

Beauty contests are popular in many parts of the world. They command enormous television audience worldwide of three billion viewers in one hundred and fifteen countries, and so entertain millions. Many people object to them on the grounds that they exploit women. The issue of exploitation has been raised by many feminists who believe that these kinds of contests these contests are demeaning to women.

One important objection to beauty contests is that they add to the pressure that is put on women as they promote an idea of female beauty, to which only a minority of woman can realistically aspire to. It is harmful to them as it encourages dieting, cosmetic surgery and eating disorders. It can also simply them feel inadequate and ugly.

In contrast to this the strongest argument in favour of beauty contests is that in a society in which women are valued on their looks, and in which there really are fewer opportunities for women than for men, beauty contests give women a chance to get noticed. They also can be the route to success if you win them. Many Hollywood actresses such as Michelle Pfeiffer and Sharon Stone are former beauty queens, who would simply not have had the opportunities they have had without winning the beauty contests.

Another argument against beauty contests is that women in beauty contests are judged on their physical appearance rather than on any other qualities that they may possess. Judging women but not men primarily on their looks, contributes to the subjugation of women because other qualities such as intelligence are not seen as part of ideal femininity and therefore not as things to which women should aspire.

On the other hand it is often stated that people enjoy beauty contests. Many women enjoy entering them, and many people enjoy watching them, and nobody is forced to do either. The beauty of a fit, healthy, well-proportioned human is something from which we can all take pleasure, and beauty contests along with other forms of art, are ways that enable us to do this.

The last argument against beauty contests is that the image of female promoted by beauty contests is culturally specific and western. It does not matter how many Asian women enter Miss World, they can still only do so if they take part in the swimsuit competition, which may well not be

considered the appropriate dress in their culture. There were demonstrations against Miss World by feminists and Hindu nationalists when it was held in Bangalore in 1996.

The last argument in favour of beauty contests is that there is nothing wrong with judging people primarily on their physical appearance. We do it all the time in competitive sport where fitness and strength are major determinants of success. Every competition of every kind values certain qualities over others. So a prize can be given to a beautiful woman, for her beauty without implying that beauty is all that matters about anyone.

After having presented the evidence, I firmly believe that beauty contests are inclined to exploit women and I feel this is wrong. The kind of image of a woman that these contests promote can put contestants in danger of developing eating disorders.