Shot by Shot Analysis: *Little Miss Sunshine*

Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris's film *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) begins in an unconventional manner. While most directors save extreme close ups for very dramatic scenes, the directors of this film begin with an extreme close-up, and use similar intimate shots throughout the opening minutes of the film. This technique keeps the audience from being able to see a character before making some sort of assumption about him/her. The angles and types of shots used in the beginning of *Little Miss Sunshine* aim to point out how common it is for people to make judgments about others before knowing anything about them.

Dayton and Paris open their film with an extreme close-up on a young girl wearing glasses. Before knowing anything about her as a person, the audience notices two things. One, she is wearing glasses and, therefore, has an imperfection. Two, the frames of the glasses are large and not very stylish (:35). Immediately, audiences are forced to unconsciously begin judging a child and how she measures up to contemporary beauty standards/Dayton and Paris also give audience members a wider shot that shows Olive's "plump" belly and out of severely outdated clothes (1:15). When viewers realize that Olive is mimicking the reaction of the woman who had just won Miss America, they almost feel a pang of sympathy because they have already decided that the chubby girl with out-of-style clothes is not someone that would grow up to win Miss America (1:30). Only after the voice over of Richard cuts in to talk about winners and
losers does the audience become aware that they have been judging and mentally destroying the dreams of a child (1:34). They are forced to realize that they have unconsciously labeled her a loser based off of their own cultural biases.

After a few short scenes, viewers are again subjected to participate in condemning someone based off of societal deemed flaws. This time, viewers first see images of drugs being prepared for use behind closed doors (2:58). Immediately, audience members place the person doing drugs in a place beneath them. Before knowing if the person is man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, viewers decide the person as a drug addict above anything else.

In the last shot of this scene, film viewers see two images of Edwin; the first is him sitting back, and the second is his reflection in the mirror. After sitting for a few moments, Edwin gets up and moves to another chair in the room, and the audience is left only with his mirror image (3:35). This character blocking suggests that regardless of who Edwin is, the audience can only see him for what he reflects in terms of society. Dayton and Paris point out that regardless of the fact that Edwin is a loving grandfather, which audiences find out later in the film, viewers can only see him as a drug user and a miscreant.

Dayton and Paris construct the first few opening scenes to force audience members to acknowledge their own habitual nature to make premature judgments about others. In confronting this, viewers are also forced to realize the impact that their own cultural values have on contributing to the labeling of others. Through *Little Miss Sunshine*, Dayton and Paris aim to show that people are more than their first impressions. No one should be thought of as a loser or "not pretty enough" based on other's fragmented perceptions. Pushing those expectations onto a child is not a way of making him/her better, but merely a projection of one's own ideas of beauty that have most likely been projected onto him/her subliminally through different forms of media.
Dayton and Paris also use the segments of extreme close-ups of Edwin to show that people can be good, despite their flaws. Having problems does not make someone a bad person, but judging and condemning him/her for it, especially without knowing anything about him/her, should make one feel a little guilty. Ultimately, the entire film attempts to demolish and reconstruct the ideas of the characters that are formed in the opening scenes.
Works Cited

Shot by Shot: *Little Miss Sunshine* (:35-1:34)

Extreme close up on Olive

Close up on Miss America Contestants

Extreme close up on Olive

Close up Miss America Winner

Medium close up on Olive (low angle shot): zooms in to close up

Close up Miss America Constants

Long shot Olive standing sideways

Close up Miss America

Medium close up Olive (low angle shot)

Close up of Miss America being crowned

Over the shoulder shot of Olive; close up of Miss America (deep focus)

(2:58-3:39)

Extreme close up of door knob

Extreme close up to fanny pack

Extreme close up of drugs #1

Extreme close up of drugs #2

Extreme close up of drugs #3

Extreme close up of drugs being moved into lines; pan to close up of Edwin snorting the drugs

Over the shoulder, medium close up of Edwin - moves so it becomes just a medium close up of Edwin in the mirror