

SEXUAL HEALTH

Balance in pageantry

Beauty pageants have been used to celebrate women for decades. Sure, their roots were less than balanced, but many modern pageants promote self-esteem, personal achievements and world-view thinking. Pageants have also substantially broadened their contestant base: seniors, children, plus-size, and, finally, transsexuals.

A transsexual is someone whose inner gender is mismatched with his or her birth sex. This often leads to surgery to reconcile a person's outer and inner identities. In the past, such transformations were stigmatized, but "Trans pageants," though less broadly publicized, have been around for years. The big one, "Miss Tiffany Universe Transsexual Beauty Pageant" in Thailand, is coming up on its thirteenth year.

Unfortunately, there aren't very many others in other parts of the world. Las Vegas has hosted a small pageant since 2004. Last year, India had its first. Still, there's definitely room for more; we should embrace what we can learn from the conduct of trans pageants.

Flipping through photos of some of the contests, I'm amazed by how beautiful the women are— and not just physically. The

Sex and Sensibility



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studies classes that the University offers. Making those topics as prominent as more traditional studies has made me feel like I fit in. And, that's saying something; for a bisexual goth chick in the Midwest, fitting in isn't easy.

Having a student-run pageant could have similar effects on the student body. Lawrence is a prime spot for a grass-roots trans pageant. It's the only city in Kansas that has anti-discrimination laws for sexual orientation. Last fall, KU Professor Maggie Childs even led the charge to include gender identity in those laws.

What's more, KU's annual "Pride Week" already brings in performers and hosts an informal drag show; slap the two together and there are the seeds of a pageant.

The KU student body alone may not have enough transsexuals to fill a pageant, but there are plenty of trans women within driving

winners have a magnificent, lady-like glow and the uniquely female happiness that makes every woman attractive.

That's what these pageants are about: Recognizing transsexuals' femininity rather than portraying them as stereotypical clumsy knock-offs. By proxy, they promote femininity on a grander scale.

It doesn't matter that the outsiders of these people used to be male; inside, they are, and always have been, beautiful women.

"Specialty" pageants, be they plus-size, senior, or trans, reinforce the message that identity is something to celebrate. That's something that even the traditional twenty-something beauty crowd should be able to get behind.

I've always been impressed with the variety of LGBT and women's

distance. Kansas City boasted a successful trans group for 20 years (Kansas City Crossdressers and Friends), with members hailing from Manhattan to Springfield, Mo.

Better yet, why not open a pageant to all women? Allowing trans and natural-born women to participate in a beauty pageant together is the next logical step in accepting transsexuals as the beautiful women they are.

Throughout time women have been able to do amazing things by banding together. It's time to pull our trans sisters into the fold and accomplish even more—and look great while doing it.

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