

Fall 2012

Beauty in the Indigenous Pageant The Cultural and Social Relevance of Miss Samoa

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Beauty in the Indigenous Pageant

The Cultural and Social Relevance of Miss Samoa

By Mariko Hamashima

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SIT Samoa Fall 2012

Abstract

This paper investigates the Miss Samoa pageant's historical origins, cultural relevance and preservation, the ways in which it empowers women, the public's perspective, and future development. Secondary sources on the pageant were limited to eight pieces, so interviews with judges, contestants, winners, and participants were sources of information. Sixty surveys were also conducted to gain the public's perspective of the pageant. The study found Miss Samoa is more popular for its entertainment value than cultural relevance. The Miss Samoa pageant has been utilized as an agent of empowerment for individual women but is not necessarily influential on a larger social scale. The results also suggest the pageant been blended into Samoa as more of an indigenous pageant than a beauty pageant. The pageant's capabilities are limited due to the boundaries imposed by tourism-driven motivations. In order to encourage future development, the Miss Samoa pageant would need to prioritize locality as the paramount focus.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Jackie Fa'asisila and Allan Alo for your guidance, patience, and wonderful insight. Thank you also to Sia Achica, Petra Chan Tung, Dionne Fonoti, Sonja Hunter, Lili Lam, Rezetta Muliadou, Steve Percival, Kristian Scanlan, Rupi Taituuga, Vanya Taule'alo, Janine Tuivaiti, Tracy Warren, and my anonymous source for your time and knowledge. I truly appreciate all of the assistance and wisdom you shared with me.

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Introduction: How Pageants Began

A historical account of the origins of pageants on both a global and local scale sets the stage for this study. Since beauty pageants originated far from Samoa, the cultural and historical origins that have allowed the pageant to be able to be successfully introduced must be examined. Many cultural origins and values, especially those regarding the symbolism of hair, *fā'alialia* and self-advertisement, *taupou* and luring, and the influence of Christianity contribute significantly to this analysis.

The process of rewarding a beautiful lady started in Scotland in 1839, where Georgiana Sheridan was chosen as the Queen of Beauty (Brisk Info 2011). The first American beauty pageant was held in 1854, but was closed down by public protest (Brisk Info 2011). From the very beginnings beauty pageants were a controversial and even unwelcome venture. However, opposition to beauty pageants did not last long. In 1880 the first “Bathing Beauty Pageant” took place as part of a summer festival to promote business in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware (Brisk Info 2011). The idea of using women’s bodies as business ventures was a major motivation for the creation of these pageants, even in 1880.

America continued to lead the creation and development of beauty pageants. While Miss America is known as the first modern beauty contest, a concerted effort has been made to move towards a more holistic approach since its foundations in 1921 (Brisk Info 2011). Major instigators for this shift were the militant feminists of the early 1970’s who demonstrated at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City (Scharf 1984: 125). In response to these feminist critiques the focus of the Miss America pageant shifted from almost exclusively at look at beauty to a broader focus on scholarship and education. This required contestants to be enrolled in college, and demonstrate social awareness. The majority of their pageants scores were determined by the

talent and interview competitions, as well as the submission of the swimsuit segment to public judgment (Scharf 1984: 125). Over time the Miss America pageant encouraged education and social consciousness among its contestants but also maintained a focus on beauty by keeping the swimsuit segment. While encouraging education is one aspect of empowerment, other methods include promoting cultural preservation, cultural awareness, gender equality, health, or any other cause that may benefit the community. Pageants in Samoa would face some of the same challenges as did Miss America.

Methodology

The initial objective of this paper was to look at the Miss Samoa pageant as purely an indigenous pageant, but research uncovered other complicated dynamics. I wanted to understand what makes the pageant Samoan and how it differs from the typical perceptions of pageants. Pageants are sometimes thought of as being a discriminatory and exploitative event that ranks women based off of their looks. I deliberately wanted to move from this Western feminist perspective to understand how the pageant could be culturally relevant and empowering to its contestants and the community. I also intended to explore the influence that tourism had upon the pageant. The overall goal of this paper was to present a balanced perspective of the pageant and provide suggestions for the future.

The limitations and constraints for this project included very little written material written about indigenous pageants. Most academic pieces focused primarily on pageants within the West or through the restrictive Western feminist lens. Little is written on pageantry in the South Pacific. Of course, the invisibility of the South Pacific in academia is certainly not exclusive to pageantry. The majority of the information in this research utilizes primary rather than secondary sources.

The second limitation was the inability to acquire a comprehensive history of the Miss Samoa pageant. Pertinent staff members of the Samoa Tourism Authority were not available and written documentation was non-existent.

A variety of people were interviewed including contestants and Miss Samoa winners from both this year and the past. Samoa Tourism Authority staff members offered the most idealistic perspective. On the other side of the spectrum were individuals invested in promoting

the pageant's capabilities. Judges and scholars spoke of their experiences from their specific background or contexts.

Surveys were useful to understand the pageant's popularity, how it was viewed and why (if at all) people saw the pageant as empowering. A greater number of respondents would have been helpful and could be expanded for further research.

Pageants in Samoa

The Miss Samoa pageant began sometime in the early 1970s when the late Tuifeamalo (Tui) Schaffhausen Annandale became the first Miss Samoa (Hunter Interview 27 November 2012). This was the same time period in which the Miss America pageant was responding to the large feminist movements. If Samoa had adopted pageantry any earlier than it did, beauty would probably take a larger role in the pageant than it does today. Miss Samoa Pageant Incorporated was established and administered by the Samoa Visitors Association in late 1986 and handed over to the Samoa Visitors Bureau in 1996 (Hunter Interview 27 2012). The pageant was created in conjunction with tourism and has remained under its authority ever since.

From the beginning, however, Samoan pageants have largely prioritized cultural heritage and values. “At early beauty pageants in American Samoa the queen was sometimes determined by measuring each girl’s hair with a yardstick. One might view this method of comparison as the traditional Samoan version of taking the girl’s measurements (Mageo 1991: 357). This exemplifies that Samoans utilized their own understandings and cultural norms rather than adhering to Western concepts like body measurements. While Samoa may have adapted the institution of pageants, they did not necessarily adapt the values that came with it. This is evident since the Miss Samoa pageant used their own concepts of beauty by measuring the hair instead of the body. In fact, hair in Samoa has held particular value.

The Symbolism of Hair and Fa’alialia

The symbolism and traditional value of hair which has long prevailed throughout Samoa’s history has been reflected in the pageants. The *tutagita*¹ epitomizes a general attitude in

¹ *Tutagita*: a hairstyle consisting of a shaved pate ornamented by a tuft hanging down over the left temple, from which a long tail was left to dangle down the cheek (Mageo 1994: 408)

old Samoa that women's bodies should be displayed (Mageo 1994: 413). Mageo comments on this attitude which was rife throughout early missionary portraits;

Reverend Williams recounts how Samoan girls, when counseled by missionary wives to conceal their persons, responded by counseling missionary wives. The girls told the wives to put aside their missionary garments and to tie a shaggy mat around their waist such that the left thigh was bare, to rub their skins with oils, to powder their breasts with turmeric, to adorn themselves with beads, and 'and then walk about to shew themselves' (*fā'alialia*), so that they might inspire longing in the *mānaia*, the sons of chiefs (1994: 413).

The idea of displaying bodies in pre-colonial Samoa predated the introduction of pageants. However, the idea of *fā'alialia*² cohered with the values within pageantry very well. Just as Samoan women walked about in the community to show themselves, women in pageants walk about on a stage for similar reasons. Contact with missionaries, however, greatly affected these values and encouraged women to act within the norms of modesty and humility. "Today in Samoa, when a girl cuts her heavy long hair, others will remark that she is wasting her beauty. In one recent pageant one contestant appeared bare-breasted with but her long hair covering her breasts.

Christianity in Samoa has clearly influenced the way in which women monitor their bodies and hair, even in pageants. Women's hair in Christian Samoa was until recently, normally hidden in a bun" (Mageo 1994: 408). Even now, all 2012 Miss Samoa contestants except one wore their hair in buns for pageant advertisements. This is reflective of the traditional idea of women growing their hair long and tying it back in a bun (Myford 2004: 31). In contrast, typically images of long, flowing hair are used to attract tourists through the premise of the exoticism of Pacific Islander women (Myford 2004: 31). The symbolism of hair in the pageant not only represents traditional values but also works against stereotypical notions of Pacific

² *Fā'alialia*: to be vain, show off

Islander women. Luring, or the act of attracting or enticing, is another traditional concept that relates to the Miss Samoa pageant.

Luring

Luring uses the female body or displays to attract or entice for a specific purpose. Historically, luring augmented the sexual attractiveness of women in order to attract men of other families rich in titles, land, or other commodities whereby the deploying family might raise its status through their marriage (Mageo 1994: 415). In order to raise the status of families, the village sponsored a succession of *taupou*³ which required the girl to be petted and decorated in hopes of attracting a fine selection of high titles as potential marriage partners (Mageo 1994: 415). Although the *taupou* typically returned to her village after her short marriage to her husband, after her husband's death her offspring inherited the high titles and with this claim, a means by which to raise the village's status (Mageo 1994: 415). Just as women's bodies were used to encourage business in Delaware, in pre-colonial Samoa women's bodies were used for the 'business' or wealth of their own families. Thus, luring using the female body had historical precedents in Samoa and was not necessarily a concept introduced entirely from the outside.

Pageants were easily incorporated and are now highly popular in Samoa. The idea of pageants is now seen at many levels including church fundraising, school competitions, and even preschool events. Pageants were not imposed, but integrated because notions similar to those in beauty pageants had existed in the society before they had been officially introduced. Thus, the Miss Samoa pageant can be viewed as an indigenous pageant rather than a beauty pageant. The Miss Samoa pageant includes categories, values, and standards exclusive to Samoa so to see it merely as a beauty pageant created and dominated by the West is inaccurate. The Miss Samoa

³ *Taupou*: Title of village maiden, a position held according to Samoan custom by a virgin singled out for her charm, looks, and manners.

pageant can be more accurately understood as an indigenous pageant with unique cultural relevance.

The Cultural Relevance and Preservation in the Miss Samoa Pageant Today

Historically selected Samoan cultural values have aligned relatively easily with the idea of pageants but one must also examine the extent to which cultural relevance and preservation are seen in the Miss Samoa pageant today. While it is difficult to assess the overall cultural relevance of the current Miss Samoa pageant, specific cultural values can be identified. However, the cultural preservation of the pageant is more difficult to quantify, given the fluidity of culture and Samoan society. But cultural preservation through a pageant is not impossible, which is evident when examining Miss Navajo.

Miss Navajo and Cultural Relevance

The Miss Navajo pageant in the United States is a prime example of a successful indigenous pageant. The pageant includes an interview in the native language (which includes questions about mythology and belief systems), a culture-based talent competition (dance/performance/telling a story, all in the Navajo language), and finally, shearing a live sheep, butchering it and cooking it for their family (Fonoti Interview 21 November 2012). The pageant itself is relevant to who the Navajo are as a people (Fonoti Interview 21 November 2012). This is shown particularly in its choice of pageant events and use of language. The events are also not only entertaining but culturally relevant as well. For example, shearing sheep is a valued skill within the Navajo community. Thus, the pageant categories are not only interesting but also serve a practical application within the community as well. Because the pageant is conducted in Navajo, its intended audience is those who are either part of the Navajo community

or fluent in its language. Limiting the accessibility of communication to the local community shows that the Navajo people are the pageant's primary priority.

Language

The issue of language and cultural identity is also pertinent to the Miss Samoa pageant. Contestants have to “communicate” in both Samoan and English, but fluency is not a prerequisite and the pageant's official language is still English (Appendix A). On one hand, if the pageant were truly catering to the local Samoan audience, the pageant's official language would be Samoan. But the emphasis on English may allude to the pageant's efforts to cater to a more global audience. This can be understood given that the pageant is directed through the Samoa Tourism Authority whose purpose is to promote Samoa and produce revenue from foreign visitors.

But at the same time, the bilingual focus on the pageant could also be an exemplification of its cultural relevance as well. Bilingualism is a highly valuable skill in a rapidly migratory society. As the Samoan national community continues to grow, the emphasis on bilingualism may be even more necessary to increase the pageant's cultural relevance.

Transnationalism in the Samoan Community

The 2012's Miss Samoa pageant illustrates fluidity of cultural identity and relevancy. A total of six contestants competed and were sponsored by boutiques, couture's, a cocktail lounge, sewing shop and spa (Appendix B). Contestants competed in five categories including the sarong, talent, *puleyasi*⁴, traditionally inspired wear, and interview. Rezettakahealani Eric Mulitalo, the first runner up, won the Best interview, Miss Internet, Best Traditionally Inspired

⁴ *Puleyasi*: Two piece attire/dress

Attire, Sarong and Best *Puletasi* (Lesa 8 September 12: 3). But, Janine Tuivaiti, the winner of Miss Photogenic and the Best Talent, was selected as Miss Samoa 2012-2013. Janine sang a beautiful rendition of the Samoan national anthem for her talent and won that category (Lesa 9 September 12: 3). The signing of the national anthem can be seen indicative of the pageant's cultural relevance in terms of its use of language as well.

However, as in the case in many pageants not everyone agreed with the judges' decision and many were confused since the runner-up won the majority of the categories. The scoring was based on a combination from the total scores from the five main judges and three special judges, who allocated scores from each category, including the pre-pageant interview that was done privately before the night of the pageant. The confusion regarding scoring and determination of the winner may also be reflexive of a lack of transparency in the pageant's politics.

Some were also unhappy that Miss Samoa 2012-13 was not born and raised in Samoa. In fact, Janine had lived in New Zealand her whole life before coming to Samoa to compete in the pageant (Tuivaiti Interview 12 November 2012). Allowing young women from overseas has been a controversial practice since it was introduced a few years ago.

Despite the disapproval of some, a New Zealand-born Miss Samoa enhances the pageant's cultural relevancy. As of 2000, more Samoans resided abroad than in Samoa (Shuaib: 132). Thus, young Samoan women like Janine who live elsewhere are a reflection of the globalizing culture. The internationalism of the Samoan community is a major feature of today's culture. To ignore its presence by making the pageant exclusively for young women born and raised in Samoa, would significantly minimize the pageant's cultural relevancy. Because the Samoan culture is no longer exclusive to Samoa itself, cultural relevancy must acknowledge and account for its global populations as well. Thus, the pageant can help expand definitions and

preconceptions of what defines Samoan as a cultural identity. By accepting and encouraging young women like Janine to compete, the pageant is similarly accepting and encouraging new standards of cultural identity into the community. Indeed, the Miss Samoa pageant and its international contestants can expand and build upon concepts of culture given the growing transnationalism of Samoan communities.

Traditional Wear and Siva Samoa

Particular aspects and pieces of the pageant, especially traditional wear and *siva Samoa*⁵, are culturally relevant.

Miss Samoa and Miss American Samoa pageants are indeed considered indigenous events. The categories which clearly highlight cultural aspects and mastery thereof, are definitely unique to Samoa. In fact, contestants must demonstrate proficiency in performing the *siva Samoa* (Samoan dance), and are also judged on their interpretation of traditional Samoan wear (Achica Interview 16 November 2012).

Traditional wear is the Miss Samoa pageant category equivalent of Miss America's evening gown. The contestants are judged on the quality of their outfits as well as how they wear them. While the outfits are not necessarily traditional designs, they are created using traditional materials. This category has evolved over the years and currently reflects changes in Samoa's world of fashion. The pageant has developed so that the traditional wear now includes more contemporary designs. The influence of art and individual designers has contributed to these changes, and design has made important contributions to the pageant.

Rupi Taituuga, who has had a successful 13 year career as a designer, was the overall winner of the Best Designer award and all three special awards for the best Traditionally Inspired Attire, Best Sarong, and Best Puletasi at this year's pageant (Netzler 2012). Rupi described his

⁵ *Siva Samoa*: Samoan dance

work as “...always kind of contemporary costumes, but most of it is traditional materials” (Interview 14 November 2012.). Indeed, while Rupi’s pieces reflect traditional Samoa through the use of sinnet and tapa rather than cotton or polyester, his designs have a modern flair. They are rooted in the traditional methods and creation, but move beyond traditional art forms which is a reflection of Samoa’s culture. When missionaries first came to Samoa, Samoa didn’t immediately or wholly convert to their foreign ideas. Instead, Samoa chose which ideas were valuable and relevant to their culture already. Christianity was easily accepted because Samoa was already a highly spiritual society before missionary contact. Thus, Samoans were able to maintain some of their spirituality but in a different context. While some new values were included in this religious transformation, the core values remained intact. This integration of values is reflective of the flexibility and fluidity of the Samoan culture. The incorporation of both traditional and contemporary ideas in the traditional wear category is culturally relevant since it is mirrors the adaptive nature of the culture.

Cultural Preservation and Fluidity

Cultures are ever-changing, developing, or adapting and this fluidity is an important consideration in relation to cultural preservation. “I think people have to not stumble on the word ‘tradition’ like it’s not a changing entity. So all societies change” (Taule’alo Interview 14 November 2012). Thus, the impermanence of culture must be recognized before attempting to preserve it. If tradition and culture are defined in the restrictive pre-colonial context, then almost nothing that is happening today could be considered relevant. But of course, Samoan culture is far from extinct. Thus, culture, must be recognized as a fluid and ever-changing entity. This flexible lens and understanding is especially necessary for Samoa because it has been so highly adaptive and integrative in the past. While missionaries and colonists brought changes, these

changes became part of the culture. Because of the fluidity of Samoan culture, Samoans were selective with what they chose to accept and apply (Reverend Dr. Mose Mailo Lecture 24 September 2012).

Defining the culture in a purely pre-missionary context ignores the many changes and transformations Samoa has and will continue to develop within. Thus, tradition and its preservation must be seen through this flexible lens and understanding.

Locality

Interestingly enough, Miss Samoa does not compete in global pageants like Miss World or Miss Universe. The only other pageant she enters is Miss South Pacific, but she never enters into another arena from outside of the region. While this may just seem like a small detail, it's actually largely symbolic of the pageant's cultural preservation. In fact many hypotheses for lack of international pageantry involvement can be considered. First, the visions of beauty and general physique of the girls that compete in Miss Samoa "...may not fit a certain criteria of aesthetics in terms of beauty" (Taule'alo Interview 14 November 2012). Another reason may be simply because of the bikini category that is required at the international pageants (Samoa Tourism Authority Interview 12 November 2012). Vivienne Phillips, a pageant judge, reiterated this idea: "But I think our girls won't really suit that kind of pageantry because they expose a lot of skin. Whereas, island girls don't. And I don't know, I just find kind of those ones more superficial" (Interview 21 November 2012). Thus, all of these sentiments reflect a clear misalignment of cultural values and perceptions between Miss Samoa and international pageants. While Miss World is in a bikini, Miss Samoa is in a sarong. While Miss World is a size 0, Miss Samoa is closer to a size 12 (Taule'alo Interview 14 November 2012). The differences between the local and global pageants are too drastic for Miss Samoa to be accepted as she is. In order to

compete, core values like modesty would have to be sacrificed. Without values like these, the contrast between indigenous and beauty pageant would likely slowly deteriorate. Therefore, the focus upon local and regional competitions rather than global ones may in fact be a method of cultural preservation. By avoiding these spheres, Samoa is not pressured to sacrifice or compromise cultural values, like standards of beauty and modesty, in exchange for international recognition.

However, Miss Samoa does participate in the Miss South Pacific Pageant. In fact, the Government of Samoa established the Miss South Pacific in 1987 as a regional event to “...recognise and promote the attributes, intelligence and talents of young Pacific Island women” (PNG Post-Courier 2011). “It is an event that uniquely promotes the South Pacific and its holiday destinations and brings together young women from all sectors of the Pacific for the purpose of promoting and attracting worldwide attention to their unique attributes” (PNG Post-Courier 2011). The most likely explanations for the pageant’s participation in Miss South Pacific is that Samoa created it and is comfortable participating in shared regional interests. Not only do South Pacific nations share cultural similarities, but competing in the Miss South Pacific pageant shows collaboration for the common goal of promoting tourism. Of course, pageants also impact the individual contestants as well.

Cultural Consciousness of Contestants

Even before the Miss Samoa pageant begins, the preparation itself actively motivates young women to develop and facilitate their own growth of cultural consciousness. Petra Chan Tung (Miss Samoa 2000), for example, explained that “...it was not until the pageant until you get to click, ‘ah, I really need to go and talk to the elderlies and chiefs in my village and see what they think of these various issues and so forth’, just to prepare” (Interview 9 November 2012).

For women like Petra, the pageant initiated a closer relationship between her and the village communities. When asked what she learned most from the pageant, Janine said: “Speaking the language. Because in Samoa we have the two, we have the informal and the formal language...To try and understand [the formal language] so I could relate not only to you know, not only the people my age but also the older, and be able to speak in a respectful way” (Tuivaiti Interview 12 November 2012). These testimonies show that the pageant can strengthen relationships between the contestants and their cultural and community awareness. Along with this growth of cultural bonds, the pageant also facilitates the empowerment of women in the pageant.

Empowering Women through Miss Samoa

Pageants have both negative and positive potential. Some critics, like American feminist and activist Robin Morgan delivered a structural analysis of the Miss America pageant’s sexism, racism, homophobia, and economic exploitation of women (Dow 2003: 138). However, “...the Miss America pageant is hardly the problem; rather, it is part of the solution, and the implication is that feminists who want to eliminate it do not realize that they would be eliminating a vehicle for women’s empowerment” (Dow 2003: 145). Thus, even through the Westernized feminist lens, there are those who recognize the valuable potential of pageants. In fact, this year’s Miss Samoa New Zealand is an example of exactly that.

Te'eva Matafai, pageant director, said the Miss Samoa NZ pageant was unlike other pageant. It was not only about crowning the most beautiful candidate but it aimed to preserve, recognise and endorse the Samoan culture and its fundamental values. ‘The pageant is about empowering women and using it as a platform for young women to embrace their culture’ (Anderson 2012).

Pageants as methods of empowerment are not an idealistic goal. While there are some limitations to pageantry, there is the potential for empowerment. The Miss Samoa pageant is no exception.

Shattering Stereotypes

Pageants can empower women by challenging historical stereotypes. The film *Velvet Dreams* by Samoan filmmaker Sima Urale "...draws attention to the excesses of a world-weary Western culture that historically looked to the Pacific for its leisure and pleasure" (Smith 2008). Of course, part of the leisure and pleasure from the Pacific stemmed from the promise of its exotic and sexually-free women. The film, which plays upon this notion by using excessive repetition of images of naked and nubile young women, reminds the audience of how Pacific Island women have been objectified (Smith 2008). Pacific Island women have been viewed as part of the beautiful South Pacific tropical paradise. Thus, Pacific women have been perceived, both historically and presently, through an over-sexualized and stereotyped lens. Some may argue that the Miss Samoa pageant only encourages these ideas by placing women on a stage as a source of beauty, pleasure, and desire for the audience. But when looked at more critically, the pageant actually encourages modesty, poise, and virginity. Thus, pageants may in fact be reversing these negative images and empowering Samoan women to be displayed in direct opposition to their over-sexualized stereotype. Not only are the contestants empowered by disrupting these stereotypes, but they are also given the opportunity to travel.

Travel

In many ways, the Miss Samoa pageant can be greatly empowering to women. Petra also expressed that her reign as Miss Samoa allowed her to travel to places across Upolu and Savaii that she had never been to, "...so it was good to actually step back and get to have a feel of what

Samoa has to offer” (Chan Tung Interview 9 November 2012). Thus for women like Petra, getting the opportunity to travel and be introduced to new areas of Samoa was hugely beneficial and facilitated by her involvement in the pageant. But Miss Samoa’s itinerary has expanded globally as well.

More recently Miss Samoa has traveled far from the island of Samoa. According to Kristian Scanlan, Miss Samoa 2011 went to Korea, Fiji and New Zealand; Miss Samoa 2010 went to Shanghai, Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia (Scanlan Interview 12 November 2012). Thus, on top of being given the opportunity to travel through her home country, Miss Samoa is also introduced to completely new nations as well. This is highly beneficial in terms of individual development and expansion of cultural experiences. But this global familiarity also provides an opportunity to expand one’s public platform to act as an ambassador and represent Samoa.

A Public Platform

Other than travel, the pageant serves as a platform for the voices of young women to be heard. Over time, the pageant has worked to develop and enhance this platform. For example, According to Lili Lam (Miss Samoa 1994),

In my year there was not much use of the Miss Samoa as an ambassador for the people and the most I would attend would be cocktail functions, launchings and Independence celebrations. I see now that the Miss Samoa portfolio has grown immensely and I am extremely happy that it is so (Interview 27 November 2012).

This shows that the pageant has not yet recognized its potential but has significantly improved from what it has been in the past. In fact, Rezetta Muliadou, a contestant of this year’s pageant, believes that

...[the Miss Samoa pageant] gives the opportunity to [women] to actually voice their opinions on things that happened, you know, come with the interview and

things like that. And sometimes they get exposed to the media and they're actually given the chance to go public and say their opinions (Interview, 22 November 2012).

This is especially important since Samoa's culture is so heavily influenced by oral tradition and the power of oratory. This oratory has often been the realm of men. As Steven Percival noted, "But really, being an oral society and with women not speaking, it's clear that men actually dominate the culture" (Steve Percival, 13 November 2012). Thus pageants empower women by giving them a space to have their voices and opinions heard when they otherwise may not be. Of course, this empowerment is also dependent upon the fact that the women have something to say once they are given the platform.

In fact, the pageant may only be empowering on a very individual and circumstantial level. In other words, the pageant might only be empowering depending on the individual and their abilities. After all, not everyone is pleased with the level of public speaking of the contestants. In fact, one informant noted, "In the few times I've accidentally hit the channel and [the Miss Samoa] pageant is on, I've heard some pretty amazing interviews and answers to questions by the pageant contestants... They're obviously not judged on academic excellence" (Interview 13 November 2012). While ideally, young women will have the confidence, composure, and ability to promote ideas or causes; this may be a difficult expectation in Samoa. As mentioned before, women aren't typically given opportunities to speak in the male-dominated culture. Thus, when given a platform the contestants are unfamiliar and unprepared to use it efficiently. For the pageant to be successful in creating a public platform for its contestants, the young women would need to be better trained or prepared to participate in such an arena.

Alternatively, the contestants need to be more experienced and motivated before even granted entry into the pageant. Allan Alo notes that "...[the Miss Samoa pageant] provides an

avenue to promote those who are into that kind of thing!...While I think it is subjective, it is a platform to build women's confidence and create a network of friends all around" (Alo Interview 12 November 2012). Thus in theory, those who enter the pageant are doing so with a particular mindset and some level of interest in entering the pageantry arena. However, almost all of the Miss Samoa contestants and winners interviewed said that they had instead entered "for fun" rather than to fulfill any larger purpose or prospects. So while the tourism authority recruits young women to compete as 'ambassadors' for the country, the girls are signing up to run for fun. It is unlikely that an effective ambassador can be chosen given this selection process. Empowerment or social change rarely comes from an individual doing so for fun or as a hobby. If young women are not aware of the opportunities the pageant provides, then significant empowerment is not likely in the near future. Young women must understand and acknowledge the public platform that is being provided for them. In fact, the level of participation is key in understanding the pageant's empowerment.

Participation

The growing lack of participation of young women in the pageant is a concern to some. Only six girls applied this year and six girls ran (compared to the usual average of ten), which is a statistic that not gone unnoticed by some. As Vanya Tuale'alo notes, "...[it] shows that there's a reticence for people to become involved in that type of thing" (Tuale'alo Interview 14 November 2012). In theory, if the pageant is as empowering and wonderful as some try to say it as, why aren't there more girls vying to be a part of it?

Fairness and favoritism in determining winners may be one of the reasons. An anonymous source acknowledged clear favoritism from the STA for the winning contestant, suggesting that the STA had deliberately planned its outcome from the very start (Anonymous

Interview 21 November 2012). The same source said that they would "...encourage the ladies of Samoa not to run. Because it's a waste of time...the only thing they want is for the girls to run just to make this complete and make this plan of theirs to meet. But they don't care who's running, that's what I've observed" (Anonymous, 21 November 2012). Interestingly enough, some survey results even pointed in this same direction. Some mentioned they didn't understand why Miss Samoa had only won the talent portion while the runner-up held the majority of other categories and should have been the rightful winner. Perhaps the young women of Samoa have taken notice to stories like these and the whispers of corruption.

Or, perhaps, there may be larger inherent issues within the pageant itself. As part of the rules and regulations of the Miss Samoa Pageant, one must never have been married and cannot have born a child. The winner becomes an employee of the Samoa Tourism Authority for a year (Appendix A). Sia Achica explained that in American Samoa so few women run because they feel pressured to have a perfect record or seamless reputation because American Samoa is a very small and tight-knit community, everyone is familiar with one another (Achica Interview 18 October 2012). Thus, it is difficult to be placed in the public eye and under public scrutiny when there are strict requirements and very few secrets. Perhaps the combination of these two factors may deter the young women of Samoa to participate as well.

Furthermore, the young women may not want to become an employee of the STA. Petra Chan Tung alluded to the fact that in more recent years, it is a requirement for the contestants to quit their job in order to fulfill their obligations at the STA (Chan Tung Interview 9 November 2012). Thus, economic reasons may make it difficult for many young women to sacrifice their permanent occupations for a one year stint at the STA. Also, applicants could be deterred by the inefficiency within the STA. Several informants expressed stories of frustrated Miss Samoa's

who were expected to carry out social platforms and community obligations without any help or support from the STA. How can one be given the title of “ambassador” and then left without a support system? Surely responsibilities and experiences like these can intimidate and discourage participation in the pageant.

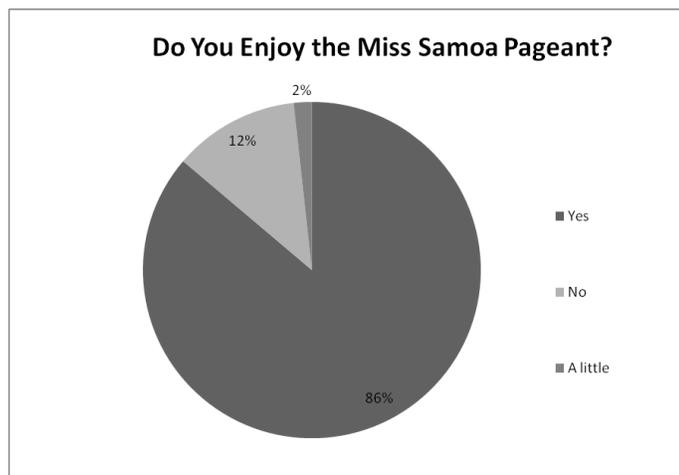
The values advertised by the Miss Samoa pageant may be an obstacle to women’s empowerment as well. For example, Steve Percival said: “What does a Miss Samoa value the most as her assets? Her beauty. Empowering empowerment, women’s empowerment, cannot be narrowed down to making a woman feel beautiful or look beautiful” (Percival Interview 13 November 2012). While there are other categories in the pageant, beauty may still be the overarching, though unarticulated, determinant. According to Dionne Fonoti; “You see a young, pretty skinny woman and it’s like, ‘you should run!’... Just because she’s pretty she should run?...I hear people say it all the time...” (Fonoti Interview 21 November 2012). For some, beauty may be all it takes to run for Miss Samoa. Thus, the lack of opportunity that the pageant offers may also deter young women’s interest in participating. Volunteering to be publically judged on one’s beauty takes a rare amount of courage. Looking at the public’s view of the pageant is also very telling of how the pageant is received at a grassroots level. The raw and honest data speaks for itself.

A Peek into the Public Perception

Two surveys were conducted for the purpose of this study. The first were collected over one week in September 2012. A total of ten surveys were done in the village of Lotofaga. The second set of surveys was collected over a period of two weeks in November 2012. A total of

fifty surveys were conducted primarily in Apia and its surrounding areas. The purpose of the surveys was to evaluate the perception, attitudes, and opinions of the local community.

The Pageant's Popularity



A total of 60 surveys were conducted for this project. Survey data affirms the Miss Samoa pageant is immensely popular in Samoa. According to the graph above, 86% of respondents said they enjoy the Miss Samoa pageant; 2% said that they enjoy it a little while, only 12% said did not enjoy the pageant (Appendix C). While a large majority of the informants are interested and enjoy the pageant, the statistic does not reflect why the pageant is so popular. This was done by critiquing what people like about the pageant itself as shown in the following table.

Table 1. The Top 5 Categories Mentioned as Their Favorite Part of the Miss Samoa Pageant

Talent	36
Traditional Wear/Costume	13
Interview	12
All	5
Dance	4

According to the survey results, the most popular category of the Miss Samoa pageant is the talent. All favorite aspects from the pageant represent holistic aspects of the pageant. The most popular part of the pageant wasn't just the beautiful women. But at the same time, if the pageant is truly about choosing an ambassador for the country who offers leadership roles and community service ventures, the interview portion would be more popular than it is. Granted, it's still popular but it's placed at the equivalent of traditional wear, which is in no way reflective of the contestant but of their designer. Thus, what is most popular in the pageant may not necessarily be the pageant's intended purpose.

Results also support the argument that the Miss Samoa pageant does in fact provide an indigenous element. While talent may not always necessarily be culturally relevant, both traditional wear and dance (which is performed as *siva samoa* rather than contemporary forms) are within the top five most popular parts of the pageant. This suggests not only that there are culturally relevant notions in the pageant itself, but that they are substantial and influential enough to be considered a top favorite.

The Importance of the Pageant

Though the pageant may be well-received by the public, it may not necessarily preserve culture or empower women. When asked why it is that pageants like Miss Samoa are important, 11 responses mentioned beautiful girls/showing the beauty of Samoa, while 9 included promoting the culture and tradition, and 6 said showing where we're from/advertising Samoa. Thus, while some may not necessarily be viewing the pageant for its beautiful women, the responses indicated that beauty was the most important part of the pageant. Perhaps like Dionne Fonoti said, there is an understanding or recognition in the community that the pageant is

artificial (Fonoti Interview 21 November 2012). But this does not necessarily mean that the pageant can't be entertaining as well.

Entertainment rarely requires a deeper understanding of what is being presented. If entertainment truly did necessitate holistic substance, reality TV wouldn't be as popular as it now is in America. Perhaps these statistics are a reflection of this same phenomenon in the pageant. Almost half of the respondents (24) replied that there was nothing that they didn't like about the pageant. Additionally, 11 out of 36 responses said that nothing in the pageant has changed. These statistics suggest the public is not thinking critically about the pageant. Perhaps the pageant is only looked at from an entertainment standpoint and not considered on a larger or more critical scale. Or it may simply be that the pageant's appeal and popularity is dependent on its current and temporal state. The public may not follow its development because it is simply not necessary. Perhaps for the general public, the pageant is seen simply as entertainment with little thought of cultural preservation or women's empowerment.

Women's empowerment was especially lacking in the survey data. Only one respondent mentioned that the pageant was important because it gave the chance for ladies to have the lead. Furthermore, only one respondent mentioned that some qualities of Miss Samoa include her ability to promote Samoan women and come down to the level of many local women. Granted, the lack of responses regarding women's empowerment may be indicative of a lack of gender inequality on a larger social scale. Or perhaps, according to the public's perspective, the pageant is simply not as empowering to women as it might be. Theoretically, if the pageant was focused around the idea of women's empowerment, a greater number of respondents would recognize that it was not only an important function of the pageant but was also an important characteristic for Miss Samoa to have. While these statistics insinuate that the pageant may be successful in its

entertainment value and cultural relevance, its ability to promote the empowerment women is certainly lacking. But is it possible for the pageant to attain this capacity in the future?

The Future of the Pageant: Concerns and Recommendations

Concerns

The general public survey collection and personal testimonies reflect a variety of concerns. Perhaps one of the largest concerns is the extent to which politics minimize the pageant's ability to fulfill its maximum potential. The best example of this is the intense favoritism from the STA towards this year's winner (Anonymous Interview 21 November 2012). But this recognition of favoritism was obvious from the outside as well since several survey responses remarked upon how the runner-up was the rightful winner who won the majority of the other categories while Janine only won the talent portion but took the title anyways. Perhaps "the audience knows that the public performance is only a part of the story, and that there is a world 'behind the scenes' where the competition is anything but objective and fair" (Wilk 1994: 129). Perhaps the influence of politics is inevitable, but efforts to diminish its impacts could be explored. One of the ways to achieve this may be moving the pageant from tourism.

Although the pageant is entertaining, it does not serve any larger roles in the community. The pageant has the potential to encourage education, especially in the interview portion. Or, it could even encourage the education attainment of the contestants by offering prizes like scholarship money. While the pageant's creates a public platform for the young women, it remains under-utilized. The platform could address whichever issue is most needed in the community—whether that is education, health, gender equality, environment conservation, or anything in between. The pageant must be developed to focus on how it can address the needs

and interests of its local community in order to serve a purpose larger than superficial entertainment.

Moving from Tourism

In order for the Miss Samoa pageant to be more culturally relevant, it must be moved away from tourism. Tourism for tourism's sake is acultural (Fonoti Interview 21 November 2012). In other words, tourism does not recognize cultural or local concerns. Tourism tends to prioritize money and income over cultural relevancy, accuracy or preservation. Placing the pageant within the context of tourism immensely influences its purpose or intentions. The purpose of tourism is to create revenue by appealing to a foreign audience. This concept directly opposes the effective operation of an indigenous pageant. In order for an indigenous pageant to be most successful, its primary concerns and priorities must be focused among its local community. Thus, the Miss Samoa pageant needs to be moved into an arena that is unconcerned with the foreign audience to whom tourism caters. By working through a more grassroots level, the pageant would be given the freedom to focus upon local needs and administration rather than that of global and tourism-driven schemes.

Locality in the Future

The inclusion and focus on locality is critical for the pageant to be fully beneficial to Samoa. More specifically, there needs to be a greater concern for the public and community's interests. Thus, one suggestion includes conducting more research on the history of the pageant and why young women chose to participate or not (Taule'alo Interview 14 November 2012). The pageant itself cannot be sustainable without women willing to be involved in it. By starting a dialogue between the community and the pageant's administration, Miss Samoa can more fully benefit and appeal to both its participants and observers. The needs and concerns of the

contestants must be prioritized over that of a global audience. By moving the pageant from tourism, a more locally-run organization is more likely to be able to effectively initiate dialogues like these with its surrounding community.

To enhance the locality of the Miss Samoa pageant, the pageant must remain within the South Pacific region. Locality is a huge determinant of sovereignty and it is easier to preserve values, goals, and ideals if the pageant exists in an arena which allows this to happen. However, a cursory glance at the Miss Worlds reveal that culturally sanctioned current white ideals prevail, although many of the women may actually fall into other racial classifications (Hoad 2004: 74). Thus, global pageants like Miss World are not necessarily a celebration of diversity as much as they may be a reinforcement of Western expectations. By refusing to participate in an arena which promotes these standards, Samoa is refusing Westernized conformity. Samoa has a better chance at preserving its cultural relevancy and maintaining the standards of an indigenous pageant by remaining in a local and regional context.

Finally, a crucial step that must be taken is to insure responsibility among that those who work behind the scenes in the pageant. There needs to be greater accountability among those who are granted authority within the Miss Samoa pageant. As of right now, insufficient groundwork and effort is being placed into the development of the pageant (Fonoti Interview 21 November 2012). In fact, when employees within the STA were asked how the pageant would change if it were given all the money and resources in the world, the response was simply that it wouldn't (Samoa Tourism Authority 12 November 2012). Maybe there will be bigger prizes but the pageant itself and its values would stay the same (Samoa Tourism Authority 12 November 2012). This obstinacy in the pageant not developing in the future raises serious concerns as to how seriously the pageant is being taken now. No system or institution is perfect and it's

unreasonable to believe that the Miss Samoa pageant is an exception to that, especially considering that even the Samoan culture is not impermeable to change. Perhaps if those who are the most closely involved in the pageant are more heavily invested in the pageant, the public's role may also follow suit. Issues like politics and favoritism would also be minimized from a more local administration because of the closer proximity of a grassroots organization to the community. Running the pageant through the top-down approach only complicates issues like politics and favoritism which are serious concerns for both participants and observers. Overall, an indigenous pageant cannot be successful when it is placed within the context and framework of tourism motivations. And while the Miss Samoa pageant is a serious reflection of this inconsistency and has yet to reach its full potential of a culturally and socially relevant indigenous pageant; it has the promise of doing so in the future.

Conclusion

As it is today, the Miss Samoa pageant exists as an indigenous pageant since it includes aspects that are culturally relevant to the community. However, the survey data showed that beauty is still incorporated to an extent. Pageantry was successfully introduced because the culture had already shared similar values with those encouraged by pageants. Over time the pageant has developed to incorporate and work in accordance with the continually changing culture. While the pageant has the potential to be an avenue of empowerment for women, its success has been limited. But if the pageant were moved from the Samoa Tourism Authority and given to a department that gave priority to locality, issues like politics, cultural relevance, women's empowerment, and accountability would be more easily managed. In all, the pageant cannot be an effective indigenous pageant if it operates under the context of tourism that caters to the interests of a foreign audience. This research suggests that the pageant's operation be reevaluated by those who are committed to local causes. Future study would require a look into where would be the most beneficial department to move the pageant. The paramount suggestion is that community members and local activists take charge in initiating the exact steps necessary to facilitate the changes needed to make Miss Samoa more culturally and socially relevant indigenous pageant empowering to both the women who participate and those who enjoy it.

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Glossary of Terms

Fā'alialia: to be vain, show off

Siva Samoa: Samoan dance

Puletasi: Two piece attire/dress

Taupou: Title of village maiden, a position held according to Samoan custom by a virgin singled out for her charm, looks, and manners.

Tutagita: a hairstyle consisting of a shaved pate ornamented by a tuft hanging down over the left temple, from which a long tail was left to dangle down the cheek.

Appendices

Appendix A:

Miss Samoa Pageant Rules and Regulations

Appendix B:

Miss Samoa Pageant 2012 Program

Appendix C:

Survey 1: Only questions 6, 7, and 8 used in analysis.

- Question 6 in Survey 1 tabulated with Question 1 in Survey 2.
- Question 7 in Survey 1 was tabulated with Question 4 in Survey 2.
- Question 8 in Survey 1 was tabulated with Questions 2 and 3 in Survey 2).

Survey 2: Survey and results