



by Chris Bearchell

Friday, September 17, is the date for the 1971 Miss Edmonton Pageant — official preliminary for the upcoming Miss Canada Pageant. Displays such as this illustrate how women are taught that they are not valuable as individuals (human beings), but instead are to be judged on how closely they approximate this society's stereo-type of the desirable woman (sex object).

Some unfortunate woman will find herself victimized into the epitome of role-playing. Her sisters will stand beside her having endured a degrading process of being objectified, exploited and judged not-quite-perfect-enough. What compels the "concubines in society's harem of beautiful slaves"? Why are such farces carried on in the name of "wholesome beauty"? How and why do they affect most, in fact all, women in our society so strongly? These questions must not be answered superficially.

The usual cliché's are inadequate at really explaining something like this — something that is much more complex than it first seems. A cliché that may apply to part of this situation is "crass commercialism". Eaton's of Canada is in this mess up to its neck as a major sponsor — the main reason being the use of the contest to expose its fashion products (and have them advertised by the beautiful bevy at its disposal).

Another more subtle reason is the benefits big business derives from maintenance of the status-quo. The basic unit of our society is the family, balance on the backs of a passive object — women. The nuclear family is something which in the eyes of corporation owners must not be questioned. Beauty pageants are rituals of the past that help perpetuate such "necessary" notions as woman's passivity and subservience.

Beyond the first obvious point of commercialism, is another — the degradation of a person being judged on physical appearance. Not only is this situation bad in itself but it serves to divide women. Those who are of the wrong age, height, weight and color are totally excluded. The cults of the youth, the mannequin, and wasp remain supreme. Those who fall into the necessarily narrow category are usually alienated from one another because of competition. Women are made objects, determined beautiful by how the tape measure fits around three particular areas of their bodies — good old 36-24-36. Women, not just in these contests, but everywhere, continually are told that they must be both sexy and wholesome — the unbeatable madonna-whore combination.

Women generally, are exploited by these pageants and are used by the advertising business. The participants in this contest are not to advertise anything (unless the sponsors want them to) but advertising is directed at women at large, promising to help bring each and every one of us a little closer to Miss Canada standards. Exploitation of the women in the contest is blatant even in the case of the winner. She virtually becomes the property of the Miss Canada Pageant. Who is so ignored as last year's Miss Canada?

Probably the worst role that these competitions play is in aiding the socialization of women. From pink booties to their first doll, all through school and university women are taught to repress their desires and intellect in favor of becoming a wife-and-mother but first a beautiful object so they can "catch their man". The beautiful objects that we are told we must try to create are

not ourselves. They are a feast for the eyes and not for the mind, for who can take a mannequin seriously.

If your appearance is pleasing then most men (and some women) will never look beyond; if your appearance is not pleasing however, the attitude from both sexes is "Why don't you do something with yourself?". If a woman is not told "You're too pretty to be smart." then she is apt to hear "You had better be smart because you're not very pretty."

Many women are highly intelligent and independent but are trapped by the all-encompassing temptation to be a beautiful object. How can a woman enjoy or even tolerate this false beauty if she is in any way independent? We are imprisoned within the confines of the objects we create, in the minds of others and in our own minds. How can we function as people without being troubled and self-conscious? This is the tragic effect of the attitudes that are fostered by such things as beauty pageants.

These glorified games people play with their own and each other's lives and sanity are a sign of a sick society. The Women's Liberation Movement is challenging this society and in particular, beauty pageants. The tradition was established on September 7, 1968 with a mass demonstration against the Miss America Pageant (which is noted for being extremely racist as well as sexist). In Canada, women's liberation groups entered protest candidates in the Miss University Contest (1969) and last year's Miss Vancouver Contest, who survived the contest until prior to the final elimination when they were able to withdraw and give their reasons — many of them the same as those explained above.

Miss Canada



SEXPLITS

