

Hmong Elders' Assumptions on Hmong Girls

There are many issues that existed in this world a long time ago which continues to exist till today, but has not been resolved yet at all. Joining the conversation means to be a participant in an issue that is important to the individual and voice out the individual's opinion on it. This opinion will probably not be the last word, but in some ways will help others to see another different side of the issue and maybe change their beliefs on it. An important issue that exist in my world which still has not been resolved yet till today is how elders in the Hmong culture living in the United States still carries the assumption that Hmong women are of lower status than men. Moreover, that a Hmong woman's place is in the home and to take care of her children. Yet, they don't know and see that things run a little different now living here in the United States. I believe that whether you are a boy or girl, you have equal opportunity. Just because you are a Hmong girl, you have to be treated different and lesser than a Hmong boy which is not right.

One key obstacle is that since the Hmong value family as most important, this belief has been deeply embedded into the minds of Hmong women. They accepted the idea that their task of citizenship was to be good mothers and pass on moral virtue to their children. The men might pursue a variety of activities such as making decisions, going to school, or building a career. On the other hand, Hmong women did not get that many opportunities to actively participate in decision making or go to school nor be allowed to develop mental maturity. They do not have as much right as their husbands and they can not do whatever they please. In other words, they do

not act independently without their husbands' presence. Basically, the only thing they can really performed is nothing, but boring household tasks. This economic way of life not only dulled Hmong women's minds, but limited their possibilities as well.

Another fact is that Hmong women tend to believe that they must marry at a young age. The youngest average age of marriage for Hmong girls ranged from 13 to 18 years of age. Because women mature faster than men, Hmong men prefer to marry someone who's still young or has just grown up reaching the age of teen years. Why? Because after she have many children, she will look less attractive and desirable. As Hmong women marry at a young age, they move directly from childhood into responsibilities of adulthood. Parental responsibilities begin at a very young age when she begin raising her own family.

A third reason why Hmong women married so young is that most marriages were negotiated between the families of the young people as it still continues in the United States among some Hmong families. Back in Laos, couples do not usually court, "fall in love", and get married. The families who select their spouses believed that love would develop between the couples as they build their lives together. In such cases, neither gender have much to say about the marriage, despite the fact that they don't agree on the arranged marriage. However, the men can marry a second wife of his own choosing. As long as he doesn't divorce the first wife. Divorce is not an option to either person, and it is usually difficult. Even though she is unhappy, she is afraid to say anything because she does not want to disgrace her family and clan members. She is expected to obey and bear every wrong without complaint.

So far, we have seen at least three primary reasons how Hmong women were treated in traditional Hmong society. In my opinion, they were helpless creatures that could not enjoy the full status of mature persons and the freedom to pursue an education and any career for which

they have a talent. Instead, they're shaped in to being a "superwoman," who could only marry and have children, and take on the tasks of nurturing their families, obedience to their husbands and have the responsibility to abide by cultural customs.

Today, however, individual Hmong women have the opportunity to go to school. The rapidly growing Hmong female students in colleges and universities highlights this truth. Most Hmong women liberated themselves from domestic chores and marriages, to pursue their individual desires and join as equal participants in all areas of life. Even though, some Hmong women marry before they complete high school or while in college, they continue to pursue their education or hold jobs that are not necessarily confined to the home. At the same time, they take responsibilities of nurturing their families.

While it is true that more and more Hmong women are entering the education and work force, Hmong women still have to cope with these cultural assumptions. Some Hmong girls still feel that they will not be able to find someone if they wait too long. Most Hmong men will not marry someone who has the same level of education or a college degree as they do. They feel these women represent a powerful force for social change and transformation, because their success would make them too independent and less obedient and unwilling to agree. Their power to control and make decisions are challenged, thus making them less inclined to get involved with Hmong women of such stature. Every once in a while, Hmong men are going to Laos or Thailand to find themselves a wife.

Despite these reasons, most importantly I feel that we, as Hmong women, must not let these dated customs discourage the growth of an independent woman's right to participate in normal society. Age is not a factor that we should be concern about when considering marriage. If in any case, we can not find a suitable partner within our own group, we have the option of

other ethnic cultures. Hmong women are beginning to take control of their lives. The knowledge of education, working with cultural awareness, and accepting changes will allow us to find our way in the world. Hmong women have been individuals shaped, consciously or unconsciously, to fit into established slots in our social system for too long. We have the economic opportunities and education qualifications to create a life that combines professional achievement and personal fulfillment in a way that has never been available to our mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. Overall, we "open" the door for other Hmong girls and women.