

# **THE CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY CRISIS AND PERPLEXED VALUES**

## **Critical Analysis of Contemporary Beauty Pageant Extravagant Hoax and Sheer Neglect of Academic Excellence (First Class)**

By

**Onebunne, Jude PhD**

Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze, Anambra State, Nigeria  
[juno.anyi@gmail.com](mailto:juno.anyi@gmail.com), 08034074664

&

**Nnaemeka, Ifeoma**

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,  
08037782746

&

**Ezeaka Chinazom Sylvia**

Department of Modern European Language  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

### **ABSTRACT**

*Value misplacement borne out of severe identity crisis has indeed become prevalent in most contemporary societies of the world. The incidence of honouring and showing intense pleasure towards what should come next is no more news. Indeed, our utmost glamour for beauty pageant against best brains is increasingly glaring and raising thoughts in the mind of most well meaning individuals and citizens. A discourse on the identity crisis, astonishing values on beauty pageant and academic excellence (first class) neglect is the focus of this paper. The paper expresses fear over the perceived as well as observed identity crisis, the immense values attached to the beauty pageant winners along with the numerous goodies that follow vis-à-vis and the neglects the best brains suffer as well as the platform on which any meaningful developing nations endure. Using the methodological instrument of critical analysis, the paper explores the theme and categorically states that if our societies do not find their way back to the original root, they will soon be likened to grass decayed in a deep pit. It therefore recommends that for a guaranteed future with sustainability of most of the millennium development goals, most societies will have to re-orientate its value system to a more morally sane society where values are set right.*

**Keywords:** Academic Excellence, Beauty Pageant, Identity Crisis, Perplexed Values

### **Introduction**

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form, in moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! (Shakespeare Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2, L 250)

Man as an instrument of creation is charged with so many values that guide his life and dealings. He is so much to be engulfed with these values (principles) that they inform his actions and inactions and should dictate what is and what is not. History has however shown

that when once man is guided by these values, priorities are set right and enormous successes and developments are recorded on the spot.

Again, still with natural inclination, man is endowed to thwart and twist these set values to define situations of the moment or his inordinate desires. Most times, these moves cause him to shift from what is expected and beneficial to shambles, resulting in worthless values and identity crisis. This paper hinges on this inexplicable outcome to address man's horrible shift to values that adore beauty pageant winners with near presidential treatments and treats academic excellence as nothing or something that deserves little or no applaud.

### **Academic Excellence**

Academic excellence may be best described as the demonstrated ability to perform, achieve, and/or excel in scholastic activities. It has been identified with achieving high grades and superior performance. It can also mean a platform that guarantees the conferment of award of excellence on the academic achiever as a way of encouraging and rewarding the Achiever for a work well done.

Academic excellence is not a concept that just comes without efforts, neither does it goes to the highest bidder in terms of who has more money. It is an award given to seasoned individuals who have proven themselves to be outstanding (stand out) amongst their equals. History greatly revealed that seasoned students at all levels of education who have distinguished themselves academically, at the primary, secondary or tertiary level of education, are most times awarded gift items or cash prizes to congratulate them for having distinguished themselves amongst their equal. For other levels of education such as primary and secondary schools, this award is given to the students who performed well in the final exam such as Common Entrance Exam, West African Examination Council or National Examination Council (NECO) etc. In other words, such award is based on the performance in the said exam. This is different from University Award of Academic Excellence popularly called 'First Class Award' given to individuals who have distinguished themselves over time-all through their stay in the University to have attained that great height. This is to say that being a First Class graduate is an achievement that requires ground-breaking efforts, which place a student on the said height right from his or her first year in school to the last.

One may believe with us however that what guarantees the attainment of this height is tied to consistent academic excellence (from first year) made possible by consistent efforts. It is indeed an endeavour that requires 'Great-Bravo' or 'Treatment.' Unfortunately, that is not the case in our society today and this can be blamed largely on *Identity Crisis and Perplexed Values*. It is more disconcerting when our citadels of learning that are supposed to champion academic excellence in its utmost responsibility begins to meddle with cheap frivolities. This includes collaboratively encouraging and recognizing mere beauty contest that judges physique on personal idiosyncrasies to the detriment of expert knowledge which, according to Francis Bacon, is power. Our Institutions of learning nevertheless have turned into Institutions of Entertainment. Entertainment industry which ought to be a course in the department of Theater Arts or Tourism as any internal arrangement may allow, is gradually and dangerously redefining many of our academe. Today, more than ever, majority of our academic products are eloquent testimonies of this recent interfering academic mélange that ends in recent but different sexual exploitations and aberrations in beauty pageant competitions.

### Beauty Pageantry

A beauty pageant is a competition that mainly focuses on the physical beauty of its contestants. It also references a competition that has traditionally focused on judging and ranking the physical attributes of the contestants, although some contests have evolved to also incorporate personality traits, intelligence, talent, and answers to judges' questions as judged criteria. The term beauty pageantry almost invariably refers only to contests for unmarried women such as the Big Four international beauty pageants (China Daily, 2004; English.pravda.ru., 2009; Enriquez, 2014) with similar events for men or boys being called by other names and are more likely to be body building contests.

In beauty pageantry, the organizers of each pageant may determine the rules of the competition, including the age range of contestants. The rules may also require the contestants to be unmarried, and be "virtuous", "amateur", and available for promotions, besides other criteria. It may also set the clothing standards in which contestants will be judged, including the type of swimsuit.

Beauty pageants are generally multi-tiered, with local competitions feeding into the larger competitions. For example, the international pageants have hundreds or thousands of local competitions. Child beauty pageants mainly focus on beauty, gowns, sportswear modeling, talent, and personal interviews. Adult and teen pageants focus on makeup, hair and gowns, swimsuit modeling, and personal interviews.

Usually, a winner of a beauty contest is often called a *beauty queen*. The pejorative term *clapper* often refers to losing candidates. Often, near presidential treatment (that is award) which includes titles, tiaras or crowns, sashes, scepters, savings bonds, scholarships, and cash prizes are given to the winner. However, adult and teen pageants have been moving more towards judging speaking, and many no longer contain swimsuit or talent sections. Some pageants award college scholarships, to the winner or multiple runners-up (Miss Teenage California, 2014).

### History of Beauty Pageantry

The first beauty pageant was held in 1859 by Archibald Montgomeri, the 13th Earl of Ellenton. In the 1880's all participants had to supply a photograph and a short description of themselves to be eligible for entry and a final selection of 21 contestants were judged by a formal panel. The Miss America pageant was established in 1921 by a local businessman as a means to entice tourists to Atlantic City, New Jersey (*Pageant Almanac*, 2008). He also hosted the winners of local newspaper beauty contests in inter-city beauty contest, a turnout of over one hundred thousand people was achieved and sixteen year old Margaret Gorman of Washington won and was awarded \$100 (*Miss America*, 2004). Similar pageant was established in Britain, Germany and other countries. The history of beauty pageant is rooted in antiquity, in ancient China for example, special rules were created for the unique procedure for selecting the beauties. The rules have been preserved to this day in poetic images of ancient Chinese literature. In Ottoman Empire, despite strict Islamic morals, noblemen in harems also entertained themselves with selection of the most beautiful wife.

In Nigeria, national newspaper, 'Daily Times' was the original owner of the Miss Nigeria franchise, which started as a photo contest in 1957. Contestants posted photographs of themselves to Daily Times headquarters in Lagos, where finalists were short-listed. Those successful entrants were invited to compete at the live finals which at the time, did not include a swim suit competition at the Lagos Island club. Grace Oyelude pageant won and

used the money she made to study Nursing in England. After her, came Helen Anyaenaeluna and Nenetule of Southern Cameroon which was under Nigerian constitution as at 1959; Edna Park, however, was the first Nigerian at Miss Universe in 1964 and is best remembered for collapsing after failing to reach top fifteen.

Today there are various beauty pageants all over the country like Miss Style Queen Nigeria, Face of Democracy Nigeria beauty contest, Miss Lacasera, Miss Tourism Nigeria, Miss Heritage, Miss Supernatural, Miss Sisi Oge, Miss Universe, Miss Earth and the recent Miss Centenary amongst many others.

### **Beauty Pageant Winners Verses First Classers: A Chaos of Value**

The contemporary times presents a chaos of value in our awarding system between beauty pageant winners and first graduates. It shows a system that suggests how much crisis is heaped on our identity, trans-valuation of values. This has validated indiscipline, suggesting a generation without moral sanity and calls for value re-orientation. Indeed, the system offers a platform that presents the beauty pageant winners with *near presidential* treatments ranging from prize money, flashy cars, and scholarships to the symbolic power of representing one's community or nation. The pride inherent in being the one chosen above all the others notwithstanding. Sometimes, the pageant winners also get government appointments. For instance, Miss Collette Nwadike, Miss Tourism 2014 was appointed by the Anambra State Governor to be his Special Adviser on culture and tourism. Most times, these treatments accrue based on mere coming on stage in scant dressing, exposing one's body and beauty before the male judges, and walking in the most offensive and distasteful manner within few hours of display, against consistent and persistent efforts to distinguish oneself academically. The winner, most times, is determined by the number of Judges she slept with before the pageantry (pageant display) – a decayed and degenerated lifestyle that encourages moral decadence and devaluation, a disgrace to the dignity of the womenfolk.

Notwithstanding, the system presents a different game for their counterparts who, after spending so much time, money, years of tireless efforts, were able to distinguish themselves with great academic excellence (first class). They are offered little or nothing in commendation for such painstaking supposed-rewarding endeavour. Most times when they are rewarded/awarded, the articles of the reward/award are so hilarious and quite discouraging to compare with what is offered their counterparts (pageant-winners). Worst of all is the denial of job appointment to some of the First class graduates by the awarding institution. Sometimes, some of these first class graduates are not even hired by employers in the labour market (what a degrading experience), let alone given flashy cars, or scholarships to build more on their expertise.

Indeed, the whole idea of leaving first class graduates after so many years of toiling and spending with no benefit unlike their counterparts is very unfair. Very thought-provoking questions such as the following arise:

- i. What happened to our value system?
- ii. What happened to our identity?
- iii. Where are we heading to as a nation with this perplexed value and identity crisis?

### **Need for Value Re-Orientation**

It is indeed frustrating to know that the tools for national development which are the best brains are being swept under the carpet and into the trash can. It is also identity crisis to give

less credence to the bedrock on which every necessary platform for national development stands. This sends fear down the spine of well-meaning citizens as to how far we have validated indiscipline, honouring nakedness and dignity degeneration in the name of beauty pageantry. Often, we magnify it with such great glamour, thereby reinforcing its continuity. This, certainly, is a journey towards moral decadence/insanity. This prepares the ground for a decayed system that could crash the entire platform set for better existence.

### Woman's Stuff: Beauty and Character

It is a popular Igbo idiomatic expression that, *Mma nwoke bu Uchu (Idi ma o bu Ichu Uchu) mana Agwa bu mma nwanyi* which literally means that man's attractiveness (beauty) lies in his tenacity of purpose (committed strength of character) but *woman's beauty is based on her character. This, however, is against the contemporary belief that a woman is described as being beautiful when she is curvy and possesses pleasant facial expression.* A woman's beauty lies in her positive attitude to life and this is the fuel needed to drive her from idea conception to realization. Her ability to strategize and utilize her inner strength especially, when she encounters a challenge will help her come out a better, more valuable and respectable woman. Beauty is not an outward expression, it is rather an inward possession expressed outwardly. It is what is in the inside that manifests on the outside. In the African society, a beautiful woman is a strong-minded and soft-hearted woman who has her integrity intact and needs not step on toes to achieve her goals. In the time past, a beautiful woman was seen as one who was not just endowed with a good sense of reasoning but had been able to preserve herself. According to Welter (1978), "Purity was as essential as piety to a young woman; its absence is unnatural and unfeminine. Without it, she was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order" (p. 315). According to Fulton Sheen, the idea of purity has to do with the reverence we accord to the mystery of sex. Beauty is character and character is built on integrity.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the stipulated facts, the paper therefore concludes that slaughtering the value system on the altar of perplexed value and identity crisis is a journey into the great beyond. And if our societies do not find their way back to the root, they would soon be likened to grass decayed in a deep pit. It therefore recommends that for a guaranteed future with sustenance of most of the millennium development goals, most societies will have to re-orientate their value system to a more morally sane society where things are set right.

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