

1 The dark side of occupation within the context of modern-day beauty

2 pageants

3

4 Abstract

5 Background: The desire to be physically beautiful is inherent among human beings. In
6 particular, some women who participate in modern-day beauty pageants tend to spend more
7 time, energy, money and emotional resources to alter their natural body and looks to fit
8 socially and culturally constructed standards of beauty.

9 Objective: The authors frame beauty pageants as the context where diverse occupations are at
10 play with the purpose of becoming a 'beauty queen'. This commentary aims to discuss the
11 origins and culture of beauty pageants, the different perspectives on pageantry work, and
12 essential and hidden occupations performed within the context of this form of performing art.

13 Approach: Using the conceptual lens of the dark side of occupation, hidden occupations are
14 characterised by the doings of pageant hopefuls that are less explored and acknowledged
15 because they are perceived as health-compromising, risky, dishonest, illicit, and socially or
16 personally undesirable.

17 Conclusion: Furthermore, this commentary calls for the exploration of occupations beyond
18 the conventional scope of its understanding and the acknowledgment of hidden occupations
19 intertwined into people's everyday doings specifically in the context of desiring to be
20 'beautiful'.

21

22 Keywords: performing arts, occupational science, hidden, health compromising, work

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3 1.0 Introduction

4 The desire to be physically attractive and ~~to be~~ regarded as having beauty of form and face is
5 a common preference for humans [1]. To cultivate that desire, it is necessary for people to
6 exert a certain level of effort through tasks and activities to become “beautiful”. While
7 “beauty” is a subjective concept, beauty ideals are socially constructed and largely
8 determined by social norms, culture, and social interaction [2]. In the contemporary world,
9 the beauty pageant reinforces this hegemonic social construction of beauty. A modern-day
10 beauty pageant replicates a ritual form that introduces young women to their community,
11 state, or nation transforming them into a special class through the principle of competition
12 [3]. At present, beauty pageants have gone beyond judging the physical attractiveness of a
13 woman as they have started selecting winners who have affective qualities such as
14 confidence, intellect, and communication skills [4] in order to represent a brand, an
15 organisation, or a nation.

16 In recent decades, more young women have desired not only to be beautiful, but to
17 participate and win in beauty pageants. That is, modern-day beauty pageants are a common
18 place of work, especially in the low-income global south. While only a few women who work
19 as beauty pageant contestants are said to represent these socially constructed standards of
20 beauty, some women tend to spend more time, energy, money, and emotional resources in the
21 endless effort to alter their natural body and look to adhere to these socially constructed
22 beauty ideals [5,6]. In order to participate in a beauty pageant, big or small, a pageant
23 contestant has to perform and experience certain occupations. ‘Occupation’ is commonly
24 understood as everything we do in life including actions, tasks, activities, thinking and being
25 that restore or maintain good health and promote a state of wellbeing [7]. Given these

1 purposes and functions, beauty pageantry is under the category of occupation referred as
2 “work” which is defined in occupational therapy as “labor or exertion related to the
3 development, production, delivery, or management of objects or services” resulting in
4 financial or nonfinancial benefits including social connectedness, contributions to society,
5 structure and routine to daily life [8 p33]. Beauty pageantry is considered a form of work
6 because it facilitates economic mobility [4] and ensures effective career progression [9] for
7 those who engage in the competitions. Catriona Gray, Miss Universe 2018 winner, was
8 criticised by fans about her body while preparing for the Miss Universe 2018 pageant. This
9 led her to respond by saying:

10 “Yes, I am preparing for Miss Universe, but first and foremost I am Miss Universe
11 Philippines 2018 and that in itself comes with duties and responsibilities... I post
12 beautiful scenes of travel cause I love to share that with you all, but behind that – what
13 you all don’t see – is me working.” [10]

14 Her response is a clear indication that preparing, joining, and winning a beauty pageant is
15 indeed a form of work that can become a career, or even a profession.

16 While the assumption about occupation underpins a positive meaning, it is commonly
17 reserved for the privileged few [11 p 34] and can potentially silence the meaning of
18 occupations for those in the majority world where occupation does not necessarily contribute
19 positively to health, wellbeing, and justice [12,13]. In the context of beauty pageants, some of
20 the contestants go beyond doing what is good for their health and wellbeing just to have a
21 chance of clinching that coveted title “Beauty Queen”. That is, there are instances where
22 contestants engage in doings that are considered, perceived, or experienced to be health-
23 compromising, risky, dishonest, illicit, and socially or personally undesirable. Traditionally,
24 the profession of occupational therapy (which each author is a member of) has focused on the
25 positive impact of occupation in people's lives. As a challenge to this, Twinley introduced her

1 concept of the dark side of occupation as a prompt to consider ‘occupations that have been
2 hidden or not been implicit’ [14 p2] within the literature regarding everyday occupations,
3 including work. This includes the assertion that work, work places, and work practices are
4 not always conducive to the health, safety, and well-being of workers themselves [15].
5 Through the conceptual lens of the dark side of occupation [16,17], we would like to
6 contribute to the ongoing discourse about occupations that challenge pervasive beliefs and
7 dominant social order. In doing so, we do not intend to further problematise the binary
8 conceptualisations of occupation; rather, we assume the role of occupational scientists--who
9 study and consider people as occupational beings--to critically examine and expose
10 misrepresented occupations. Being cognisant of the diverse occupations participated by a
11 plurality of human groups, including beauty pageant contestants, this commentary aims to
12 explore the dark side of occupations enveloping the unique context of beauty pageants.
13 Inspired to shed light on certain occupations that have been, until now, hidden or unseen
14 following the conceptualisations of Twinley and Hocking [18], the article begins by defining
15 the modern-day beauty pageant, followed by discussing beauty pageants from different
16 known perspectives, outlining the hidden occupations in the context of beauty pageants, and
17 ends by suggesting the conceptual lens of the dark side of occupation provides a relevant
18 focus from which to explore beauty pageants from an occupational science perspective.

19

20 **2.0 Modern-day beauty pageants**

21 Historically, especially in the twentieth century, pageants were not really about celebrating
22 physical beauty, but by bringing communities together through theatrical performances that
23 fabricate the local past and its folk traditions [19]. The first known beauty pageant was held
24 in Scotland in the year 1839. It was organized by Archibald Montgomerie, 13th Earl of
25 Eglinton, to re-enact a medieval joust, and in the pageant, Georgina Seymour, Duchess of

1 Somerset, was proclaimed the “Queen of Beauty”—she was the first known beauty queen in
2 history [20].

3 In this paper, we look at modern-day beauty pageant as work in the field of performing
4 arts where diverse occupations are at play. Purposes of modern-day beauty pageants may
5 differ but they have one thing in common—the winner is almost always called the “Beauty
6 Queen”. These beauty queens win for various purposes including empowering women [21],
7 embodying national pride [22], promoting certain products, charities, or organizations [3,6],
8 and espousing inclusivity, diversity, and cultural identity [21,23]. Aside from signing a one-
9 year contract to live the purpose of the organization, winners are also granted the voice to
10 speak publicly to advocate for a specific cause, material rewards that go along with winning,
11 and powers for social and political purposes [3,24].

12

13 **3.0 Perspectives on pageantry and beauty**

14 To have a deeper understanding of how beauty pageants have evolved from historical re-
15 enactment with performative educational function [19] to a global spectacle of socially
16 constructed physical beauty with performative political and commercial functions [3,6,25] it
17 is important to have an overview on the different perspectives surrounding the origins,
18 culture, and work-related underpinnings of modern-day beauty pageants.

19

20 **3.1 Feminism**

21 By the 1990s, the media discourse about the world of pageantry conveyed how it served as a
22 platform of feminism due to its empowering nature, whereby women are granted a voice to
23 speak up, a stage to showcase their talents and skills, and an opportunity to be publicly
24 recognized for society to emulate [26]. Supporters who feel pageants embody feminism
25 declare that “beauty pageants give a voice to diverse women everywhere, especially as

1 contestants come from all different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds and even bring
2 certain disabilities to the world stage” [27]. However, in spite of the popularity of modern-
3 day beauty pageants, feminists around the world have seriously opposed the existence of
4 beauty pageants, which they denounce as degrading (towards women), sexist, and racist [28].
5 Miss America is the oldest beauty pageant that is in operation today and recently shifted its
6 rhetoric from seeing pageants as sites for the objectified feminine body to spaces in which
7 this feminine body possesses choices and freedoms [9,28]. Mainstream feminists challenge
8 the normalization of ‘flawless femininity’ which means having firm breasts and buttocks, no
9 cellulite, white sparkling teeth, and beautiful healthy hair among others [9]. In some
10 instances, achieving these beauty standards requires the unending effort to modify the natural
11 body through cosmetic surgery, weight control, and consumption of endless beauty products
12 [5,29]. This kind of body transformation is supported by a postfeminist standpoint where
13 women have the power and control over their bodies as a result of choice and self-
14 improvement [9].

15

16 **3.2 Post-colonialism**

17 History of colonisation has greatly influenced the beauty pageant culture in previously
18 colonised countries in Asia, Central and South America, and Africa. According to
19 postcolonial theorists, ‘Western structures of knowledge’ are imposed and deemed superior
20 to southern peripheral contexts in terms of political, socio-economic and psychological
21 aspects [6,30]. This Western influence bred a ‘cultural hegemony’ where the ruling class
22 from the colonising countries constructed cultural values and norms, including the standards
23 of beauty, to maintain their powers, privileges, and dominant status [31]. An example of this
24 is the santacruzán, an annual festival celebrated all over the Philippines in the month of May.
25 It is a Roman Catholic tradition in honour of Saint Helena, mother of Constantine the Great,

1 which was introduced in 1854 to the Filipinos during the Spanish colonisation in 1865 as a
2 means to further cement the Catholic religion into the Filipinos' way and image of life [32].
3 From a primarily religious event, present-day santacruzán has become a beauty pageant of
4 sorts which expands beyond the archipelago such as in Canada where Filipino-initiated
5 pageants are shaped by present-day forms of colonialism [33]. Trying to fit in the white
6 settler context as migrants, these beauty pageants struggle to serve as an opportunity for the
7 unique Filipina traits to be recognized even in the play of multiculturalism. In Hong Kong,
8 Filipina domestic workers enjoy the idea of being a 'Sunday Beauty Queen' which signifies
9 how even for one day (of the week), they can be free from their oppressed roles as a domestic
10 helper and have the control on how they want to express themselves [34]. In Indonesia, the
11 practices of beauty are highly influenced by the history of Dutch colonialism [35]. Indonesian
12 transgendered women, also known as waria, hold beauty pageants across large cities to
13 promote glamor and transnationality. While beauty pageants are not reflective of Southeast
14 Asian culture, pageantry still persists due to the colonial influences rooted from the European
15 model of commodifying beauty [35].

16

17 **3.3 Dominance of white beauty standards**

18 For over fifty years in America, black women were excluded from the Miss America
19 Pageant. Kinloch asserts that "with the obvious exclusion of black women, the pageant
20 maintained its principles to value the beauty of white women while devaluing that of black
21 women" [36 p105]. However, on the politics of sex, beauty, and race, Kinloch discusses the
22 cultural political context and what this signified, suggesting that the pageant's acceptance and
23 public construction of Vanessa Williams, the first African-American to win Miss America in
24 1984 reiterated, momentarily, its own discourse of power: "to prove, despite a racist history,
25 that the pageant was raceless in its representation of all American women" [36 p99].-

1

2 **3.4 Capitalism and consumerism**

3 Beauty pageants are largely commercialised and are usually run by transnational corporations
4 across the globe to capture the Eastern societies with Western's standards of beauty through
5 cosmetic promotions and tourism campaigns impacting economic development [25]. There
6 has been an assumption that most titleholders are chosen from countries belonging to the
7 Global South because these transnational cosmetic conglomerates want to capitalize on the
8 lucrative market for their beauty products for women in southern peripheral countries [6].-

9 While most women are cognisant about the huge gaps between their "natural beauty" and the
10 beauty standards constructed by world cultural, political, and economical hegemonies [6], the
11 capitalists in world dominant core countries take advantage of this corporeal dilemma among
12 women from the Global South so that they can blindly patronise their products no matter how
13 expensive or dangerous they are. The capitalist perspective of modern-day beauty pageants
14 intersect with the post-feminist standpoint where women are seen as powerful citizens and
15 consumers who have control over their physical body through materialistic consumption and
16 cosmetic surgeries [9]. This intersection is called 'consumptive femininity' in which products
17 such as beauty products, apparels, and clothing mark idealized gendered norms that are class-
18 bound through purchasing power [4].

19

20 **3.5 Classism and Class Politics**

21 Modern-day beauty pageants must have risen as an opportunity to address political issues in
22 the façade of a ritual performance. These pageants reflect the perspectives of (some) women
23 in modern society and officialise the role of women as part of the community [3]. Ironically,
24 being a beauty queen does not entail political power, but rather acquires a symbolic capital.
25 Contestants are usually sponsored by capitalists, social entities, or local communities which

1 implies that if she wins and becomes the ‘Beauty Queen’, she is expected to represent her
2 sponsors based on their hierarchies [37].- Evidently, beauty pageant contestants come from
3 middle class backgrounds [4,21,38] because they have the appetite for consumerism and the
4 resources to pay for personal pageant training, gym memberships, social media managers,
5 and high-fashion apparel in order to remain competitive. Seeing many titleholders and beauty
6 queens coming from middle-class backgrounds suggests that pageant organisers select
7 women who received formal education, can speak the English language eloquently, and are
8 striving for upward mobility i.e., moving from middle class to elite social class, or at least
9 close to that [4,6]. The process of upward mobility, however, can necessitate doings that may
10 seem risky, illicit, or even immoral from the eyes of society, but may be considerably
11 meaningful to the aspiring beauty queen.

12

13 **3.6 Morality and religion**

14 In the world of pageantry, being physically beautiful is closely associated with embodying
15 wholesome and moral values [9]. Religion also plays a part in the existence or abolition of
16 modern-day beauty pageants. For instance, when Miss World 1996 was hosted in India,
17 indignant protests from feminists and Hindu right-wing organizations fled the streets to
18 condemn the beauty pageant [39]. To appease the protesters, the swimsuit competition was
19 held on an offshore island in Seychelles. Indians who opposed the beauty pageant were under
20 the rhetoric of banning pageant hosting in India because Indian women are ‘pristine
21 commodities’ [40]. They believed that to bring honour, Indian women must embrace
22 femininity, purity, submissiveness, mothering, caretaking instincts, compassion, and
23 morality—and upholding these values protects Indian women from the corrupting influences
24 of the West including beauty pageants that bring ‘nudity, dubious morals and AIDS in their
25 wake’ [40].

1 Along similar lines, the Islam religion also has a conservative take on beauty
2 pageants. In Indonesia, Miss World 2013 was afflicted with much protests from dominant
3 Muslim groups stating that the beauty pageant is an ‘immoral event’. Hence, there was a need
4 to transfer the event’s venue to Bali, a predominantly Hindu province in Indonesia [41].-In
5 Islam marriages, the criteria a man looks for a woman to be his wife, in addition to her
6 religious commitment, are her wealth and beauty [42]. This moral perspective implicates that
7 beautiful Muslim women are bound to get married and fulfil their duties of taking care of
8 their children, family life, and home that brings peace and contentment [42]. Thus, joining
9 beauty pageants is not part of a Muslim woman’s duties. In response, Miss World Muslimah
10 USA was presented as a peaceful protest to Miss World and “aims to advocate for women’s
11 modesty in Islam and how Muslim women should be honoured [and] poses a great alternative
12 to other global-scale glamorous pageants, which may not be in line with what Islam permits”
13 [43].

14 In Christian religion, Biblical values perceive female beauty in terms of piety and
15 labour rather than any transient form of physical appearance (Proverbs 31:30) [44]. While
16 physical beauty is not discounted in Biblical texts, beautiful women are ‘noble’ when
17 they uphold modesty and ingenuity through entrepreneurship (Proverbs 31:11) and do not
18 use charm and vanity for their own advantage (Proverbs 31:29) [44].

19 Typical eligibility rules in beauty pageants include being between 18 to 26 years of
20 age, unmarried, to not have had children, and being biologically female at birth; in some
21 instances, racial purity is also considered (i.e., being 50% of a certain ancestry), being able to
22 speak a certain language, and have never posed for any men’s magazine [25]. These pageant
23 rules could have been drawn largely from the aforementioned and oldest existing beauty
24 pageant, Miss America, which originated from the United States of America, a country that is
25 statistically, predominantly Christian.

1

2 4.0 Occupations associated with participating in beauty pageants

3 The pursuit of participating and working to win a modern-day beauty pageant has never been
4 as serious and competitive as is in recent years. With all the entitlements, material rewards,
5 and social glory accompanying the 'Beauty Queen' title, the journey requires more than mere
6 hard work, being healthy, and mental preparation. That is, to some hopefuls, to win a title--
7 from a small town, a national competition, or the world stage--entails engaging in hidden
8 occupations to various extents [45].

9 Before discussing perspectives regarding the dark side of occupations, it is important
10 to outline the occupations that are commonly involved before, during, and after participating
11 in a beauty pageant. The non-exhaustive list of occupations for beauty contestants involve
12 going to the gym, exercising, eating nutritious food, formal and/or informal schooling,
13 grooming, dressing up, and communicating through various media outlets. Contestants
14 participate in these occupations many months and even years before they decide to join the
15 pageant. The expectation to be in a certain body shape is prevalent in the beauty pageant
16 world, hence it is imperative for contestants to have a gym membership, exercise routine, and
17 a strict nutritional diet [21] in order to adhere to social and cultural standards [38] produced
18 and reproduced within the pageant industry. Moreover, desired winners in beauty pageants
19 are contestants who are formally educated and who have undergone beauty pageant-related
20 training sessions [4]. Possessing knowledge and skills obtained from formal and informal
21 schooling or camps (e.g., being able to walk in high-heels, speak eloquently in English and in
22 other languages, and wear fashionable apparel on-point all the time) is advantageous not only
23 for the beauty queen but more so for the organisers who will not have to exert much more
24 effort to train the beauty queen who got the 'job' [23, unpublished data]. Grooming and
25 dressing up are occupations for pageant contestants as they are always on photoshoots, press

1 conferences, social events, and social media. Since female beauty pageants are largely
2 sponsored by cosmetic and beauty product companies, their contestants are expected to use
3 body-enhancing products like toiletries, lotions, and shampoos not only to maintain their
4 personal hygiene but also to build their personal identities, social bodies, and the bounds of
5 femininity [4]. One of the most important occupations beauty queens are expected to engage
6 in is autodidacticism (or self-education) in order to prepare to be deemed a well-informed
7 contestant, as their interpersonal communication and expression of self is judged through
8 questions, interviews, and during public (on and off stage) speaking. This occupation can
9 only be maximised by the beauty queen who is granted the platform to publicly voice out her
10 ideals, advocacies, and opinions--though always in consonance to the organisation she is
11 representing--towards social issues [3].

12 During the competition, several occupations are also performed in a ritualistic manner
13 with feminine meanings as Finol [46] described. In his article, he talked about the male
14 pageant held in Venezuela, which he found to have similar elements to the women's beauty
15 pageant such as having a master of ceremony, the judges, the spectators, and the contestants.
16 He even outlined that the '12-step ritual' commonly seen in a beauty pageant includes:
17 introducing of the contestants, singing and dancing, presenting of judges, parading, singing
18 and dancing, parading, singing and dancing, parading, singing and dancing, presenting of the
19 past winner, selecting the finalists, and announcing of the winner. Additionally, the format in
20 female beauty pageants usually has a question and answer portion, up-close interview, and a
21 series of competitions (i.e., traditional dress, swimsuit, evening gown, and talent) [25]. In
22 principle, these series of ritualistic tasks and activities can only be performed by pageant
23 hopefuls who made it to the final show after being able to routinely participate in most, if not
24 all, of the occupations aforementioned.

1 The occupations that were discussed are traditionally perceived as socially acceptable
2 activities that are performed by pageant contestants to adhere to the beauty standards of the
3 competition hence increasing their chances of winning the beauty pageant. These
4 occupations, to some extent, adhere to the many definitions - as illustrated by Law and
5 Baum's [7], for example - wherein they restore, maintain or enhance good health and
6 promote a state of wellbeing towards occupational participation. Alternatively, the dark side
7 of occupations [17,47] are, to a certain extent, silenced, hidden, or secretive and are engaged
8 in by pageant hopefuls with the shared goal of winning the beauty pageant, regardless of how
9 they may be socially, culturally, politically, or morally perceived, judged, or experienced.
10 However, the authors of this article would like to make a crucial point of clarification; there
11 has been misuse of the phrase 'dark occupations' and a misinterpretation of the intention of
12 Twinley's concept of the dark side of occupation. For instance, Twinley has explained this is
13 not about labelling occupations as 'dark'—as Kiepek [48 p4] refers to— which would of
14 course connote a moral judgment towards individuals who engage in the (said) occupations
15 under consideration. Conversely, the phrase the dark side of occupations explicates a
16 metaphor for occupations that are not acknowledged, hence lacking exploration and
17 understanding [14,18]. In the context of beauty pageants, the dark side of occupation is very
18 much about illuminating an aspect of human experience—in the form of doing beauty for
19 competition—that is masked in secrecy and is known to have a hidden side [45].

20

21 **4.1 Dark side of occupations within beauty pageants**

22 Before discussing the dark side of occupations within beauty pageants, it is imperative to
23 clarify that the following discussions do not espouse dualism or promote 'othering' or
24 'exoticising' [48] of individuals who engage in occupations that resist, or are in opposition to,
25 the expected and accepted social and cultural norms. Rather, the discussions challenge these

1 aforementioned conceptions of occupations to work towards more critical and integrative
2 understanding of occupations [17,48,49]. Hidden occupations in modern-day beauty pageants
3 include doing some things away from others that might be perceived and experienced to be
4 rather mundane or tedious, such as use of instant teeth whitening strips and skin-lifting tape.
5 Hidden occupations can also then include use of excessive use of whitening products (e.g.,
6 glutathione, dubbed as the ‘wonder drug for skin lightening’; steroids for muscle building for
7 men), cosmetic surgeries, occupations that ensure survival or involve risk (i.e., weight control
8 regimen), and sex work (i.e., receiving money or support in exchange for sexual services).

9

10 4.1.1 Use of illicit beauty products

11 Despite the controversies surrounding the use of glutathione as a skin whitening drug [50]
12 and its non-sanctioned distribution in some countries, more people in the southern peripheral
13 countries have started using it due to its ‘whitening effect’. For instance, in the Philippines,
14 oral glutathione is not restricted, while the use of intravenous glutathione is given public
15 warning due to its adverse effects [51]. While health-related harm can be incurred by
16 glutathione users, the desire to be ‘whiter’ remains more compelling than the health risks.
17 This can be explained by the continued valorisation of ‘whiteness’ or ‘lightness’ impacting
18 the biggest international pageants [25] which could be the impetus for beauty pageant
19 contestants to engage in this occupation. In male beauty pageants, the values of masculinity
20 including showing of muscles, physical attractiveness, heterosexuality are extensively
21 promoted [46]. Where physical attractiveness is the determining factor to win a title in men’s
22 beauty pageants, some male contestants resort to using anabolic-androgenic steroids (AAS),
23 an illicit substance to increase muscle mass, hence becoming more physical attractive, at least
24 subjectively [52]. Some male bodies are genetically ectomorphic which make it difficult for
25 them to gain muscle mass in spite of consistent workouts, hence the urge to use AAS to

1 hasten gaining muscles especially when the pageant is forthcoming. Although the popularity
2 of using glutathione and AAS may reinforce its normalisation as a self-care routine for
3 beauty contestants, in the beauty pageant context where ‘natural beauty’ is being espoused,
4 some contestants may still feel the need to hide this reality to adhere to the ideals of the
5 competition.

6

7 4.1.2 Cosmetic surgery routine

8 The effort to control the body is evidenced by the proliferation of a ‘weight control culture’
9 and cosmetic surgery [29]. Before further discussing cosmetic surgery, it is important to
10 differentiate it with plastic surgery. Plastic surgery is commonly defined as a surgical
11 procedure done for the reconstruction of facial and body defects due to birth disorders,
12 trauma, burns, and disease, whereas cosmetic surgery involves procedures and techniques
13 focused on enhancing a person’s appearance for aesthetic purposes [53]. Common cosmetic
14 surgery procedures done to these beauty pageant contestants include breast enhancement,
15 facial contouring (e.g., rhinoplasty), facial rejuvenation (e.g., face lift), body contouring (e.g.,
16 liposuction), and skin rejuvenation (e.g., Botox® and filler treatments). The normalisation of
17 cosmetic surgery through reality television shows, ‘Botox parties’ (use of
18 OnabotulinumtoxinA injection), cosmetic gift cards, and even social media endorsements has
19 reified the post-feminist slogan ‘girl power’ where women, young and mature, are lured into
20 the belief that they have control over their bodies [9]. The bombardment of this rhetoric to
21 women, in turn, legitimises the practice of cosmetic surgeries globally. The problem lies not
22 in the surgical procedures per se, but when pageant contestants undergo cosmetic surgeries
23 when pageant rules forbid it. Contestants who were suspected to have had cosmetic and
24 plastic surgeries are expected to conceal these doings otherwise their chances of winning the
25 beauty pageant would diminish instantaneously. Although it is rare for contestants to be

1 expelled from the pageant due to ‘cosmetic enhancements’, some contestants choose to
2 showcase their ‘untouched beauty’ to evoke the other end of the spectrum within the post-
3 feminist rhetoric.

4

5 4.1.3 Weight control regimen

6 To more conservative contestants, choosing a stringent weight control regimen could be the
7 only way to adhere to the thinness-promoting norms in the pageant world. Excessive weight
8 control involves overly selective nutritional diets, intensive exercises, and misuse of
9 laxatives, diet aids, and enemas which heightened eating disorder symptoms among pageant
10 hopefuls [21]. One of the participants in Crawford’s study [21] expressed that while
11 contestants were mindful of the fact that they need to eat regularly to sustain their physical
12 fitness routines, some still engaged in starving or non-eating. In more extreme cases, women
13 in South America could access a quick weight-loss alternative called “tongue mesh”. With
14 the help of plastic surgeons, a piece of plastic mesh is sown on the contestant’s tongue with
15 six stitches which promises instantaneous weight loss as illustrated by Sayej [54]:

16 The patient keeps it in their mouth for a month. From day one, it becomes incredibly
17 painful to eat any solid food, so they stick to a strict liquid diet. All they can drink is
18 broth, smoothies, juice, and soup. It costs as low as \$600 to get the mesh sewn to your
19 tongue for a month. The results? Shed 30 pounds in 30 days.

20 These procedures are usually done in preparation for the big pageant and are hidden from the
21 media until the beauty queen wins and finishes her reigning contract.

22

23 4.1.4 Sex work, escorting, and sexual exploitation

24 The issue on distorting the female body and mind for the sake of beauty has been raised to
25 public consciousness since the Women’s Liberation Movement in 1971, but Wolf [55] argued

1 rather succinctly that the real issue was not about wearing makeup, losing weight, and
2 undergoing surgeries but women's lack of choice. For some women who may experience a
3 lack of choice, especially when competing for a beauty pageant and being judged by others as
4 part of the competition, the exchange of sexual services can be one way, or the only way, to
5 achieve more choices. More broadly speaking, Rule and Twinley [56] recently provided an
6 occupational perspective of women involved in sex work, in which they asserted: "sex work
7 is interpreted and performed differently, depending on the political, religious, cultural, and
8 legal context; all of which shape the dominant cultural narrative of stigmatising perceptions
9 of sex workers". While sex work can either be perceived as empowering or oppressive [57],
10 engaging in the exchange of sexual services within a beauty pageant context is fraught with
11 issues related to risk, danger, stigma, and exploitation. In 2018, the Miss Venezuela
12 Organisation was accused of offering its contestants for sexual activity (termed by media
13 reports as a prostitution scandal) to seek sponsors from political figures and big-time
14 businessmen to obtain houses, luxury cars, trips, designer clothes, and ~~jewellery~~[jewelry](#) [58].
15 This exploitation led to the suspension of the Miss Venezuela Organisation from operating,
16 which instigated the restructuring of the organisation's leadership in order to restore its
17 reputation to the Venezuelan public. When sex is not viable, time is exchanged for pageant-
18 related funds or sponsorship through escorting. Escorting is the provision of entertainment or
19 companionship to a client in exchange for money or something else [59]. Escorting
20 constitutes accompanying the client to entertaining events such as an opera, club, or dining
21 experience. The temporal aspect of escorting depends on the mutual agreement between the
22 escort and the client, but escorts can either choose to engage in repeated transactions through
23 word-of-mouth advertising [59] or short-term mating via easily-accessed online websites or
24 social media applications [60]. Wright [57] argued that from a capitalistic standpoint, sex
25 work and pageantry create a sex class where women are relegated to service work and

1 provide pleasure to the males of society. However, when applied with critical reflexivity at
2 the societal level of analysis to occupations as proposed by Kiepek [48], we can also
3 understand modern-day sex work as an occupation that can be enjoyable, empowering,
4 rewarding; it can help one build social networks and friendships, experience healing and
5 companionship to another, and feel independent [61].

6

7 **5.0 Discussion**

8 This commentary recognised the diversity of human beings and their diversity allows for
9 understanding them through their contexts, situations, and occupations. The motivation to
10 write this piece is largely in response to recognising the need to expand the scholarship on
11 less explored and acknowledged occupations; in this instance, we have discussed beauty
12 pageantry as a work occupation in order to contribute to the wider challenge regarding
13 common assumptions that have been made about occupations people, groups, and
14 populations engage in [12,17,18,47,49].

15 Modern-day beauty pageants are perceived differently by people, including scholars,
16 depending on factors including their social and political identities (e.g., gender, race,
17 sexuality, disability, class, religion or spirituality), personally-held and political beliefs (e.g.,
18 feminism), history and culture (e.g., historiography, post-colonialism), and social status
19 (involving capitalism, consumerism, and classism). While multiple perspectives can ensue
20 agreements and disagreements, looking at modern-day beauty pageants as a context where
21 diverse and hidden occupations are at play initiates a new way of understanding the things
22 people do. A non-exhaustive list of occupations was outlined to build on the growing
23 knowledge about the dark side of occupations. From these intersecting discussion points, the
24 authors argue that modern-day beauty pageant, as a form of work, is both a means and an end
25 to achieving a work role, career, or profession that can afford public recognition but that can

1 involve engagement in some occupations that are perceived as health-compromising, for
2 instance. Occupational justice is defined as having the right to meet basic needs and equal
3 opportunities to reach one's potential to engage in diverse and meaningful occupations [62].
4 Coming from an occupational justice standpoint posits how modern-day beauty pageants
5 could potentially give winners, the beauty queens, the socialised rewards of possessing
6 power, fame, money, and the voice to be able to choose and participate in more and varied
7 occupations than before. Moreover, the beauty pageant also characterises the rhetoric 'the
8 end justifies the means'. This suggests how beauty pageants, its organisers and fans, have the
9 tendency to highlight the 'end' or the goal rather than the means since these means (steps and
10 processes) towards the goal (participating or winning the pageant) were commonly perceived
11 to be illicit, tricky, harmful, or unhealthy. With the purpose of better understanding
12 occupations, it could be possible that some pageant hopefuls have experienced injustices and
13 have caused injustices on others during the process of participating in beauty pageants. This
14 is supported by Angell's [13] argument that 'occupation is not only a means of resistance and
15 change but also a site where inequality and social difference are constituted'. It is also an
16 opportunity to recognize the identity of humans as autonomous agents who are capable to
17 choose occupations beyond the barriers of social differences such as "gender, class, caste,
18 religion, education, poverty, ethnicity, age, culture, geographic location, sexual orientations
19 and other axes of difference" [12] and that challenge the social order [13].

20 Contributing to a more critical and socially responsive occupational science, we can
21 therefore consider modern-day beauty pageants as work sites where occupational injustices
22 are experienced and occupational justice are achieved. Whether this is true or questionable,
23 the authors perceive contradictions as spaces for future debates and potential scholarship.

24 Furthermore, this commentary articulated underrepresented and unique occupations
25 that affect the health and wellbeing and envelope majority of individuals and collectives

1 belonging to the Global South. Apart from the USA, this paper has contextualised the
2 literature review on beauty pageants by citing examples from countries like India, Indonesia,
3 Nigeria, Philippines, and Venezuela to illuminate issues and forms of work that are distinct in
4 these cultures and social realities using an occupational science perspective. This
5 commentary is intended to be non-exhaustive and data-free since the goal was not to
6 generalise but rather to consider and reconsider the conceptualisations of occupations within
7 exposed and hidden social realities and contexts. While this article largely extracted literature
8 from pageants for women, it is valuable to note that modern-day pageants have catered to
9 more diverse groups such as babies, children, teenagers, married women, grandmothers [28]
10 men [46], gay men, and trans people [22].

11 In conclusion, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the ‘dark side of
12 occupations’ so as to challenge occupational scientists, and indeed all those interested in
13 studying people as occupational beings, to explore occupations beyond the more traditional
14 boundaries of thought and scholarship of human doings and work. Concretely, we would like
15 to raise consciousness in considering occupations from different cultures and subcultures by
16 sharing this work through online and offline discourses and debates in higher education
17 institutions and more informal platforms such as podcasts, vlogs, and social media. For
18 readers coming from the fields that intersect with occupational science, we hope to offer a
19 critical understanding of people’s diverse doings to guide in reconceptualising their practice,
20 research, and policy making, especially when involving people who engage in hidden
21 occupations and work in the context of desiring to be ‘beautiful’, whilst being judged against
22 unrealistic beauty standards.

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