

The Impact of Hmong Women's Gender Role Endorsement on Decision-Making

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Voelz (1985) defines those who adhere to notions of men taking on the head-of-household role and women being nurturing wives as holding a traditional gender role view. Those who are open to egalitarian work ideas are identified as holding a modern gender role view (Voelz, 1985). There is increasing research suggesting Hmong women in the United States are taking more modern gender roles (Lo, 2002, Lor, 2010). It is not only Hmong women but also Hmong men who are stepping away from traditional gender roles and expectations. A reason for this shift is often associated with Hmong refugees' relocation to the United States after the Vietnam War. Now that Hmong men and women have a choice between traditional Hmong culture gender role expectations and the more modern views of gender, there may be disparities in how Hmong men and women interact presently as opposed to traditionally. The present study builds upon Barry and Beitel's (2006) study and defines women who endorse traditional gender role as hyperfeminine. At the same time, women who approve modern gender roles are described as hypofeminine (Barry & Beitel, 2006).

This study examines the gender role endorsement of Hmong women and how it affects their decision-making process. The study looked at two different factors that play a crucial role in determining a Hmong woman's gender role endorsement. For one, there are Hmong gender roles that Hmong women in the United States are raised with and are expected to follow, and secondly, there are cross-cultural gender roles that are attributed to women at large in Western society. Both of these indicate that Asian women, specifically Hmong women, have the opportunity to choose whether they will endorse the roles they were taught to follow or the roles of women in American society.

Hmong Gender Roles

According to the age-old traditions of the Hmong patriarchal society, daughters, young women, and wives are expected to be quiet, passive followers of the demands of their parents, husbands, and elders (Lo, 2002). Hmong women are often expected to take on this role because a Hmong family is structured so that the family is under the “authority of the male head of household” (Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao & Yang, 2004, p.13). This type of structure not only allows men to take control of many of the decisions made in the household, but it also gives women the responsibility of supporting and following the demands of the male head of household (Lee, 1994).

Traditionally, men are brought up to assume roles of superiority such as acting as the head of household or representing the family name (Yang, 1997). Men are often expected to uphold the traditions and values of the family and clan, and Hmong women are to provide unconditional support for their men in turn (Lee, 1994). Similarly, Hmong women are often encouraged by other family members to take the role of caretakers and obedient daughters (Lo, 2002). The role of caretaker for a Hmong woman means that she is responsible for assisting her mother in household chores and in the care of younger siblings. In a traditional Hmong house setting, this is how things would work. That is, the mother tends to her young children, while the father is in charge of taking care of the clan business.

Gender Differences

Street, Kimmel, and Kromrey (1996) found that when women were asked to identify their gender role preferences based on their personal traits, most women tended to value compassion more than the men who were surveyed. In addition, women also tended to act more on this trait, especially when displaying prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior is behavior that is considered beneficial to others and can include behaviors such as guiding or comforting others (Eagly,

2009). These research findings suggest that women still value and act upon the feminine traits, such as compassion, that are traditionally attributed to them (Street, et.al, 1996). Asian American women may still value traditional traits attributed to women.

A large number of groups of East Asian American women are from traditionally male-dominated societies. Many of these women find themselves stuck between two gender role ideals, that of the West and the East. Suh (2007) made the important assertion that Asian American women immigrants in the United States are experiencing gender role identity crises because of their acculturation process to more egalitarian ideas in Western society. The integration into Western ideals of gender roles has opened up opportunities for Asian American women, such as working outside the home, a chance that women in more traditional settings would generally not have had (Suh, 2007). Even though Asian American women are moving away from their traditional roles, a study by Lottes and Kuriloff (1992) which looked at the effects of different factors on sex role attitudes found that Asian men and women tend to support ideals of male dominance in contrast to Whites and African American men and women in the United States. This suggests that Asian women may still value traditional gender role ideals.

Gender Role Endorsement

A research study, examining the effects of traditional gender role reinforcement and its affect on men and women's decision-making processes, conceptually defined traditional and modern gender role reinforcement (Voelz, 1985). Voelz defined those with a traditional gender role outlook as those who support traditional ideals of men taking on the role as the head of household and women taking the role of the obedient wife. In contrast, Voelz' (1985) study defined men and women with egalitarian ideals as 'modern' in their outlook. The traditional gender role outlook can be applied to traditional Hmong ideals of men and women. In contrast,

modern gender role outlook can be applied to Western ideals of equality in gender roles.

Because of the traditional roles expected of women, research shows that women are less likely to be assertive in interactions with men because of the traditional roles expected of them. In a study on differences in assertive behavior, researchers found that women often report that they are more assertive in expressing concepts such as love and compliments, whereas men were more assertive in situations that involve being the boss (Hollandsworth, 1977). In another research study involving gender cues in conversations, researchers found that when a woman's voice sounded dominant, raters automatically judged the woman as addressing the man in a condescending way (Hall, 1981). What these two studies suggest is that women are often not expected to speak up in matters of business that include decision making. When they do, they are often viewed negatively. Furthermore, research on interactions in mixed-gender peer groups reveal that girls often display more passive behaviors; they frequently let boys take over and make decisions (Meyer, 1991).

Hypothesis and Limitations

In general, scholars agree that gender role traits and endorsements are impacted by factors such as race and culture (Kane, 2006, Barry & Beitel, 2006). More so, gender roles often play a role in how men and women interact in their cultures (Filardo, 1996). The purpose of the present research study is to add to the body of literature on Hmong gender roles. Furthermore, the results of this study may provide groundwork for researchers to look further into the impact of gender role preference and interaction between men and women within the Hmong culture.

This study investigates Hmong women's endorsement of traditional and modern gender roles and how this impacts their decision-making process involving Hmong men. The hypothesis is that hypofeminine women, that is, Hmong women who endorse modern gender roles, will be

as likely to agree with their male counterparts in a decision-making situation as hyperfeminine women, Hmong women who endorse traditional gender roles. This result is expected because, as the research above suggests, even though Asian American women are being allowed to explore areas that are traditionally male-dominated, Asian cultural groups as a whole still sanction male dominance over women (Lottes, 1992).

This research study used analysis of gender roles and gender role preference of women in Western society and Asian American women to draw conclusions about Hmong women. However, because of the limited research on Asian American women, and specifically on Hmong women's gender roles and attitudes (Kane, 2000), the results from this data should only be viewed as basic groundwork for future studies on Hmong gender roles.

Method

Participants

Participants were 32 Hmong women. These women were all college students. No demographic information, including age and immigration status, was collected on the women. An email containing the survey link was sent out to all Hmong women currently enrolled at a mid-sized Wisconsin university. The students participated on a voluntary basis.

Materials

Two main measures were used in this study. The Hypergender Ideology Scale devised by Hamburger, Hogben, McGowan, and Dawson (1996) and two written scenarios detailing a decision-making process between a man and a woman. The Likert-scale items in the Hypergender scale asked questions that identified the subject's gender role preference, that is, whether or not the subjects identified their gender role views as hyperfeminine or hypofeminine. The scale had a total of 57 items. Each item was rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly*

agree). The survey asked questions such as “A true man knows how to command others” or “Most women need a man in their lives” to assess subjects’ preference or views on their roles as women.

The second test involved a set of two written scenarios that detailed a decision-making process between a man and woman. The race and ethnicity of the man and woman were not specified. Both scenarios involved a decision-making process between a man and a woman who represented either a traditional or modern gender role view. In the traditional scenario, both the man and the woman endorsed a traditional gender role view with regard to the decision-making process. On the other hand, in the modern scenario, both man and woman represented a modern gender role view. The man and the woman in the scenario divided a list of 20 household tasks amongst the two of them. The household tasks assigned to the woman in the scenario varied based on the particular gender view (i.e., hyperfeminine or hypofeminine) the woman in the scenario was supposed to represent. For example, in the traditional scenario, the man and woman endorsed hyperfeminine gender roles, so the woman was assigned all the traditional women’s tasks (e.g., women do dishes). In the modern scenario, since the man and woman endorsed hypofeminine gender roles, the woman had a mixture of traditional women’s tasks (e.g., women do dishes) and modern tasks (e.g., women wash cars).

Procedure

All tests were administered to participants online via the survey site Qualtrics. Participants were allowed a two-week time period to take the tests. All of the participants took the Hypergender Ideology Scale first and then were randomly assigned to the modern or traditional scenarios. Once the participants read their scenarios, they were asked to identify whether or not they agreed with the woman’s decision in the scenario. The participants were

asked to explain their reason for agreeing or disagreeing with the woman's decision in the scenario they read. Tests that were not completed were not valid and were not included in the analysis of the results. There was no time limit for participants to complete the tests once they started.

Results

An average Hypergender score was computed for all participants. A strong adherence to traditional gender roles yielded in a higher score on the Hypergender Ideology Scale. In both traditional and modern scenario conditions, participants yielded an average Hypergender score of 2 out of 6. This suggests that both groups had strong adherence towards modern gender roles instead of traditional gender roles. To ensure that there was no significant difference between the average Hypergender scores in both groups, an independent sample t-test was run. Average Hypergender scores were not significantly different across traditional and modern conditions, $t(19) = .493, p > .05$.

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to test for a relationship between the average Hypergender score and the chores that were described in both the traditional and modern scenario conditions. For the traditional scenario, the average Hypergender score was strongly correlated with the following chores: *clean the refrigerator*, $r(11) = .41, p < .05$; *scrub the toilet*, $r(11) = .42, p < .05$; *clean the windows*, $r(11) = .33, p < .05$; and *do the laundry*, $r(11) = .37, p < .05$ (see Table 1 for all correlations).

The average Hypergender score did not correlate with any of the chores from the modern scenario. The low Hypergender average scores suggest that all participants had strong adherence towards modern gender roles. Therefore, a strong correlation should have existed between the modern group and the Hypergender score. However, none of the survey items in the modern

group significantly correlated with the average Hypergender score. Implications for these paradoxical results will be addressed in the discussion section.

Table 1

Correlations for average Hypergender score and Modern and Traditional Groups

Chores	Traditional Group	Modern Group
Do the Dishes	.307	.304
Clean the Refrigerator	.739*	
Scrub the Toilet	.733*	
Clean the Windows	.711*	
Clean the Bed Linens	.451	
Do the Laundry	.798*	.243
Vacuum the Drapery	.491	
Dust	.542	.178
Clean the Playroom	.584	
Clean the Dining Room	.606	.264
Take out the Trash		-.021
Rake the Leaves		.046
Clean the Gutter		-.031
Scrub the Toilet		.277
Clean the Office		.117
Clean the Porch		.037

Note. * $p < .05$

Discussion

The results show that participants in both groups, on average, scored fairly low on the Hypergender Ideology Scale. This suggests that participants endorsed modern gender roles. When average Hypergender scores were correlated with the chore survey scores, significant correlations were found only in the traditional scenario and not the modern scenario. If participants scored lower on the Hypergender Ideology Scale, their scores should have correlated with chores from the modern scenario. However, the opposite was found; average scores were only strongly correlated with some chores from the traditional scenario.

Research suggests that even though Asian American women are being allowed to explore areas that are traditionally male-dominated, Asian groups overall still justify male dominance over women (Lottes, 1992). In the scenarios that were presented, there was a man and woman involved in making a decision. After reading the traditional scenario, Hmong women participants may have felt that it was the woman's duty to carry out the more traditional roles, even if the participants did not agree with the roles. This may be a result of the traditional gender role expectations of women in the Hmong community (e.g., Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao & Yang, 2004; Lo, 2002; Lee, 1994).

Another explanation to these paradoxical results may lie in the length of time the Hmong women have lived in the United States or if they were recent immigrants. Research has shown that Hmong women who have lived in the United States long enough to attain an education tend to take more modern views of gender roles (Timm, 1994). If a Hmong woman were to grow up in a community that held on to traditional notions of gender roles (e.g., new immigrant family), she may be more likely to value traditional gender roles as opposed to a woman who grew up in America.

It may seem contradictory on the surface that women reporting that they hold modern gender views would endorse traditional gender-based chores but not modern views. These results support the literature suggesting that Hmong women still internalize traditional gender role beliefs, even though they are displaying modern gender role values. Although Hmong women may hold notions of traditional gender roles to be correct, they still display modern gender role values, a trend that may be attributed to their acculturation process in Western society because of exposure to egalitarian ideas (Suh, 2007).

Conclusion

In sum, women who reportedly hold modern gender role views still support traditional gender roles. Reasons for this may be that Hmong women are facing two different cultural worlds: the Western society and the traditional Hmong society. Because both societies hold conflicting views (i.e., Western society holds modern gender role views, while Hmong society holds traditional gender role views), the Hmong women in this study may have felt compelled to answer according to both societies' views. More importantly, participants of this study were only college students and do not adequately represent Hmong women across all age groups. These women are receiving an American education and do not represent women who may have been educated in other countries or may have not been exposed to education at all.

Questions such as whether an elderly Hmong woman, who spent most of her adulthood in a traditional Hmong society, would feel as conflicted as a college-aged Hmong woman remain to be explored. Future studies should certainly encompass a broader demographic range, including but not limited to age, immigration status, and education level. Furthermore, studies in the future should not only look at Hmong women's gender role views but also at the gender role views of other minority women. Studies should especially study how these minority women are

influenced in their decision-making involving a man. The question of whether this phenomenon of holding and displaying contradictory gender role views is only prevalent in Hmong women or in other women as well clearly warrants further examination.

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