

**Utah State University**

---

**From the Selected Works of David Lancy**

---

January 1, 1988

# Rhinestone Cowgirl: The Education of a Rodeo Queen

M. Raitt, *Utah State University*

David F. Lancy, *Utah State University*



**SELECTEDWORKS™**

Available at: [http://works.bepress.com/david\\_lancy/29/](http://works.bepress.com/david_lancy/29/)

# Rhinestone Cowgirl: The Education of a Rodeo Queen

Margaret Raitt and David F. Lancy  
Utah State University

Rodeo is a major form of family entertainment in the Western United States, for both spectators and participants. But while young men play dominant roles in the rodeo in events such as bronc riding and calf roping, young women are also involved, primarily as competitors for the title of Rodeo Queen. To help them achieve excellence, clinics are held to advise them on how to improve their riding, appearance, and their public speaking and poise. This paper explores the training of young girls competing for rodeo queen. Data include the ethnography of a clinic, interviews with participants, and a brief description of an actual contest in the Cache Valley of northern Utah, near the center of North America's major rodeo circuit. The paper contributes to our understanding of how key personnel are socialized and technically prepared for their roles in cultural performances, an aspect of performance that has received relatively little attention in the literature.

## *Men and Women in Rodeo*

Although the origin of the rodeo can be traced to Spanish California (Hoy, 1978), most historians (Frederiksson, 1985; Lawrence, 1984) credit William Frederick Cody (Buffalo Bill) with the invention of the modern rodeo. His Wild West Show was first held in 1882 and attracted over a thousand cowboys who competed for prizes in roping, shooting, riding, and bronc-busting events. The Wild West Show began the process of romanticizing the cowboy and the West. Earlier the popular image of the cowboy more closely reflected the actual life-style of dirt, toil, and boredom unrelieved by decent wages. Although the Wild West Show eventually faded in popularity, the rodeo has not. Cheyenne Frontier Days was established in 1897, the Pendleton Roundup in 1911, and the Calgary Stampede in 1912; all are still going strong, along with hundreds of other rodeo events.

---

Both authors were with Utah State University at the time of this writing. Margaret Raitt has since completed her graduate degree and David Lancy is presently with the Faculty of Education at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad.

The modern rodeo is a multifaceted enterprise. The official sanctioning organization refers to rodeo as "an original American sport" (Edison, 1986, p. 1, emphasis added). The playful attributes of the sport are further enhanced by the addition of clowns, clown acts, and the often droll and humorous tone adopted by the announcer. The typical rodeo, especially when represented in a small town, also serves as a "rite of traditionalization" (Pomponio Logan, 1978). This latter dimension is emphasized by Lawrence, who argues that rodeo "is used by the ranching society—and by the population which shares that ethos—as a ritual event which serves to express, reaffirm and perpetuate its values, attitudes and way of life" (1984, p. 5). According to Handleman (1980), play and ritual serve to structure our perception of reality, and they are especially useful in helping us to cope with paradox. Rodeo articulates the irony and paradox that are part of the new "Old West." Lawrence focuses on the "man versus nature" theme that underlies the rodeo.

The sport of rodeo . . . deals with the relationships between man and animals, both domesticated and undomesticated, and on a deeper level with the human relation to the land—the wilderness and the wild. . . . As an outgrowth of ranching, rodeo embodies the frontier spirit as manifested through the aggressive and exploitative conquest of the West, and deals with nature and the reordering of nature according to the dictates of this ethos. It supports the value of subjugating nature, and reenacts the "taming" process whereby the wild is brought under control. This can be thought of in terms of the force of "culture" reaching out to dominate "nature." (1984, p. 7)

The paradox emerges when we consider what might happen were the bronc rider to tame the bronc, or the calf roper to train his animal to come with a whistle and lie down to receive the brand or ear tag. Contestants lose points if the animal they are attempting to ride or wrestle acts the least bit domesticated. Encounters between rodeo rider and animal more often result in injury to the former; animals who are rarely or never ridden successfully are canonized.

Another paradox played out in the rodeo is the cowboy as archetypal hero—hardworking, pure, rugged, loyal, "straight-shooting." In reality, rodeo cowboys are often scorned by ranchers and their employees for their laziness, fancy clothes, and staged mannerisms (Lawrence, 1984). Far from being a spontaneous affair staged for the benefit of the individualistic cowboy, rodeos are much more akin to the traveling circus, with animals and contestants all part of a carefully tended and managed company.

Rodeo provides a tightly scripted and sanctified version of the ideal Western male role, reflecting (but rendering harmless) many inherent paradoxes; it does much the same for the Western female. Women have always played a part in rodeo and, apparently, have often been resented by their male counterparts. Lawrence argues that one of the main reasons is the strong tradition in the Western United States of clearly delineated roles for men and women (at least in theory). Hence, "Rodeo seems to keep the sex roles as sharply distinct as they were in the cowboy herding tradition" (1984, p. 119).

In the early days of rodeo, women played a more varied and active part (Anonymous, 1985; Fredriksson, 1985; Remley, 1978). Riske claims that "rodeo is undoubtedly the first sport in which women competed in near equality with

men" (1983, p. 1). From the Cheyenne rodeo of 1897 onward, women competed in several ladies-only events, especially pony races and trick roping. Cash and trophies were awarded, although these were usually less valuable than the prizes awarded to men. In 1914 a Ladies' Bronc Riding championship was initiated, but it only ran until 1928 (Remley, 1978). More recently, especially since World War II, the role of women in rodeo has been more and more circumscribed.<sup>1</sup> One woman's event is goat-tying; another, which occurs more frequently, is barrel racing. Both are denigrated by male rodeo participants.

There is one event included in most, but not all, rodeos, which stands in a class by itself because it is the only event . . . in which girls and women are allowed to enter. This is the barrel race, which as its name implies, is a race against time. Horsemwomen compete for the honor of racing in a clover-leaf pattern around a pre-set course marked by barrels and then making a mad dash out of the arena in the shortest possible interval . . . Rigid rules about costume govern the dress for this event in professional rodeo. No jeans are allowed, but rather the participants usually wear brightly colored and smartly tailored suits, with matching cowgirl hats that often blow off from the breakneck speed of the ride and the sharp turns that are required . . . At the most prestigious shows . . . this event is not a part of the standard program . . . Rather, the . . . committee structures the barrel race into its night show, making it seem more like entertainment than . . . contest. . . . Girls or women in barrel racing are usually called "gals" by announcers. . . . they are subject to a rule not applicable to men contestants that requires them to ride in the grand entry . . . this event stands in sharp contrast to the others because it entails no human-animal agonistic elements. Also barrel racing competition is structured so that it exhibits no ranch connection—that is, nothing which appears purposeful is accomplished. The girls are expert riders, but they generally wear pale-colored or gaudy outfits that make them look unfit for the range . . . Men in rodeo either condescendingly tolerate this event or oppose it entirely, and sometimes manage to eliminate it from the regular program.

Such an attitude starts early in the lives of rodeo males. A young bull rider . . . referred to the fact that "the dingy girls' events are held in the track rather than the arena, to get more of them over faster." (Lawrence, 1984, pp. 37, 110-111)

Women are most visible in the rodeo as "queens." Rodeo queen contests are legion in the West: Every town, high school, county, and state has an annual contest in which a queen and her attendants are chosen. At the 51st Preston (Idaho) Rodeo there were 21 young ladies in the "grand entry," all having been singled out in one queen pageant or another. At the conclusion of the grand entry (e.g., after opening welcome, benediction, "John Wayne" monologue) the young women gallop at breakneck speed for a couple of turns around the arena while trying to wave demurely to the crowd and keep their hats atop their heads. This

<sup>1</sup>Some of the slack has been taken up by all-girl rodeos organized and run by the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (Riske, 1983).

selves to reinforce the stereotype of young women as decorative accessories to the rodeo with only a tenuous claim to real horsemanship. Freedman's (1986) description of the role of cheerleaders is apropos: "Cheerleaders are a colorful and anonymous chorus line . . . They convey the underlying message that women have a useful decorative place just outside of center court, cheering males on to victory" (p. 103).

Paradoxes abound in the rodeo's portrayal of the ideal Western woman. A female growing up on a farm or ranch leads anything but a pampered and glamorous existence. While there may be a division of labor based on gender, both sexes work long and hard. Also, a rodeo cowboy's success depends on his being as wild and ornery as the animals he challenges; a queen's success depends on her being seen as urbane, attractive, and sophisticated (Lawrence, 1984).

Although the Women's Pro Rodeo Association attempts to expand and diversify the role of women in the rodeo, the most common entry is via the rodeo queen contest. Most barrel racers are former rodeo queens. Rodeo queen contests have much in common with other beauty pageants, which can be "read" as a series of self-congratulatory statements that communities make about themselves, despite the fact that they often bring to the surface many unresolved conflicts (Lavenda, Laver, Norwood, Nelson, & Evenson, 1984).

### *The Rodeo Queen Clinic*

Women's involvement with rodeo poses a number of puzzling questions. Why are they permitted to participate at all? What function do they serve? What messages are they supposed to convey? Given the very limited and, some might argue, demeaning role that women are permitted to play in the rodeo, what accounts for the motivation of young women (and their families) to pursue this elusive and expensive goal? We reasoned that a rodeo queen clinic might offer insight into these issues. In an institution that clearly serves a socializing function, values that are often implicit must be made explicit. Further, if the clinic reflects the private rehearsal prior to the public performance, then the play and/or the ritual frame that masks the paradoxical quality of real life in make-believe or piety (Handelman, 1980) is still open and permeable.

The clinic opens at noon on a Thursday near the end of March in a dormitory cafeteria. There are 22 young girls, varying in age from 7 to 19, some accompanied by various family members. The clinic organizer, J'Wayne McArthur (Mac), rises to welcome those present. He begins by introducing one of last year's participants, Gina Robinson, who is wearing blue jeans, a pink shirt and vest, lavender boots, and a rodeo queen crown at the front of her lavender hat. Winner of Miss Rodeo Wyoming 1985, she is here again to help and advise this year's attendees.

Mac shows a short video of last year's clinic and explains that he started the clinic to help girls prepare in three areas: horsemanship, appearance, and public speaking. Parents have been invited to see what goes into being a rodeo queen. The clinic will provide training in all areas; however, the coaching should not change a young woman, just bring out the best in her (Miss Rodeo America had commented she did not recognize herself by the time she had finished training). Mac introduces his other assistants: Miss Utah High School Rodeo, Kristin Haney, is wearing a pink shirt, grey skirt and boots, and a pink hat adorned with

queen's crown; Scott McKendrick, tall and mustachioed, wears a grey leather jacket, blue jeans tucked into beige and pink tooled leather boots, pink shirt and narrow neck tie, dark glasses, and black hat.

Mac then delivers a lecture on horses. The girls must be able to answer questions on horsemanship, and perhaps his book on the subject, to be published next week, might be a help. Judges look for a girl who appears to be riding because she enjoys it and knows how. Her horse should be the right size for her, well behaved but eye-catching—a buckskin or a paint. It needs professional training, and the girl should train with the trainer so she knows the cues. When training, it is important that the rider make it easy for the horse to obey, and once again, "choose a smooth, easy horse"; horses can be dangerous, and it's easier to get more life out of a lazy horse than to hold back an excitable one. To help with rodeo knowledge, there is a "Trivial Pursuit" game on rodeo which, although outdated, will still be useful. The horse's health is important: it should be wormed and shod, and its teeth checked. The tack must be clean. Riders should look symmetrical, and to accomplish this they should ride with their free hand held in front of them. The weight needs to be in the right place, and sitting upright is the goal—on the crotch, not the pockets of the blue jeans. When mounting, remember that judges prefer the jump mount. Instruction is very direct, the teacher assumes that the clinic participants are very familiar with the outward features of the rodeo queen contest.

After lunch, the participants and instructors make their way down to the arena. There are bleachers at the west end, and several horses are saddled and standing patiently. Mac, on a grey mare, gives a demonstration—a slow canter, spinning, changing leading legs. Scott, on a bay, demonstrates the use of the rider's legs in making the horse do what is required of it—leading with the right leg, and slowly cantering a figure 8 with a flying change in the middle. Their rapt audience sits on the bleachers, some taking notes.

Having shown the girls what they should be aiming for, Mac divides them into two groups. One goes to the horses and the other to the west end, where six oil barrels stand, saddled, on legs of horse height. This latter group practices jump mounting. Two volunteers are shoved forward by a motherly hand in the small of the back, and more follow quickly. They try and try, while anxious parents hang grimly onto the other side of the saddles, stopping them from slipping round and under as the mounters put all their weight on one side. Lots of fun, and cries of "Did he see you?" as one or another almost succeeds.

The girls at the other end of the arena are taking turns riding the horses at all gaits, being told to sit on the crotch, each scrutinized and constantly reminded about her hands, feet, and posture (shirts should be tight enough to show good posture). Adults stand in the middle of the circle, watching and commenting. "Queens have high heads, straight shoulders, and smiles," Scott tells the riders. The two queens, Gina and Kristi, demonstrate. These girls know how to ride; what is being stressed here is looking attractive on a horse. Halfway through the session, the groups change and try the other activity. After enough riding and mounting they are dismissed to go relax before dinner.

After dinner, the highlight of the evening is a fashion show. Now the emphasis is on clothes, modeled by several rodeo queens. The organizer of the Miss Rodeo Utah competition, Elaine Miller, comments as the young women take the floor.

The fashion show begins with rodeo suits, including frilly shirts, boots, ties, hats, and gloves that either contrast or blend perfectly. There are black suits with white shirts; dusty rose suits with burgundy highlights, an orange satin jumpsuit with a cream lace blouse and perfectly matching orange gloves, an outfit *all in peach*, a pink jumpsuit with a jacket and striped blouse, lavender with a darker hat, and grey linen worn with a scarlet shirt, hat, gloves, boots, and belt. Recreation clothes follow, including prairie skirts and dresses (which must cover the tops of the Western boots). Then comes horsemanship gear—blue jeans and frilled shirts, always with matching hat, belt (often with a fancy silver buckle), and tooled leather Western boots. Finally, the glamorous evening clothes are displayed: a black lace dress with black boots and black hat, a black velvet skirt and white shirt, and pink taffeta with cream lace, ruffles, and burgundy hat, belt, and boots.

As soon as the show ends, the girls and their mothers crowd into the dressing room to look at the clothes, many of which are offered for sale at bargain prices. On a side table, hats (purple, black, burgundy, orange, and beige) are piled, each costing at least \$80. Fever has set in, and the girls, in a mood to buy anything, hastily scramble in and out of separates, cajoling and bargaining with their mothers. Fifty and 100 dollar bills change hands. Finally, temperatures come down, bill-folds are put away, and the exhausted but jubilant girls leave, clutching their booty.

Friday morning brings more experts on appearance and modeling. The participants look far more glamorous and relaxed than on the day before, and one or two are wearing their casual "queen" clothes. Miss Rodeo Wyoming is wearing a lavender ultra-suede dress with pink insets, lavender stitched boots, and pink belt and hat.

The girls learn about makeup to match the outfit of the day. For performing, it should be heavy, almost like a clown's, and applied to draw attention away from the bad points of the face. Fingernails should be in good shape, despite the fact that the hands are roughened by caring for horses. Hairpieces are allowed but they should look natural. Utah girls are still wearing too much hair, says the rodeo queen judge; shorter and fuller is more fashionable than cascades of curls over the shoulders. The shape of the hat should complement the face, hair, and shoulders—a small difference in brim style can make a big difference to a queen's appearance. It is hard to keep hats and hairpieces in place; bobbypins help, and so does two-way tape on the forehead. No hair should hang on the forehead below the hat.

Sue McMasters gives all-important advice on modeling: "start preparing *now*, diet, exercise [queens generally have trim figures], be the best girl that you can be. Behave like a lady when out and maintain dignity at all times. A true lady makes everyone feel comfortable, she is nonjudgmental, accepting, and thick skinned." When preparing for photo sessions, a girl should practice her smile and pose before the mirror, remembering to turn in her ankles and bend the knees slightly (knees should never be locked). Her walk should be feminine, and Sue demonstrates modeling turns for wearing both pants and skirts. When sitting, "never cross the legs if the thighs are fat." Queens have fact sheets to fill out about themselves for the judges to read. Sue suggests that they be specific about what they cook or sew, and always put down their correct weight.

Scott tells the audience they should use body language, eye contact, and facial expressions. Even while talking they should be aware of what is going on around them. Rehearsing a speech aloud helps confidence, and it is good to see a video of oneself and be critical. Girls should talk to each other, share and ask questions, watch other people, and take a little bit of what they like from everyone. When speaking to an audience they should use hands, voice, and eyes, and never bore anyone to sleep. Speeches should begin in an interesting way and be dynamic; judges listen to many speakers and are more likely to remember the outstanding ones. Throughout this session, one has the impression that the speakers are addressing a highly motivated group. The parents, having paid \$160 for the weekend, are anxious to get their money's worth. The young women likewise are intent and subdued.

After lunch a small group of judges and committee people meet with Mac to discuss the clinic and rodeo queening. They express concern that most rodeo queens only ride in the grand entry. Contest committees should get more work for queens to do (such as working with the county commissions to promote the rodeo). Queens should be encouraged to speak more with adults and in public. Elaine, who wants to make the state pageant a good experience, founded the state advisory committee to help with this and to put together a training portfolio to let participants know what to expect with regard to clothes, horsemanship, and so on. She would like to invest \$40,000 and produce enough interest to send Miss Rodeo Utah to the Miss Rodeo America competition. Mac feels that being a rodeo queen is an advantage to a girl, and would like to see all the clinic participants be a queen or an attendant. He asks for suggestions on improving the clinic: some people want a higher level of instruction for advanced students who have attended before, more posters should be put up in stores, and scholarships could be offered.

Meanwhile, the clinic participants have split into groups of about seven for more particular attention to the subjects discussed in the morning session—makeup, modeling, and speaking. They spend about an hour with each specialist. The modeling group practices unbuttoning jackets and turning; two mothers sit and watch. While Sue is helping one girl, the others stand and look around. "You have a real nice walk" she comments, "use it to advantage, you have those nice long legs." The others practice walking and removing their jackets. One girl asks if she can be sexy. "No," is the firm reply, "this isn't the time for that, you have to be queenly, like a thoroughbred." She reminds them that their walk should be slow and controlled, yet full of energy.

In the public speaking group, Scott asks them to speak on items of horse equipment, making constructive and positive comments but also picking out poorer aspects. His comments are always amusing and never make the speaker feel small. There seems to be more parents at this group, and they also add comments. Scott has to remind the girls about their grammar, which is apparently very important and certainly needs some attention in a few cases.

At the evening banquet, the would-be-queens, very different from their afternoon images, emerge complete with suits, hats, and makeup, sporting their crown if they have one. They leave their tables to sit at the side of the room and wait their turn to model their outfits. Their suits come in every color of the rain-

bow. They finish their walk at the podium, where they give their speech. Of the 23 speeches, 1 is about "My Dad," 1 about the cowboy, 2 are on the rodeo, 7 on "My Hometown," and 12 are on the subject, "My Horse" (3 of them starting coyly with descriptions of "my best friend"). Although all the speakers make a magnificent effort, one can sympathize with the judges of a large competition and understand why originality is emphasized—the most memorable speech this evening contains some humor and a different approach; all the others seem to blend in. However, it is a sympathetic and appreciative audience. With the opportunity to get up and mingle between the speeches and dinner, the girls tell each other how awful they felt but how well everyone had done.

During dinner, discussion ranges from the generally unsympathetic attitude (usually teasing) of brothers to the fact that being on the back of a horse keeps the girls out of the back of a car (for which all the mothers are profoundly thankful). One family wonders if the family business could support the queen as a tax break, and goes home determined to find out.

On the morning of the last day, participants are relaxed, although slightly apprehensive about how the experts will critique their performances of the previous night. The opening speeches are brief: Mac gives an overview of the riding (four cues, good posture) and waxes lyrical about the art of making a horse "flow" beneath the rider. He compliments the girls on their English, but points out that even now they are not watching how they are sitting (it seems they can never relax). Sue again emphasizes they should be *ladies*, Christie tells them to relax and be confident, Scott reminds them to be dignified, and Elaine compliments the other experts on the quality of their advice.

Again the group divides, this time for the individual critiques and photographs. They watch the video of their performance the previous night while waiting for their photo session. Under bright light reflected from four umbrellas, the photographer poses each of them, placing one hand on the hip, two hands on the hips, a jacket slung casually over the shoulder, or a foot on a stool, hand on knee. Some girls get flustered and confuse the directions in their embarrassment, while others are stiff and have difficulty relaxing.

In the other two rooms, girls and their mothers sit, assimilating the tips and observations of the experts. Elaine remarks on the fit of the suit, the angle of the hat, the smiles, and the posture. Mom sits by taping the comments for future reference. Sue advises them on the colors they should wear. She watches each girl's video with her and occasionally gets up to demonstrate the correct way to turn. She points out to a girl with broad shoulders that she could wear a jumpsuit with no belt, and comments on her makeup. More girls stand near, patiently waiting their turn.

The party is nearly over, and it is time to say goodbye, promising to meet again at local rodeos in the summer or at the clinic next year. Girls leave to change out of their finery, emerging like Cinderella at midnight, but their "ball outfit" still with them, laid over their arms in a plastic bag, and the coach waiting to take them back to the farm and the chores.

We could summarize the underlying message of the clinic as follows: Becoming a rodeo queen involves presenting an attractive appearance coupled with a credible performance. The ideal appearance reflects a conventional American conception of beauty, with a contemporary Western accent. One creates a success-

ful appearance through the choice of appropriate wardrobe, makeup, and posture both on and off a horse. The performance, while no less important than appearance, is nevertheless quite restricted. Queen contestants must ride a fairly undemanding course and give a short, conventional speech. No doubt it helps to be competitive, as Lavenda et al. (1984) noted in their study of midwestern small town beauty pageants, but in the clinic this was not particularly stressed.

### The Interviews

During the course of the clinic, we conducted in-depth interviews with 28 participants including judges, teachers, mothers, and 13 of the girls. We wanted to discover the participants' conception of the rodeo queen and uncover their motives and goals. The mother of Miss Utah High School Rodeo put it quite bluntly: "Rodeo queens add to the rodeo even though a lot of the cowboys don't really like them. They add a little bit of class and a little bit of femininity to a very rough sport." Indeed, the rodeo queen's apparent delicacy may serve to underscore the brutal, difficult, and dangerous nature of the rodeo cowboy's tasks. Others spoke about rodeo queens as "wholesome girls" who help to "promote the Western sport of rodeo." Throughout the interviews it was clear that the rodeo queen is looked upon as an advertisement for the rodeo and, by extension, the "Western way of life." Although a young lady must exemplify good horsemanship to become a queen, no one mentioned riding ability, roping skill, or what have you, as important skills for being a queen. In particular, she is chosen for her poise, grace, good cheer, smile, and attire. She is a lady, an ambassador, a star.

Although there was widespread agreement on the role of the rodeo queen, the emphasis on appearance over horsemanship creates a conflict for participants. The majority of girls feel there isn't enough emphasis on horsemanship. "Modeling and talking is great, but [a] rodeo queen's nothing in the rodeo without a horse. If she doesn't know how to ride and she can model and talk really well, it's just not very good because at rodeos you have to go riding, wave to everybody" (Minda, age 15). "I think that photogenics and personality is a really important area to stress, but I don't think the horsemanship is stressed enough in the things that I do" (Kay, age 15). "Modeling and that is important, but I think horsemanship shows you how well you can compete" (Michelle, age 14).

Several adults seemed to share this view: "I have been to a lot of contests where the girl who won was not a horsewoman and it's very upsetting. We put a lot of emphasis very early on horsemanship . . . I think it's very, very necessary in rodeo. If you are representing rodeo, you should ride well" (mother of a queen). But the majority of adults argued that the pageant's (and the clinic's) emphasis on appearance and performance was appropriate: "She has to be able to display her personality quickly and in a short time. She has been able to express her views and yet be able to promote something like rodeo. She has to be very knowledgeable, needs to know what is going on in the world about her" (a contest judge). "Some of the girls absolutely cannot ride, and if they can't ride then you better give them a chance to make it up someplace else" (mother). "I feel they are looking at the total girl and I think there are probably many girls that can stay on a horse and perform on a horse, but they need to be a total person and I think they need to emphasize the other things as well" (mother).



All of the participants and many parents place a great store on knowing how to be a "lady." Sue's definition of a lady as someone who can make people feel at ease was widely quoted. Many of the girls who are growing up on farms or in small towns with brothers as their main companions feel they are learning the socially acceptable manners and mores of the outside world.

Thirteen girls were interviewed, and of those only one lived in town and had to board her horse. The others all lived on ranches or in small towns where their families had enough land to keep some animals. "We raise registered Hereford cattle, so we ride up on the range . . . and I barrel race" (former queen). "My dad has rodeoed since I was born and I just followed him around and I seen the queens" (Amy, age 15). "We run a cattle ranch and . . . just work on horses" (mother). "I started riding when I was 9 months old, and I 4H-d, rodeo queened, and horse-showed my entire life. I have never been without a horse" (mother). "My mother breaks all her horses and my dad breaks all his. My dad used to be a jockey" (Regina, age 16). "Right now our whole family produces rodeo" (Nancy, age 14).

It takes a long time to develop the necessary horsemanship skills to be a rodeo queen. Most of the girls who were interviewed said they started to ride before they were 10 years old (three said they were practically born on a horse). However, two were 12 before they began. One 14-year-old said that she only began seriously riding 3 years ago, so presumably began before that. Once the skills have been acquired, it takes several more years to develop them to the level required of a state queen. Miss Rodeo Wyoming is 21 but first became a princess at 15. Even after all the time and effort involved, she commented that rodeo queening is all about "a lot of hard work and disappointment."

For most of the girls, rodeo queening is done in partnership with their mothers, whose support, both practical and emotional, is of enormous value. Of the 21 girls at the clinic, 17 were accompanied by their mothers. "[My mother's] my main man, she helps me a lot" (Michelle, age 14). "We have a lot of yelling sessions, but it's really fun, too. When she thinks I don't know what I'm talking about, she goes someplace else, and somebody tells her the same thing and then she looks at me and it clicks" (mother). Fathers and brothers help too, however, "[Her coach is] her brother, who has been riding with J'Wayne here for the last two quarters" (mother). "My father [helps me] a lot, he works with me," (Utahna, age 16). "I work more closely with my dad on the riding stuff (Regina). Sometimes both parents help, as in the case of Utahna, Regina, and Kristin. Kristin's mother said, "I get her clothes ready, he gets the horse ready, she gets herself ready." Minda admitted, "You have to work really hard and without your parents you just don't get anywhere."

For many of the girls at the clinic, rodeoing is a family affair. The whole family spends a lot of time at rodeos in the summer, the males often participating in the events and mother and daughter cooperating on the rodeo queening. "We're from a rodeo family and we're going to be at rodeos so we might as well be into everything" (mother). "The whole family [goes to the rodeo] every weekend. We do make it a whole family thing to go to the rodeo" (mother). "We're horse people, cow people, we love it and go to rodeos. My husband ropes in them, Kerry runs barrels, and we cheer 'em on" (mother).

Even if some would-be rodeo queens don't need the emotional and physical support of their families, they certainly need their financial backing. One judge told us that a good horse costs \$5,000-10,000, a horse trailer \$2,000-\$3,000. Outfits are expensive, with suits for \$200 and more, boots costing more than \$100 a pair, and hats at over \$75 each. One outfit is not enough; she needs several. On top of this is the horse's gear; a saddle costing \$800-\$1,000, a bridle \$100, and rugs, blankets, and leg protectors. In addition, a few girls have to board their horses. Girls aspiring to the top (Miss Rodeo America) may decide they need a coach, and they sometimes have their clothes professionally designed and made. Trips to competitions away from home may entail an overnight stay. One mother of a younger participant said, "By the time she's these girls' age she'll be ready, because this sport is too damn expensive to take lightly. We're paying out \$250 a month plus board and feed to break our mare, to train this horse for her. This clinic is costing us damn near \$300 for the weekend." Another says that when the girls get to a certain point "they realize the thousands of dollars that's being spent on them and just about die." She added, with feeling, that her daughter's queening activities were "breaking my bank account."

The participants, nevertheless, seem to think it is all worth it. Miss Rodeo Wyoming feels that being a rodeo queen gives her "the opportunity to meet people and promote the rodeo, which is part of my life." She also enjoys the hero worship: "Little kids look up to you, and in their eyes you're like a movie star, and that's me."

Many of the girls feel they want to become more like a "lady," they feel it is a way to improve themselves, to learn about makeup, modeling, public speaking. "[Rodeo queening] helps me to walk and act like a lady, and I can also stand up in front of people and express myself a little better that way" (Carol, age 18). Minda enjoys meeting people: "I've met so many friends through queening, I have friends all over the state of Utah because I high school rodeo and I love it." Says Laurie, "I feel that it would be a good education and help me to become a better person in my life." Utahna feels it teaches her a lot about herself, and she enjoys showing people that there is more to rodeo than "falling in the mud and stuff. It has a lot of class to it." Michelle thinks it's "just having fun and trying your best."

The mothers have far more definite ideas about what rodeo queening is doing for their daughters. "It develops character, self-confidence; horsemanship teaches them posture, coordination of their abilities, teaches them to handle different situations." Gerri believes her daughter's (Miss Utah High School Rodeo) whole life has changed, "She used to be a very quiet, reserved girl, she's gained great maturity, great personal self-worth. She's doing a lot more and enjoying it more than she ever has because of her hard work and her success." Several mothers agree with this. "I think rodeo queen contests really better the girls. They make a lot of friends, they learn poise, they learn makeup, they have to give speeches, they have to model and it just makes more of a lady out of them all the way around. It makes them a well-rounded person." There is an underlying view that rodeo queening facilitates the transition from horse-crazy tomboyhood into delicate, dignified womanhood by occupying the adolescent years. "She has her priorities straight—Boys are nice as long as they don't interfere with her horses," is a sen-

timent echoed by several mothers and summed up by this comment: "The best way to let them grow is to keep them on the back of a horse, it keeps them out of the back seat of a car."

Our informants identify several reasons for the persistence of girls and their families in this expensive and elusive pursuit. The girls like being in the limelight and it is a nice contrast to the humdrum life on the farm. For the parents there is the vicarious thrill of a child's success, the family's general involvement in rodeo, and the desire to expose their children to new people and places, but in a carefully controlled manner. Despite the overall serious tone of the clinic, however, it is clear that for nearly all the participants rodeo queening is fundamentally a playful, recreational activity.

### *A Rodeo Queen Contest*

The culmination of all of this training, effort, and expense is the rodeo queen contest. The Cache County (Utah) Rodeo Queen contest takes place on June 21 at the county fairgrounds in the southwest corner of Logan. The whole contest is conducted outdoors and begins about 5 p.m. First, the 12 contestants take tea with the three judges (two women and one man) at the picnic site beside a narrow rushing stream shaded by willow trees. After this they are interviewed individually at one of the picnic tables. They wait in a line to the side (about 20 yards away) and approach the judges when their turn comes. After the interview they wander off to talk to friends and relatives.

One interviewee's outfit is turquoise. She walks toward the judges, puts her hands on her hips as she does the turn, walks, hands on hips again, twirls around, returns, then shows her back view. There is a flower in her lapel, and her hair is different; although it's long, it is gathered into a ponytail to one side. Then the interviewee is invited to sit and the judges talk to her. She sits with her legs uncrossed, the approved fashion. Then she stands and walks away, quite composed.

Another one wears a blue and grey striped suit with a blue hat, blue shirt with a diamante pin, and pale blue gloves. The pants are rather long and wrinkle around her boots. She looks a little uncomfortable and shrugs her shoulders as she's waiting. Her hair is loose and shoulder length, blonde and curled. The judges are busy leafing through papers and taking notes. They call her over and she approaches but doesn't walk terribly well; her pants seem too tight. She's very nervous, her walk seems stilted—perhaps she hasn't been to a clinic.

Later the contest moves to the nearby arena for the horsemanship display. Last year's queen (on her prize saddle) demonstrates the pattern that has been set for the contestants: lead the horse to the first cone and (jump) mount, walk the horse to the center cone, trot to the top cone, canter around the full length of the arena, turn back through the center, continuing to canter; then come a series of figure 8s and other maneuvers, ending up with a flourish before the judges. The contestants wait outside the arena. When their turn comes they ride in, dismount, and walk to the public address system. There they speak to the crowd, sometimes quite a long piece about themselves, but in a few cases very short. They remount and ride the pattern, then they ride out of the arena.

When everyone has had a turn, the results are announced and the prizes distributed. A married woman takes the title, which is viewed by some as unfortunate because married women are not allowed to go any further in state and national pageants. The queen receives the use of a new horse trailer for 1 year, at the end of which she will have the option to buy it. Queen and attendants receive horse feed for their mounts. There are individual prizes for the best horsewoman, the best in appearance, and the most congenial, and the queen and her attendants take those three prizes.

### *The Rodeo Queen and Growing Up Female in the West*

The crowd's disappointment with the choice of a married woman as Cache County Rodeo Queen reveals one of the principal purposes of the rodeo queen effort. The pageants simultaneously elevate a small cadre of ideal women who are slender, beautiful, sexy, well-dressed, and nonthreatening to male dominance in the work force, politically or elsewhere; they demean as unworthy all those women who happen not to be slender and beautiful—those who happen to be married, gray-haired, professional, or aggressive. This critique may be valid, but for large parts of the country, especially what might be called the agricultural, rural heartland, it is irrelevant. As Groce points out in reference to the very traditional sex role stereotyping associated with boys' and girls' activities in 4-H,

The world of the country child is different in several aspects from that of his urban and suburban counterparts. Several outstanding characteristics of rural communities have a direct impact on the socialization that their children experience. Rural communities are distinguished by the presence of (1) local social systems in which the individual is ranked on the basis of personal and family reputation; (2) strong equalitarian traditions; (3) a social universe that is centered around an extended family and the local community—with an emphasis on group cooperation and community participation; and (4) fairly traditional farm-based economies with narrow career opportunities and traditional sexual divisions of labor. (1981, p. 106)

Groce's last point is particularly germane. The young ladies from rural Utah, Wyoming, and Idaho who participated in the rodeo queen clinic do indeed face extremely limited horizons. Lancy, co-author of this paper and a teacher educator at Utah State University, finds that the overwhelming majority of the women in his mostly female freshman Orientation to Education class list marriage and raising a large family as their immediate and primary goals. We presume that for girls who don't go to college, this is their only goal. The clinic, as a "socializing organization" (Sieber & Gordon, 1981), carefully channels the energies and interests of these young ladies in directions that are acceptable and appropriate in this society. At the same time, however, the clinic opens up the opportunity for these girls and their families to transcend the limitations of the local society, however briefly. Thus we see how the Cache Rodeo Queen of 1986, as a married woman, fails to fulfill this promise.



As have others before them, Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984) struggled to define the purpose or function of festival and of play, and to debate the relationship between the two. It might be wise to first acknowledge that these activities serve functions for the participants that are different from those they serve for the society that sanctions them (Lancy, 1980). We have argued that young girls and their families find ample rewards in "safe" excitement and glory for their investment in the quest to become a queen. But what does the larger society gain from its support for and investment in rodeo? The rodeo, like other "secular rituals" (Moore & Meyerhoff, 1977), does indeed represent excess. The clowns and clown acts reflect an inversion of local norms of propriety—their humor is mainly off-color, and yet the audience would like to believe that it is open-minded and sophisticated enough to not only tolerate but appreciate these dirty jokes. The cowboys, especially the bull and bronc riders, reflect an imprudence and recklessness that is antithetical to sober, careful, calculating Western values. The rodeo queens are far more beautiful, more finely clothed, and more carefully spoken and mannered than their "commoner" friends and relatives. It is precisely because of these excesses that the rodeo creates a sense of community among spectators and participants, because it presents an idealized and easily understood version of the community's ethos.

### References

- Anonymous. (1985, July/August). Daring, beautiful western girls. *American West*, 22, 44-48.
- Edison, R. (1986). A welcome from the PRCA. *Prorodeo: Official Rodeo Program*. Colorado Springs, CO: PRCA Properties.
- Frederiksson, K. (1985). *American rodeo, from Buffalo Bill to big business*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Freedman, R. (1986). *Beauty bound*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Groce, N. (1981). Growing up rural: Children in the 4-H and junior range. In R.T. Sieber & A.J. Gordon (Eds.), *Children and their organizations: Investigations in American culture* (pp. 106-121). Boston: G.K. Hall.
- Handleman, D. (1980). Re-thinking *Naven*: Play and identity. In H.B. Schwartzman (Ed.), *Play and culture* (pp. 58-70). West Point, NY: Leisure Press.
- Hoy, F. (1978). The origins and originality of rodeo. *Journal of the West*, 17, 17-23.
- Lancy, D.F. (1980). Play in species adaptation. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 9, 471-495.
- Lavenda, R.M., Lauer, M.A., Norwood, J.R., Nelson, C.E., & Evenson, A. (1984). Festivals and the organization of meaning: An introduction to community festivals in Minnesota. In B. Sutton-Smith & D. Kelly-Byrne (Eds.), *The masks of play* (pp. 34-50). West Point, NY: Leisure Press.
- Lawrence, E. (1984). *Rodeo, an anthropologist looks at the wild and the tame*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Moore, S., & Meyerhoff, B. (Eds.) (1977). *Secular ritual*. Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum.
- Pomponio Logan, A. (1978). The palio of Siena: Performance and process. *Urban Anthropology*, 7(1), 45-65.
- Rentley, M.L. (1978, July). From sidesaddle to rodeo. *Journal of the West*, 17, 44-52.
- Riske, M. (1983). *Those magnificent cowgirls: A history of the rodeo cowgirl*. Cheyenne: Wyoming Publishing.
- Sieber, R.T., & Gordon, A.J. (1981). Introduction: Socializing organizations—Environments for the young, windows to American culture. In R.T. Sieber & A.J. Gordon (Eds.), *Children and their organizations: Investigations in American culture* (pp. 1-17). Boston: G.K. Hall.
- Sutton-Smith, B., & Kelly-Byrne, D. (1984). *The masks of play*. West Point, NY: Leisure Press.

### Acknowledgments

We are grateful to J'Wayne McArther and his rodeo clinic staff for permission to study the clinic and the many participants who gave their time for an interview. We are also grateful to colleagues Gerald Adams, E. Helen Berry, and Joyce Kinkead for assistance with this paper.