her worth and vision.”

### **Other findings –camera shots**

The camera shots observed mainly in the introductory, performance and interview segments were used with the aim of sending across portrayals of exposure, physical appearance or confidence in movements. In the introductory segments in both pageants for instance, the camera shots fed the viewers' gaze in the Miss Ghana pageant as the bodies of the contestants were exposed. By employing the use of close up shots and zoom ins, the shots focused on certain private and sensitive parts of the exposed women at some points in time in the show. The shots panned from the feet of some contestants, travelling up their thighs, slowly to their faces, giving a clearer view of their bodies and skin. It was observed particularly that one camera shot zoomed into the area between one contestant's thighs where her little shorts had tightened up against her genitalia. The shot stayed on the contestant for a while, zooming out when she began to walk towards the microphone to introduce herself.

The camera shots in the introductory segment of the Miss Malaika pageant focused attention on the visual and physical appearances of the contestants. The shots highlighted the heavy makeup of the contestants. It also highlighted the colours and patterns in their attires feeding the gaze of the audiences.

### **Performance segment**

The camera angles observed in this segment for both the Miss Malaika and Miss Ghana pageant were mostly medium and long shots that sought to emphasize the collective attractiveness and beauty of the ladies as they performed on stage. There were no observed close up shots in this

segment. The dance performance on the Miss Malaika stage was also observed to have been taken by a bird's eye shot at a point in time, giving the impression of the ladies being watched.

### **Interview Segments**

The interview session in both pageants were carried by mostly medium and close up shots that focused on the show of confidence or assertiveness of the contestants. In the Miss Malaika pageant for instance, as the ladies gave their speeches and answered questions posed to them, some camera shots revealed some interested observations. Viewers are shown the passion with which the contestants spoke, and the intensity on their faces. The shots also focused on the hand gestures that accompanied some of the speeches that emphasized confidence and passion.

The Miss Ghana pageant also had shots that highlighted the facial expressions of the ladies as they answered questions posed to them by the judges. The shots highlighted both expressions of confidence, zeal as well confusion and blankness on the faces of contestants that faltered in the answering of the questions posed them.

### **4.4 What segments in both pageants make one pageant more objectifying or empowering than the other?**

#### **Introductory segment**

All four segments in both pageants were observed to have either presented the contestants in objectifying or empowering lights. Some of these indicators were observed in varying degrees in each of these four segments.

It was observed that the introductory segments, which sought to reveal to the viewers who the contestants were, and other basic information about them portrayed the ladies as being objectified in the Miss Ghana pageant more than the Miss Malaika pageant. As Virtucio (2016) conjectures, sexual objectification of women is perceived to be at a peak in swimwear segment thus the introduction of the bikini session in the introductory segment presents the segment as more objectifying. Aside from the exposure of the women's bodies, the purpose of the segment is not seen to have served its purpose as much as the segment in the Miss Malaika pageant. The viewers of Miss Ghana are only introduced to the contestants' names, contestant number, and region of representation of the young ladies. However the Miss Malaika pageant in its introductory segments revealed the contestants as more than a pretty face. Viewers were furnished with information about their names, ages, institutions, personalities, values, as well the impacts the pageant has had on them.

### **Performance segments**

The second segment to be studied was the performance segments which showed the contestants as displaying in choreography, or other talents. It was observed that both objectifying and empowering elements were found in the Miss Malaika pageant. Even though the contestants displayed their talents, which portrayed them as skilled and talented, as established, parts of this segment also exposed some sexualized parts of the ladies.

The Miss Ghana pageant was also observed to have exposed of the bodies of the contestants in the performance segments and did not feature any talent show sessions in the segment. It may be concluded then that this segment both objectified their contestants in similar ways. However the

Malaika pageant provided a better platform through its talent session, to portray the women as skilled and with various passions.

### **Interview Segments**

These session was aimed at testing the intelligence, eloquence, as well as project planning skills of the contestants. It was observed that the interview sessions in the Miss Malaika pageant gave more room for contestants to express intelligence, functionality, agency and individuality more than the Miss Ghana pageant. It was observed that the Miss Malaika contestants put in more effort into research and presentation as against the Miss Ghana's interview sessions. Questions posed appeared to be more varied and thought provoking, as compared to the Miss Ghana pageant.

### **Evening Gowns segment**

The evening gown sessions in both pageants appeared to be the segment that was the peak of the appearance based objectification element. The Miss Malaika pageant however was observed to have focused a lot more attention on presenting eye pleasing, poised and graceful moving contestants more than the Miss Ghana pageant. The extravagant, floor sweeping gowns did well to portray them as a 'spectacle' to behold, gazed at and judged (Zhang, 2013). As the ladies strutted in these elaborate gowns, they were observed to be moving in very synchronized and choreographed slow movements. As they took their designated positions on the stages, they all posed with hands-on waists, wearing an ever-smiling face. The camera shots in the Miss Malaika, evening gown segment provided viewers with visual details of the various attires with medium and close-up shots. The production also used some long shots capturing all 10 women at once

while highlighting the ‘spectacle’ and aesthetic beauty of all the colours adorned by the ladies combined.

The Miss Ghana pageant on the other hand, was observed to focus less attention on the contestants in the evening gown segment. The session was relatively brief and less elaborate. As the ladies showed up on the stage in their evening gowns, similar earrings and similar shoes, the final 10 posed in front of the stage, as the hosts of the event, announces the top five out of the ten. The ladies did not strut around the stage to be examined, or ‘taken in’ as was observed in the Miss Malaika pageant.

#### **4.5 Comparing the sexual objectification depictions of pageant contestants of the two programmes**

Aubrey and Frisby (2011) suggest that a clear way in which sexual objectification could be done is through body exposure which is a key characteristic of any regular standard beauty pageant. Thus the study coded body exposure as sexual objectification. It was observed that both pageants may have sexually objectified their contestants in similar but varying degrees. The Miss Ghana pageant by featuring a swimsuit segment as part of the show, exposes the bodies of the young women to a high degree, leaving them to be gazed at especially by the males, as projected by the male gaze theory.

The Miss Malaika pageant however did not feature any swimwear sessions or equivalent segments, thus the ‘peak of sexual objectification’ represented by swimwear segments was missing. This notwithstanding, there were other degrees of body exposure and focus on sexualized parts of the

ladies' bodies. As it was observed, the show revealed in its early opening scenes before the first performance of the ladies, a deliberate show of skin in the design of the costumes. As established earlier, the costumes showed some of the contestants' breasts, upper and lower thighs as well as bare backs. Thus it was found that though they were exposed, it was to a varying degree relative to the Miss Ghana pageant.

### **Summary**

This chapter has presented findings that answer the research questions from analyzing the data. The findings have highlighted the objectifying or empowering ways in which both pageants portrayed the contestants, what segments of both shows portray the participants as more objectifying or otherwise than the other, as well as findings that reveal the similarities and differences in how both pageants may sexually objectify the young women.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This final chapter of the study has focused on discussing the findings that have emerged out of the analysis of recorded televised events of the 2019 edition of both the Miss Ghana and the Miss Malaika events. The findings in this chapter will be discussed against literature as the objectives set for the study. The chapter will also make recommendations for both scholarship and the Ghanaian entertainment media space using insights gained from the study.

#### 5.1 Discussion of key findings

Findings from the study reveal that even though some segments in the two pageants, Miss Malaika and Miss Ghana project the contestants in certain objectifying lights, other segments may provide platforms for the empowerment of the young women. Studying four main segments as the units of analysis of this study, it was found that the Introductory and performance segments mainly of both pageants, portrayed the contestants as being sexually objectified by exposing parts of their bodies. This was evident in the swim wear section of the introductory segment in the Miss Ghana pageant and the performance segments of both Miss Ghana and Miss Malaika. These findings give credence to Wright (2017)'s analysis of the Miss America pageant in which she established that exposure of the women's bodies to viewers especially through the swimsuit aspects of the pageant was a good conduit for objectification to occur. Virtucio (2016) also established in his study of four main segments of some International Beauty Pageants, that the swimwear segment is the segment that blurs the line between woman empowerment and objectification. The final year students who took part in Virtucio's study were asked to rank the segments according to their

significance in choosing a true beauty queen. The respondents said the most important was the question and answer portion, followed by national costume, then evening gown and least in the rank is the swimwear segment.

This study also found that apart from projecting the women in sexually objectifying lights, the two pageants emphasized value of the physical appearances of the women and focused much attention on the way they looked. Efforts were put into presenting the women as fitting in a standard ideal of beauty, poise and gracefulness. This according to Morris, Goldenberg, and Boyd (2018) may be problematic because it projects the women as being objectified through their appearance (appearance-based objectification). Conducting three similar studies, they found that placing a focus on a woman's superficial beauty or appearance constitutes appearance-based objectification and renders the woman as being without emotions, being inert, lacking vitality, etc, likening her to an object. It was also found in the Miss Malaika pageant, as announced by the host, that the ultimate winners were determined mainly by beauty of the face, figure and eloquence legitimizing Wright (2017)'s observations of beauty pageants that women are valued for their beauty and physical appearance above all other values. According to Chen (1998)'s, this may be problematic because even though winners of these pageants may land enticing opportunities, the impression that the ultimate ticket to these successes lies in physical appearance is inherently worrying.

Despite these findings revealing the depiction of the contestants in some objectifying lights, some segments were also found to project the young women as more than just a pretty face. The interview segment in both pageants mainly provided such a platform. The interview segments posed various questions to the contestants in order to test their thinking capacities as well as

eloquence. This challenges arguments that project beauty pageants only as television content that project the contestants as being objectified through and through. The segment also gave the women avenues to voice out their opinions values as was found by Hamashima (2012) who sought to establish in her study that beauty pageants were conduits of empowerment for the women who participated in them. Interviewing judges, contestants, winners, and participants of the Miss Samoa pageant, as well as sixty surveys, she found that one of the things the Miss Samoa pageant did was to empower women by giving them a space to have their voices and opinions heard when they otherwise may not be. This was evident in the speech session (a part of the interview session) in the Miss Malaika pageant for instance where the ladies made their voices heard on a number of social phenomena. Issues of safety, discrimination against hijab-wearing Muslims women, health issues were addressed in these sessions.

The talent session which featured under the segment of performances, was also another segment that sought to project the ladies as functional and skilled rather than simply beautiful. Viewers were shown the singing, acting, dancing, painting prowess of the Miss Malaika contestants. Banet-Weiser (1999) describes the talent portion of pageants as a performance of personality, artistry and female subjectivity.

This study also found that certain segments in both pageants projected the contestants as more objectifying or empowering than the other. Comparing the four main segments, it was found first that the introductory segments in the Miss Ghana pageant objectified its contestants more than the Miss Malaika pageant, thus the Miss Malaika pageant provided a better platform for portraying the women as personalities and not just pretty faces with nice figures.

The performance segment in the Miss Malaika pageant also portrayed the women as more functional and skilled than the contestants in the Miss Ghana pageant. The existence of the talent session rendered the segment a good platform for the empowerment of the women rather than that of the Miss Ghana pageant.

The interview sessions in both pageants though sought to project the women as intelligent and eloquent, however the Miss Malaika pageant was observed to have empowered the women better in this regard rather than the Miss Ghana pageant. Miss Malaika provided a better platform in this segment to empower the young women through more mind provoking questioning and a speech session where the voices of the young women were heard.

The evening gown session in the Miss Malaika pageant was observed to have focused a high degree of attention on the physical appearances of the women more than the Miss Ghana pageant. By the elaborateness of attires and movements, the pageant seemed to have objectified the ladies physically more than in the Miss Ghana pageant.

### **The Male Gaze theory**

Evidence of the male gaze was found in the analysis of the data. Mulvey (1975) in her male gaze theory posits that in visual content or on visual platforms, the anticipation of the gaze of both men and women but especially men, may have certain dire consequences. It was observed, and as discussed in the findings chapter, that the ‘man behind the camera’ of the Miss Ghana shots fed the gaze of viewers by highlighting some sensitive parts of the bodies of the contestants in the introductory segments. The other camera shots generally put focus on the ‘aesthetic’ presentations

of the women on the stage as attractive and colorful. The wide shots, bird's eye shots, close ups on attires and makeups fed the viewers' gaze but the theory projects that the gazes were mostly that of men.

Some male judges were also observed to have made references to their anticipation of the contestants' 'display' as well as their anticipation of being 'entertained' by the women. It could be argued then that , according to the theory that the assumption of a flirty tone and demeanor by the first contestant of the Miss Ghana pageant was to live up to the assumed male gaze of both judges and men watching the show.

## **5.2 Limitations**

This study has a few limitations. Due to the ready availability of only the just ended episodes of the two pageants, the study had to focus only on these two as its data. Thus it may not be accurate to make general inferences to all beauty pageants in the country. This notwithstanding, findings give an in-depth description and exploration of what may be happening in the two biggest pageants in the country.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

It is recommended that future research be done exploring the effects of portraying pageant contestants in objectifying lights on other young women who may consume the entertainment TV content. The images of objectification and sexualization being shown on the screens in beauty pageants have the tendency of impacting disturbing perceptions about women's bodies and their

relationships with themselves. Thus future research may explore the effects of heavy consumption of beauty pageant content on the young women who consume them using the cultivation theories. Other studies can also be done exploring the perceptions of Ghanaians about beauty pageants in the country. Beauty pageants have evolved over time in the country, with several others springing up redefining their ideals. Further studies can explore the views of Ghanaians on whether or not the entertainment TV content, beauty pageants are currently doing more harm than good to the young women who participate in them.

The entertainment pageant industry should also, based on findings of this study, reconsider the design of beauty pageants and the core values that underline them. Better representations of women on television would be established if these pageants would base judging criteria on more functional values rather than appearance and display. Even though pageants may give these young women great experiences and may increase their self-esteem, the consequences of judging one's worth by beauty of the face, figure, and body exposure is proven to have dire consequences on the psychology of the young women who both participate and consume the TV content.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study found out that arguably the two biggest pageants in the country, Miss Ghana and Miss Ghana are showing to viewers certain objectifying images of the young participants, but also providing platforms for their employment through certain segments. The young ladies' bodies are being exposed, their sense of worth is being judged in a competition by the beauty standards they ought to meet and how beautiful, in face and in figure they have to be. The Miss Ghana pageant may not be giving the young women the opportunity to show their functionalities and the value

they bring to the table other than their beauties. Viewers are exposed to mostly the glamour and glitter, and the ‘beauties’ on the screens. The objectification theories by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Nussbaum (1999) provide indicators for what objectification may manifest as, some of which were established in these two pageants. These notwithstanding, certain segments in both pageants were found to empower the young women by giving them platforms to show their intelligence, assertiveness and agency.

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## APPENDIX A: CODING GUIDE

NAME/TITLE OF PROGRAMME:

DATE AND TIME OF TELECAST:

NUMBER OF CONTESTANTS:

COMPOSITION OF JUDGES:

SOURCE OF RECORDING:

INTRODUCTORY SEGMENT-

- observations of objectification (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)
- observations of empowerment (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)

PERFORMANCE SEGMENT

- observations of objectification (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)
- observations of empowerment (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)

INTERVIEW SEGEMENT

- observations of objectification (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)
- observations of empowerment (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)

EVENING WEAR SEGMENT

- observations of objectification (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)
- observations of empowerment (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS)

#### OTHER OBSERVATIONS

- CAMERA FOCUS- PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS (objectifying/empowering)
- COMMENTS FROM JUDGES- PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, BODY EXPOSURE, VOICE, POSES/MOVEMENTS (objectifying/empowering)