

Finding Self-Identity and Empowerment in the Comfort of Your Own Skin: Are Women Shelters Culturally Competent Enough to Serve Hmong Women?

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how domestic violence shelters empower women and why we need to consider cultural differences when we think about domestic violence victims. I explore the relationship between the minority and the majority population while investigating Hmong cultural differences. Most abused women in the Hmong culture tend to be more passive in escaping domestic violence. Cultural factors such as language and the shame associated with Hmong women hinder them from seeking independence and autonomy from abuse outside of the Hmong community. These cultural differences both segregate and limit the Hmong minority population from the dominant white population within local domestic violence shelters such as New Horizons. Using New Horizons as a case study, I interview domestic violence advocates, as well as cultural advocates, and Hmong victims of domestic violence. My ultimate goal is to understand the necessity of culturally-competent domestic violence services that are vital for allowing Hmong women to secure autonomy in their life choices, free from domestic abuse. Through these qualitative analyses, and also by providing my own personal experience, I hope to raise awareness about the necessity for establishing a Hmong women's domestic violence shelter.

INTRODUCTION

This research is about the identity of Hmong women and Hmong men who live in two conflicting cultures: one is more "traditional", in the sense that it glorifies patriarchal norms; while the other culture is more "progressive" and empowers women to escape abusive situations (often to the displeasure of gender-role traditionalists in Hmong communities). It is important to learn and understand the culture and traditions of the Hmong people in order to help Hmong women seek independence from their cultural obligations and lifestyle. Keeping the culture and practicing its traditions are important because it defines who they are: Hmong. The older generations of women are the ones we need to ask if they need help because they are more stuck in the mentality that abuse is acceptable and is not a problem in their relationships. When abuse happens at home, Hmong women are less likely to report, less likely to seek help, and also, in knowing that, they are more careful to do things that will not let them get hit. Out of every ten women who gets hit, only three will report because they are concerned about their husbands facing legal action (The State of the Hmong American Community 2013). Are these women better with or without their husbands?

Domestic abuse shelters, like New Horizons in La Crosse, Wisconsin, are one of several outlets for Hmong women in abusive relationships. However, Hmong women might be hesitant to make use of the services at the shelters because the people working there have different religious, linguistic, and cultural values. On the one hand, these cultural differences may not matter to those who seek help; on the other hand, the "culture gap" might stand in the way of having Hmong women turn to them for help. As I mentioned in the title, my research question is "Are women shelters culturally competent enough to serve Hmong women?"

In this paper, I will address how the interviewees identify themselves, what it means to be a Hmong woman or a Hmong man, and what kind of success, power, and status they have in the Hmong community. I begin by discussing the research design. Then, I report my overall findings, followed by a detailed interpretation of the interview responses. I conclude the paper by mentioning the limitations and implications of my research.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect domestic violence shelters have on abused victims, primarily considering the challenges that women face being members of an ethno-religious minority. By examining a domestic violence shelter and its general role in empowering women, I explore the cultural differences of domestic

violence victims and explore the relationship between the minority and the majority population in terms of being seen as dependent, due to culture sensitivities and differences.

Research Site and Target Population

To explore the domestic violence shelter in La Crosse, Wisconsin, New Horizons, I interviewed domestic violence advocates who are both females, a White and a Hmong, a White male outreach scholar/outreach advocate, a Hmong male cultural scholar, and both White and Hmong women victims of domestic violence. These interviews will investigate the personal experiences of Asian women who are victims of domestic violence and will also pertain to research that had been done on the topic. As shown in Table 1, the participants range from 21 to 60 years old, most of them are women, many of them are parents, and several have both a “traditional” and a “westernized” cultural outlook.

Table 1: Characteristics of the people interviewed

	Participant (Pseudonym)							
	Sevana	May Bao	Kaia	Gao Sue	Dianna	Mai Lia	Magdalena	Chee Nou
Age of Participant	52	25	25	63	22	36	34	60
Gender of Participant	Woman	Woman	Woman	Woman	Woman	Woman	Woman	Man
Traditional or Americanized Values?	Don't Know	Both	Both	Both	Both	Yes	Both	Both
Marital Status	Divorced /Separated	Divorced /Separated	Currently Married	Widowed	Single (Not in a Relationship)	Currently Married	Single (Not in a Relationship) - Married Before	Currently Married
Size of Hometown	Smaller Community	Smaller Community	Smaller Community	Larger Community	Larger Community	Larger Community	Larger Community	Smaller Community
Location of Abuse	Smaller Community	Smaller Community	Smaller Community	Smaller Community	Smaller Community	Smaller Community	Larger Community	Smaller Community
Is Participant a Parent?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Is Participant an Advocate?	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Did Participant Report Abuse?	Other	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Did Abuser Obey Restraining/No Contact Order?	Does not apply	Does not apply	No	No	No	Yes	Does not apply	Does not apply

Notes: Table entries represent background characteristics of the interviewees (participants).

Informed Consent Process and Research Design

I obtain consent prior to collecting any data, only data from interviewees who provide an informed consent form will be included in the study, and I remind the interviewees that participation is voluntary (i.e., there is no penalty for non-participation/withdrawing). To ensure confidentiality, I give participants pseudonyms, and all transcripts, audio tapes and data information are labeled so that they cannot be traced back to subjects.

This study uses narrative inquiry as a research strategy. I conduct open-ended individual interviews with these participants so that they can communicate their experiences and insights, using their own words. Below is an outline of the interview questions:

- Do you feel self-empowered when you are at the shelter?
- Do Hmong women have rights?
- What is a Hmong woman's role? What is a Hmong man's role?
- What are the reasons why an abused Hmong woman may refuse to leave their husbands?
- Are cultural differences considered when it comes to domestic violence issues?
- What are the relationships between the minority and the majority population?
- What is the clans' role?
- What is the difference between a traditional mainstream shelter and a Hmong shelter?
- Why should we need a Hmong shelter?

- What are the reasons an abused Hmong woman may not go to a shelter?

When necessary, I used follow-up questions to allow participants to clarify responses and/or provide a more in-depth feedback.

Results and Discussion

To analyze the interviews, I saved digital versions of the transcripts to a disk and uploaded those files to Dedoose, a software package designed for qualitative analyses (www.dedoose.com). Dedoose allows researchers to see patterns easily in their interview data. For example, while reading the transcripts in Dedoose, I discovered eight themes that showed up repeatedly in the interviews. In particular, I noticed that participants' responses to my interview questions tended to fit into the following categories:

1. *Abuse* (experiences with): Anything that deals with abuse
2. *Culture*: how Hmong people live life and how they are traditionally
3. *Empowerment*: What empowers women, how do they feel about themselves now after having experience the abuse, especially the shelter life
4. *Family's Acceptance of Abuse*: How did the family handle the abuse and what were the reaction, was there any resolution
5. *How Coupling Happened*: How did the couple meet, how did they end up being together as in marriage or in a relationship
6. *Roles of Hmong Women*: What are the expectation of a Hmong woman or what are the duties
7. *Shelter Preference/Experience*: Views on what a shelter should be, what the experiences were like, and what are the needs
8. *What Can Be Done/Resolution*: What do we need to do, are there other solutions, how can we overcome cultural barriers

Table 2 organizes the interviewees' responses by theme using a "code application" table. The colors of the table entries tell readers how often a particular theme appears for each of the participants, and I added row and columns totals to the table so readers can get an overall feel for how frequent certain ideas are in the data. The paragraphs below put the results in Table 2 into richer context.

Table 2: A Summary of the Themes Discovered within the Interviews

	Abuse (experiences with)	Culture	Empowerment	Family's Acceptance of Abuse	How Coupling Happened	Roles of Hmong Women	Shelter Preference/ Experience	What Can Be Done/ Resolution	Totals
Sevana		5	3			1	8	10	27
May Bao	16	19	4	3	1	6	1	4	54
Kaia	11	7	4	3		4	14	5	48
Gao Sue	6	21	5	2	1	12	3	6	56
Dianna	17	13	4	5		4	8	18	69
Mai Lia	7	17	7	6	1	10	6	4	58
Magdalena	5	8	5	3	4	7	15	2	49
Chee Nou	7	10	2	6		4	4	6	39
Totals	69	100	34	28	7	48	59	55	

Notes: Table entries represent the number of times a particular theme shows up in a given interview.

Abuse

Owens (2007) stated “Men have a higher status than women publicly, while women hold their power more privately. In some cases, marriages have broken up and the risk of domestic violence has increased in the face of pressure brought by changes in gender status.” There is less domestic violence in a marriage with equality because there are boundaries of respect. There will be culture clash when there is a marriage where the Hmong man is still traditional whereas the Hmong woman is not. In this situation, we hear the couple going through domestic violence and one seeking resources in the community while the other is locked up in jail for abuse. We hear cases where one is murdered by the other spouse or commits suicide after the murder had taken place. We hear more divorces occurring, thus, because of the increasing cases of divorces, the culture is being more receptive to divorced Hmong women.

The definitions of domestic violence in the Hmong culture are:

- Punching with a fist and using knife or weapon on another is violence.
- Individual is not related to immediate family who is using force or harm is violent but if individual is from within the immediate family, this action is a discipline for the family.
- Any type of family issue is not violent but a discipline use of fighting and shouting outside the household is violence.
- The use of physical force or physical violence against one of the additional one layer is acts of disrespect or acts of behavior over acceptable norms. Violence is viewed as a position of a child who does not respect parent. The child's behavior that is disrespectful is put in the definition of violence. A wife disrespecting her husband is considered a violent act. The status of the hierarchical individual is looked upon and if individual is disrespected, it is looked on as violence.
- We view domestic violence as not a problem to them, not an issue, burglarizing and vandalism are issues or violence in our community. Even if you have issues or violence with your kids, it's not an issue for them; it's your family's issue. This/violence has never been pointed out to them.
- Problem stays in the family, not is looked upon as violence. But anything outside the home or anybody outside the home attacking the family, then is an act of violence. Because they view the family as a whole entity not individual. Verbal attitudes used to harm the family are a form of violence.
- Invasion of privacy is a problem/issue to a family, which is the use of violence if viewing the mainstream definition of violence.
- The Hmong culture authoritarian role of a husband, wife, brother, sister, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, and so on to physically harm an individual for whatever reason may be to: disrespect, disobey, not listen, or lie. The acts of stepping up to this “authoritarian” individual in the family leads to the aggressive behavior and physical harm upon the person oppressed. The visual harm done to the oppressor leads to consequences by getting medical attention or the involvement of the legal system.
- Anything that you can see on an individual such as bruise, cuts, or blood is the use of violence. The situation has to be life and death situation within the Hmong community.
- Violence for the Hmong perspective is poverty. It's all about the “Man of the House.” One use of violence has consequences while the other does not have consequences. Violence within the household is not violence, it does not lead to consequence, it is the man's responsibility, does not involve the community. When blood is shed, the community is involved. Physical harm that is involved within the Hmong clan is the use of violence.
- Hmong consider threat. Something that is a threat to himself, herself, or others. The use of weapon, vandalism, gang involvement, or broken into person's property is the use of violence.
- Any pattern of physical abuse causing injury or harm to the victim. The victim's complaints to the extended family or clan leader are considered violence. The disputes within siblings involve some physical or minor fight is not considered violence. If disputes between spouses does not result in physical injuries within certain level it is not considered violence. Any physical pattern causing harm, injury, or damage has to involve somehow, most cases won't be reported to clan leaders. If victim does not feel comfortable in resolving the situation, this is not violence. Violence does involve isolation, neglect, and no food, clothing and shelter.
- Physical act that drives physical reactions as far as bruises, punching, hitting, slapping of children or spouse is violence.

The Hmong community respond to relationships once they are aware that there is abuse in the relationships take that as very quiet. Everybody does not want to talk about it and everybody in the community knows that is their own business. It is like a black skeleton in the closet where nobody wants to talk about it (Chee Nou). There is no group help. There is no way of reaching out for help unless the wife asks for help, but there are also the

consequences of, "Oh, she has such a big mouth, always complains about her husband and etc." (Dianna). So it is a very ugly situation most people do not talk about it but people already know what the situation is all about already. The bad thing about it is there is no help because when you see the elders, it is a one-time thing and there is no follow up until another issue occurs. Therefore, most Hmong women feel helpless, and they do not know who to turn to. If they turn to other people then other people will say, they are complaining too much and always running away from their husband (Gao Sue). That, itself, I think make Hmong women very afraid to go outside the circle to talk about their problems.

The older generation is more likely to get abused because their husbands are still pretty soaked into the culture where men feel they can beat their wife if they do not listen to them. The woman is still in custom to where the man can beat her if she does not listen to him. So in this, the women are less likely to report any abuse and less likely to seek help. Knowing that in mind the women are more careful so they do what is right to avoid the abuse. But even though the women do get abused, most likely they are not going to report it (Dianna and Sevana). They feel if they turn their husband in and they lose their husband are they better off without their husband. So they think about their lives and some of them do not want that because they feel that is not worth it. Sometimes the women will not leave her partner because they are afraid that their reputation will get ruined and what if confidentially word gets out into the community she will have a bad name. When abuse does happen, it happens between the abuser and the victim and where no one else gets involved. Here is what May Bou had to say about her abuse experience:

I was cooking with his sisters and I found out that one of his sister had told him that I used her phone to call my brother which I wasn't allowed to have contact with in La Crosse. He came up to me with a knife, threaten me, said he was going to kill me, and started calling me names. The next thing I remember was he punched me. I was glad my daughter wasn't there. His sister didn't do anything. His mom didn't do anything either.

Culture

The biggest problem at the shelter is that there is no advocacy for Hmong women when they come to the shelter. The expectations at the shelter homes are very traditional. If a Hmong women comes to seek for help at the shelter because she has been abused, it is not because she needs to know that she can always come back to the shelter should it happen again (Sevana). She is there because she is running from her life and needs help. She does not know what her options are. Reality with her relationship has set forth, and she does not know how to go about making the right choice for her and/or for her children. She is there because she knows that if there was a next time around, she might end up dead. There are no resources out there for her, and this is why she is turning to the shelter for help. When she is not being educated about her choices, she will eventually return back to her family for help. In most cases, her family will return her back to her husband. The kind of advocacy needed for Hmong women is to help the victim see the what if's, the pros and cons of returning to an abusive relationship, and help them come up with a plan to assist them through their decisions. There is no sugar-coating when it comes to Hmong culture and abuse. It takes more than making arrangements to help them get to their families. This is not about just getting a restraining order (Dianna). This is about teaching them to be empowered and having the will to fight for their freedom and survive. This is about giving them hope that they can have a better life by taking a stand to be free of abuse because they live in such an oppressed culture, they do not know any better. When you are teaching them values of living, you are also teaching them that they are going against culture norms. When you are helping them with restraining orders and other legal issues, basically, this will not only affect her, but both her and his family plus the Hmong community as well (Dianna, Gao Sue, and Mai Lia). A reason to why Hmong clients do not stay very long at the shelter is because they feel there is no help and lack of cultural understanding (Dianna and Gao Sue).

The Hmong culture is a patriarchy society governed by the man in their immediate family as head-of-the-household and a male leader who represents the individual clan. In Laos, the culture identifies Hmong women as submissive and obedient, being passive aggressive, hospitable, caring the house-hold to cook and clean, make meals, and in gardening (Chee Nou and Gao Sue). The women are expected to bear many sons to help the family farm but discouraged to having many daughters; bearing children was part of their gender role, there were no exception to women pursuit of their education or holding a job outside their home besides farming with their husband. If there are daughters, the couple will have their daughters help their mother around the house and expected to be married off as most of the time in an arranged marriage or to very few circumstances to whom she picks. Daughters have been lectured periodically, that they must be a daughter who knows her role and her place in society and they are trained to be hard working girls so one day a Hmong man should want to marry her (Gao Sue). Once they are married to their husband, they have the role engraved in their brains that they have to take care of everything. If there were less sons and more daughters or no sons and all daughters, the women is disrespected by her husband and his male

relatives because there is no heir to pass the name and no support to help around the farm. As stated by Mr. Lee, women were trained and grown to be submissive to their husband due to their upbringings and what their parents did as a married couple. Being passive aggressive was the norm in the culture for the women. Women obeyed orders even if those orders were immoral and/or unethical to her. There are no reasons for excuses from women when duty calls, once she is married, her duties will be there forever. They are taught that they do not have rights and must follow their roles of being a good daughter and one day, a good wife (May Bao). The outcome for disobeying is getting beat up.

In America, a woman's role is to keep up with the housekeeping, raise their children, cooking, gardening, basically 90% of the work, and on top of that, listen to their husbands and family members without speaking out (Chee Nou). There were fewer discussions and arguments between a married man and a woman. Hmong women are expected not to gossip and associate with others, they do not talk to their husbands in a bad way, they have to listen to their husbands, and so if any of these rules are ignored or overlooked by the women, the women have to understand that it will be a reason for them to get beaten up. These are things taught to her as she grows up knowing her place in life; and also, learn by watching how her parents interact with each other. The role that women will pick up is "my husband is my head, and I am the body". What is most important of all is the ability to accept getting abused by their husbands is a long practice in tradition for hundreds of years. Not all Hmong men beat up their wives, but most of them do (Chee Nou). Somehow, if they feel like if their wives do not listen to them, or has somehow displeased them, then they will beat her up to keep her in her place. Hmong men believe that this is a good practice of disciplining their wives so they would stop being disobedient and/or do what the husband want to be pleasing. Hmong women learn that this practice is acceptable and that their husband can hit them. If there is a slight disagreement, the woman will be verbally and physically abused until the man is satisfied in those abuses. This is considered to be a cultural norm and is accepted in the culture. When this happens, women can only accept their punishment and keep their silence.

There are couples who argued, the man would beat the woman just to win the argument because she did not see his way. Hmong women do know that if they were out of line, they would get hit or beat and that was disciplining for them to be a good wife. Men look at it that it is always the women's fault for getting beat, and most women feel the same way. When a woman wants to speak up their opinions, they most likely would not because they know their husbands will disagree and they will fight. So, instead of the chance to get hit, women will just obey their husbands to avoid violence. They feel victimized, and yet, they victimized themselves by feeling sorry for what they did, even when they know it was not their fault (Dianna). When she marries, the culture said her first husband is her eternity husband after life. If she remarries and had three ex-husbands, her first husband will be with her after death. The Hmong people discourage divorce as that is considered "taboo." Divorced women will be exorcized or disowned by her ex-husband's family and at times even her own family (Mai Lia).

Hmong men were extraverts and highly active in the farming area. Men did physical labor or heavy duty work; they were the animal hunters and brought the bread home for survival. The Hmong men would attend the fields, cut the trees, and raised their animals (Chee Nou). They do not do the daily jobs like the women. It rarely happens that men will help out their wives. They may help with the kids now and then, cook, do laundry, but the percentage of that is very small. Most of the Hmong families are traditional. In order to have a good life, Hmong families are taught from a young age that living in America, they have to be hard workers and laziness is not an exception. If a person is lazy, especially a Hmong woman, no one would want to marry her. Men are viewed as the boss, the decision maker of the house. The men are the financial holder, too. When the Hmong men are married to his wife, he owns her in the way that she belongs to him (Gao Sue). This plays in the power and control wheel. Culture-wise, men are more powerful, leading, and patriarchal. There is no equal in the relationship, the men makes all the decisions.

In the 21st century, new millennium, Hmong women in the United States have become more active in society and in their own home. There are more and more women who have encouraged equality within their marriage and family house-hold as well as moving towards equality within the clan. Hmong women are more in position of power in family, clan, and even the Hmong community/society (Owens, 2007).

Empowerment

To summarize the interviewees' comments regarding empowerment, all have a sense of positive vibes after their experiences with domestic violence. These positivism attitudes are what shape who they are today.

- Counseling and support groups provided a safe haven and security
- Learning new things, seeking the ability to persevere and have motivation
- Speaking out and having voice because they were able to acknowledge the law is on their side
- Confidence to live life to their fullest

- Self-conscious and positive self-esteem
- Encourage self and others
- Stronger and independent
- Moving on, letting go, and accepting past as is but life is important to walk away from the past/history of abuse
- Feeling thankful for what they have
- Better themselves and see further in life
- Improved communication in all relationships
- Self sufficient
- Personal experience help further family situations
- More knowledge of community resources
- Staying focus, be positive, have hope, have faith, and believe

From the interviews discussed regarding empowerment, there are concerns with the elimination of oppression, the resurgence of hope, and the making of a better community in which to live. The effects of the changes on individuals while simultaneously seeking areas for opportunities for change within the Hmong culture regarding domestic violence is what has related in the interviews discussed above. Likewise, their experiences showed the achievement of a democratic society in which all individuals have a voice—a just world free from oppression. The interviewees want to commit to imperatives of empowering people and transforming the larger social order in the interests of justice and equality. In addition, empowerment through cultural terrain characterized by varying degrees of accommodation, contestation, and resistance and collaboration of all efforts to compromise and be a team in their communities. Through each interviewee, there is great attempt to fashion an understanding of hope that points to new forms of social and material relations attentive to the principles of independence and justice by examining on past experiences and current domestic issues to redefining their life and finding focus to moving on.

The overall statements suggest that these Hmong women of empowerment can serve the Hmong and Asian communities as effective ambassador to the “larger” community in domestic violence issues and women of color in a profession. They have earned the respect and further understanding of the enormous sacrifices they made to be where they are today. They are proud of their heritage and have grown so much more from their tragic experiences. They are counted on to conserve the resources of an institution and heritage they served and to bring to their work and community a practical point of view to compete with the rest of the world. They bring social issues, concerns, and concepts to their workforce in the diversity atmosphere to challenge others like them and team build to improve the environment. They have persevered.

Family’s Acceptance of Abuse

May Bao stated her Mother-in-law and Sister-in-law sat there and stared at her while her husband abused her in front of them. They did not do nor say anything. Kaia commented her Mother-in-law did not agree with her wanting to divorce their son even after the abuses. Repeatedly she wanted to divorce her husband and yet, she did not. Now that she is seeking a higher education degree, her in-laws are giving her more respect. That does not mean abuse is still right. Gao Sue said divorce is common for her generation, she put up with the abuse because their issues will never go away, and she lives with the abuse knowing that that is the norm. The Hmong community hears of the fights the couple is frowned upon than she will be given a bad name which was not what she wanted. Diana commented that her partner was controlling thus she suppressed to that and put up with the abuse. Her parents were supportive of her not getting abused but still blames her for getting abused.

Mai Lia stated her Mother-in-law controlled and spend her disability benefits monthly to pay for the Mother-in-law’s bills and expenses. She had no money to use and never saw her monthly checks. Yet, her husband continued to abuse her in front of his family. Her Mother-in-law actually encouraged that he abused her, which he continuously did until she left him injured and afraid. Because they think it was a norm for a man to beat his wife, they supported the abuse and he thought that she did not listen to him that she was disobeying him so he beat her every time. She left him and found no resources out there for her at age 18 and a single mother of 1 month old newborn. Her parents disowned her because she divorced and left him. Additionally, because she has a disability, the Hmong community frowns upon that even more. She had nowhere to go and no support. She did not even know how to complete Food Share; she was naive and ignorant at that age. There was no Hmong advocacy in the county she lived. Hmong agency did not help due to her disability and her being divorced single parent.

Magdalena’s ex-mother-in-law tried to intervene the abuses when she and her ex lived with the parent-in-laws by supporting her that she could go visit her parents. Every time the abuse occurred, her ex would lock her in their bedroom and threaten anybody to interfere or he will beat them up too, she was abused and controlled by him even after moving to live on their own. Her parents said to her right when she got married that whatever he does and said to her, she will have to live with that because they would not accept her back as their daughter. If he beats her up,

she will have to stay with him forever. She stuck those words in her mind and never went back, but, she used the legal system to help her leave him.

Majority of the time, parent-in-laws supports their son abusing their daughter-in-law because the traditional Hmong culture believes it is okay to abuse the woman because she disobeyed, argued, did not listen to orders, or said “no.” It is even more supportive from parent-in-laws to allow their son to abuse if the daughter-in-law was never liked nor welcomed into the family from the beginning. Depending on how the woman gets married, her parents might even support the abuse because it is the traditional Hmong culture to allow the man to do what he wishes to do on her. In the United States, now, the law has the protection over the woman, but not all the time will the law protect her if abuse results in death of her or both her and him (he usually commits suicide following murdering her). There could be incidents where the law is not called upon because the woman would not want to lose face of her parents and reputation therefore she stays in the marriage and lives with the abuse. In the new millennium, there are more divorces happening, most has been due to the continuous abuse by the husband, therefore, the woman leaves her husband and takes her children with her then goes through the divorce proceedings. There will be times where blame occurs from both ends of the parties, but, the important thing is that she leaves and does not put herself and her children at risk furthermore. The kids are put in the middle, those who are minor ends up being taken with their mother, and others who are over 18 makes a decision to stay with their father or go with their mother. It has been that the Hmong boys over 12 stay with their father, the girls normally goes with their mother. This happens because one day, the Hmong boy will be old enough to follow his father’s clan and turn back to his father for cultural support. The Hmong girls goes off to be married and does not follow her father’s clan nor her mother’s clan as she is independently married off to another clan or ethnicity.

There are more Hmong divorces now than ever before because women are saying, “NO TO ABUSE.” Women are finding that living in an abusive marriage is not the norm now, they have resources out there, support for them as a divorcee and a single parent of 6 children. The elder Hmong generations still frown upon, but not so much now because they find themselves also in the predicament either because they are victims of 40 yrs. of abuse or that their daughter(s) are victims of abuse. Either way, presently, the support is there more than ever before, which is a positive intervention for victims of violence. Whereas, there are traditional elder Hmong generation who still believe abuse is okay, fewer feel that way and they find themselves in contestation with other elder Hmong and the younger Hmong generation. The culture clashes for each aged generation; that is why there are people who convert their shamanism religion to Christianity or Catholic because of differences in opinions, norms, values, or beliefs of the Hmong culture.

How Coupling Happened

Hmong marriage occurs through one of the five initiated practices: formal proposal, arranged marriage, consensus marriage, kidnapped marriage, and forced marriage. In Laos, the formal proposal is frequently done with the bride coming from a wealthy family and there is high level of respect between both families to initiate this marriage between two couples. The man and his representatives will formally arrive at the bride-to-be’s home bringing money and gifts to the bride-to-be’s father to ask their daughter’s hand in marriage. The father of the soon-to-be bride would accept or not. In United States, the formal proposal is seldom being done because Hmong people feel they are as financially stable as one another, wealth does not come into play, however, respect still stands. There will be some cases where the groom-to-be would want respect given to his parents and clan as well as his bride-to-be, her parents and clan, therefore, he will initiate a formal proposal. Now a days, the traditional formal proposal has become more a western formal proposal where the groom-to-be will purchase an engagement ring and ask his bride-to-be’s father to ask their daughter’s hand in marriage before asking his bride-to-be. Once the approval is granted, the groom-to-be will ask his soon-to-be bride to be his bride.

The second initiated wedding is called the arranged marriage. In Laos, arrange marriages are common mostly in wealthy families but not so much in the United States. Both families have a daughter or son, and decides for their young child their future spouse and in-laws. The children at a young age, the parents would talk amongst one another and negotiate a dowry, which is the bride price to compensate the bride’s family for the loss of a daughter to help around the house and to assure the bride-to-be’s family that the groom-to-be will treat her with respect. The dowry could range from \$1,500-\$3,000 (then) to \$5,000 (now) depending on the worth of the bride. If she comes from a wealthy family, her and her family’s reputation, she is a hard working woman, and determined based on her education level. Sometimes the dowry is lowered based on the opposite of the previously mentioned criteria. The higher the dowry the higher value of the bride the more her family expects her new husband to treat her well. In the United States, the dowry range between \$5,000-\$10,000 (the maximum being that she comes from all the above previously mentioned with the highest educational degree in law, Doctorate, Master’s or anything above a

Bachelor's degree). Because the dowry is considered to have a bad connotation, now a days, Hmong parents would not accept the dowry, instead, gives that dowry back to the newlywed couple to start their new life together.

The third initiated wedding is called the consensus to be wed between the couple. The couple talks amongst themselves and the groom-to-be asks his bride-to-be to marry him, this is an engagement confirmation, neither parent is parties of this consensus. With both agreeing, the groom-to-be will take his bride-to-be or bride-to-be and run-away with him to his parents to be wedded. This proves to the groom-to-be that she loves him very much to leave her family. After this is done, the groom's parents will send an envoy to the bride's parents to announce their daughter is now under the groom's clan's protection and do not look for her, meaning the formal announcement has been made that the groom has married their daughter. The wedding does require both sides of the families to engage and plan the ceremony. In United States this is a common way couples initiate their wedding to get married. In Laos, this hardly occurs because the couple lives apart from one another. Villages are far away and Hmong girls don't all live in one area. The selections are very few thus the journey to seek love is challenging for both. When in Laos, this initiated wedding has caused young couples to commit suicide, together, regardless of their strong love for one another their parents permits them to marry. The permitting for the couple to marry mostly is based on various reasons: the bride or groom's family financial stability and reputation, reputation of the bride or groom, and/or reputation of the clan.

The fourth initiated wedding occurs through kidnapping the bride. This occurs when the woman refuses to marry the man due to whatever reasons, but the man would use force through kidnapping her so he can marry her. He would persuade and manipulate her just to kidnap her from her family. He may require assistance from his friends to help him grab and carry her. This is very common in Laos. If this happens in the United States, he would tell her to go out to eat with him but takes her to his house to be wedded. This seldom occurs now in the United States due to legal issues. There will be Hmong parents who are very traditional and do not use the law, but due to their respect for the other clan, they will allow their daughter to be kidnapped to save face or not disgrace their family and clan, therefore their daughter will abide by whatever their parents say because they are tied to their traditions. If the authorities are called, the woman loses respect of her parents and her clan. Additionally, at times, the groom may even rape the bride so she would feel too shameful to go back to her parents because she is now "damaged" (virginity is valued in traditional Hmong culture; sex occurs after marriage). The last initiated wedding is forced marriage. This happens as a result of sexual assault, sexual encounters, and/or pregnancies because the woman have to save face but so does the man for sexual assaulting her, sexual encounters with her, and/or getting her pregnant.

The responses of these Hmong women falls within several of the five coupling ceremonies. May Bao was pregnant by her partner and forced to be married. Gao Sue was in love with her partner and their consensus led them to marriage. Mai Lia was forced to be married after taking time away from school to be with her partner and that was considered "losing face." Lastly, Magdalena was young and in love and had a consensus to wed but also forced to be married because she left school to be with her partner.

My parents didn't want me to get married at such a young age and I made a decision for myself. My parents didn't want to lose face so it was kind of hard both ways. They didn't like my husband and weren't happy that I wanted to get married young and that I got married young. On top of that, they didn't like my family based on history through our ancestors, what their family was about, the blood stream, and what they could cure as far medical disease and stuff. They didn't know much about my husband's side of the family to say it was ok. So it was very challenging, especially for my mom to except my husband. Even to this day, after I've gone through divorce, she still says "I told you he's a monkey, and he wasn't good looking for you to begin with. He didn't deserve you. After all the things you done for him and his family, he didn't deserve you." My mom thought I deserve something or someone better. I didn't know any better; I was in love.

In all, the scenarios put these women in a role to not lose face and save their parents reputation. The Hmong culture values family what one does has consequences for one's reputation.

Roles of Hmong Women

The roles of Hmong women have been a redefined for over 20 years by Hmong women since migrating from Laos to the United States. Some traditional roles of Hmong women remain the same while more Hmong American women have redefined what those roles are. For Hmong American women, these roles have been redefined due to equality between genders and the traditional Hmong women still believe the roles are to save face, respect for the elders and family reputation (Gao Sue). There is a culture shock. The challenges were to define the gender roles to help both man and woman improve their marriage and life together or worsen. That is a question that a couple faces

as they struggle to be together. Because Hmong people live in two separate cultures, the norms, beliefs, and values may change depending on which culture each couple wants to follow. One couple may use both cultures to try to manipulate which culture is convenient for the man which may or may not make their marriage work if the woman differs because most of the time, the man has the final say in their marriage. Another couple may use the traditional Hmong culture which may cause a conflict as we already face the last 30 years in the United States and from the interview cases indicated previously. While another couple may just be 100% Americanized which have in many cases work better for that couple long term because the law and regulation comes into play whatever they do and say.

In Laos, education for Hmong women was not permitted. The Hmong people lived in the high lands; only very few were wealthy enough to live in the cities where formal education was possible. Schools did not exist in the Hmong villages after World War II. After the 1950s, the Hmong in Xieng Khouang province began to allow Hmong political leaders to lead the Hmong people. It was not until the institution of Hmong political leaders that the Hmong families began to send their children to schools in the cities. The first Hmong females received some kind of formal education after seeing that the Hmong individuals could lead their people. Some villages in Xieng Khouang province began to offer primary grades. These villages were the first to allow and give Hmong girls the opportunity to attend school (Vang, 1994).

The women were strictly pushed into the domestic work within the house chores; cleaning, cooking, feeding animals, and working in the garden. Schooling was expensive for the Hmong families who lived up on the mountain villages. Those who were able to afford schooling would choose the most talented child to attend school, mostly boys. Until the late 1960s, wealthy Hmong families who lived in the cities or who worked for the Lao government would allow their daughters, only one or two, to attend the city school and/or hire a teacher to teach their daughters (Vang, 1994). The reasons these rich families would allow daughters to attend school was because of the wealth, social security, and character of the Laotian daughters whom Laotian families sent to school; these Hmong families observed the Laotian families wanting their daughters to have a structured and stable life. The Hmong girls were not allowed an education because they of the push for domestic stability within the household; such as special events like spirit calling and weddings--the girls and women are the ones to carry out the preparations for such events within their families--not the boys and men. The rich families who had boys would allow their sons to attend school, whereas, families in poverty and in the mountain land would not send their sons to school for it is essential that these boys help out with raising the animals and harvesting the garden (Vang, 1994).

Attending schools in the cities were mostly Laotian girls and very few Hmong girls. These two ethnic groups competed with one another to better their life through knowledge. Consequently, it was strongly discouraged for the Hmong families to allow their daughters to attend school and get an education. About seventy-five percentage of the Hmong families would not allow their daughters to attend school because the Hmong elders believed that the girls having an education would only benefit herself, and when she marries, she would be helping her side of the in-law family and her husband; enriching her husband's and in-laws' lives, not her blood family and clan. In the past, the elders never allowed education to occur for women and girls; it was prohibited because of what the Hmong elders believed was the appropriate role for women and girls (Vang, 1994).

If a family was open-minded and had goals for women in the Hmong community because of seeing the role models and women leaders in Laos, that family would allow their daughter(s) to attend school. This is relevant to emphasize as the years passed when there were some women doctors and teachers in the cities and small towns because of these city Hmong families seeing the potential for women in education. As for the small town Hmong families, education was never stressed; only the domestic duties and harvesting the garden was of import, with no motivation and confidence for their daughters to pursue an education and the freedom to explore their independence. For small town families, independence was never talked about and never mentioned because independence for Hmong women and girls never existed. The opportunities for these Hmong women and girls were never implanted in their life and never were an option for them.

Hmong American women could be best described as first generation students with little preparation, who grew up never intending to go to college. Education of Hmong girls was not valued. School is the state of tension for Hmong women who are torn between being Hmong and being American. Traditionally, the Hmong women did not have schools, nor did they have family planning alternatives. In the United States, they took the chance of going on to higher education without knowing if they would succeed or not. The Hmong women who are in higher education now are the ones with high self-image, self-concept, determination and self-actualization.

In coming to the United States, the young and old, men and women, were permitted to attend school to learn how to read and write just to get by. Overall, the Hmong refugees had little if any formal education before arriving in the United States; if there were individuals who were educated, the majority of them were men. United States is considered to be the land of opportunity and freedom. It does not allow discrimination on the basis of gender, race or

disability. This society is a land of economic sufficiency, work opportunities, higher education, family strengthening, and freedom. Coming to this country is the success of one's life, regardless whether there were struggles and barriers for Hmong women, such as language barriers, economic security, and self-sufficiency. This country encourages competition for all people of any gender, race, and disability, for Hmong women and men to Caucasian women and men in the work force and in higher education. The education prospective is never ending; it is always there for everyone, including Hmong women. The fact remains; there are choices (Vang, 1994).

Higher education for Hmong women has been a folk story to the Hmong people. Long ago, Hmong people have a rule that if a family has a daughter that attends school to get her education, she would be too intelligent and controlling for a Hmong man to marry. Whether if she is pretty, kind, and intelligent, she will not be married off to a Hmong man because Hmong people believe she has lost her attraction to a potential beau. There are still some Hmong families that follow this belief, while the majority does not care about this. What matters is that a Hmong women's value is based upon the work she performs and the economic security she brings to herself and her family-- husband and her children as well. If the woman is educated and brings to her family wealth and security, her life and her family's life will be in good condition. In this society, it is all about competition with other families and people. If there is a woman pursuing her education, she must do so and stick with her goals and dreams to be more competitive. In the Hmong community, some old words of belief in the past have been set aside or thrown away, not to be used against Hmong women, while other old words are very much still in evidence today regarding Hmong women's pursuit of their education. An example of an "old wives' tale" is that if she has education, then she is just too intelligent for their sons and they therefore should not marry her. Those that do understand woman's roles in society based on her educational pursuits would not think like this and would therefore allow their son to marry her, for she will bring to her in-laws security and wealth. Hmong people who are not open-minded are jealous of the Hmong woman's education, economic security, and social mobility (Vang, 1994). The things that Hmong women do enrich their life and their blood family's lives, regardless of what they may hear from the Hmong community. For Hmong women, gender equality is still a problem in the community, and it is still evident in the educational system. In mentioning about Hmong culture affecting Hmong women's education, there are a couple of barriers imposed by cultural expectations because of the Hmong male dominance within the family structure that effectively shuts women out of a fair say or equal treatment within Hmong community. Hmong women have no right to challenge the male authority structure. The only power women have is over their children, their daughter-in-laws who live with them, and their husband's minor wives. Since the Hmong value the family as the most important aspect, this belief has been deeply embedded into the minds of Hmong women.

Looking at the responses from the interviews, in summary, the roles of Hmong women has mainly been to obey, be a good wife, cook, clean, bear children, raise children, show respect, care and love the in-laws, be submissive, be patient to everybody, and, at times, encourage higher education. Whereas, if the talk comes from Hmong American women today, their role in society are: equality for both gender for all areas of life, higher education is highly encouraged for women due to self-sufficiency and independence, both love, care and respect two sides of the family, women are valued as much as men in their family, and both have social life and network to help boost their career so they come back to help their families. Hmong American women are working harder to try to sustain traditional family values, expectations, motivations, norms, and beliefs through their own experiences and what they feel is going to benefit them and their family. These women are providing accommodation through cultural transition; individualism and self-determination developmental process; and the overall challenge of balancing academic life and traditional life. They are mentoring Hmong American youth, both boys and girls to understand the ideology of how to live a better life with these high cultural expectations from both traditional and non-traditional worlds. These empowered Hmong American women are fostering greater understanding within Hmong female students in high school and higher education on the developmental process of traditional cultural identity in terms of self-identity, self-esteem, and acculturation. Hmong language, cultural, and history courses are offered to Hmong students in higher education and charter schools from grade K-12 to sustain their own heritage. That does not necessarily mean to learn about abusing people: women, children, and elders, but to make them aware of what being Hmong means to them in a historical, culturally sensitive, and social way.

Hmong women are beginning to take control of their lives. The knowledge of education, working with cultural awareness, and accepting changes will allow them to find their way in the world. They 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 their mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. Overall, they "open" the door for other Hmong girls and women. Hmong women express a desire to contribute to the welfare of the Hmong culture and as a contributing factor toward pursuing higher education. The women unanimously expressed their main objective in pursuing higher education as obtaining financial security for themselves, their family and to somehow influence the transition of their culture into the American way of life.

As long as survival is the highest priority of the Hmong culture, the implications for school are severe. If the Hmong are to succeed in school, professors, faculties, administrators, and counselors need to know who the Hmong are, and have some real understanding of the Hmong culture. Without this awareness they will not be able to provide equal access to the school curricula. Education is the critical variable in the changing role of Hmong women.

Shelter Preferences/Experiences

In the western society, Hmong people know that domestic violence is not an issue to be taken lightly. There is a price to pay in America because they have laws and a judicial system everyone follows. However, most Hmong men still follow tradition and hit their wives anyway (Magdalena). One thing to understand from this is that the Hmong people do not have a judicial system. This goes back in history where they do not have laws. The only thing closest to a judicial system is the clans, which are comprised of counselors, advisors, mediators, negotiators, and the judges. When something happens, it is up to the wife to bring the husband to the clans to talk, and if that does not work, then they both would have to go to her clan. Keep in mind that the clans are all males and not women. As Chee Nou notes, the most important thing of all, traditionally, the main goal is that the clans do not want to see families fall apart, so therefore, they will do everything possible to keep both the husband and wife stay together unless if it is a life or death situation; therefore, when it is about abuse, clans will tell the husband to stop; but most likely, it will happen again when the husband and wife go home. The next step is to go back to the clans and the whole process starts up again as mentioned above. Nothing ever gets resolved, thus in forcing women to be more and more submissive and obedient to please their husbands. Sometimes, there will be cases where the women refuse to be the submissive partner and will argue with their husbands. The arguments will turn physical, and these altercations can sometimes become deadly. The husband and wife will end up killing each other and sometimes children, too; or the wife will feel defeated and kill herself, and sometimes her children. In many cases, the husband will use a weapon to harm or murder his wife, and not wanting to get prison time, will eventually commit suicide.

When tragedy strikes or abuse happens, the Hmong community responds very quietly to the issue. In other words, no one wants to talk about it, even when they know the couple fights. They treat it like a skeleton in the closet (Chee Nou). There is no group that will help or no reaching out to help unless the wife asks for help; but then there's a consequences of people saying that the wife has a big mouth who is complaining of how her husband is treating her. Instead of giving empathy or being compassionate about the situation, Hmong people will actually degrade the wife, and treat her immorally by giving her a bad reputation. Basically, there is no help unless the wife decides to ask for it, which typically does not happen because wives know help will not be there. The feeling of helplessness emerges in Hmong women and makes them afraid to go outside of the circle to talk about their relationship and their sufferings. Hmong women generally are afraid of the embarrassment and shame they will cause their families and the Hmong community if they seek help outside of the culture. It is crucial that they must keep their relationships and what happens in these relationships closed off to families, friends, and the public; otherwise, it will damage their reputation in the close-knit Hmong community, for these women would be shunned from family events and community events as well.

Before a Hmong woman can even seek outside assistance, the need of advocacy must be addressed. People have to understand that when a Hmong woman is seeking for help, it is not the like a typical situation advocates will be dealing with. All the information that is stored in a Hmong woman's head will need to be undone (Chee Nou). For one thing, Hmong women who turn to shelters for help do so with much guilt, feeling as if they failed at her marriage, are not good women and spouses, etc. What's more, these women must also live with the shame of knowing that the Hmong community is gossiping about them while they seeking help. This is the one thing in the Hmong culture that is valued highly, not wanting to be talked about, especially if the topic of gossip is a strained marriage. With the reputation of being a person who leaves her husband to be safe, Hmong women fear that no other Hmong man will want to marry them (Vang, 1994). Mai Lia says it succinctly when expressing her reluctance to stay at New Horizons:

I would reconsider because they don't understand me, or how I go through in the Hmong culture. I would not go to a mainstream domestic shelter because I don't feel comfortable. I don't think they would understand me to the extent that they should. I don't even know if they have Hmong food, accommodate that.

Hmong women in America are living in two worlds. The younger generations are more lenient towards having more rights. They are not afraid to call the police force when necessary. If they feel threatened or unsafe, they will call the police, but then again, there are those who still refuse to get help. Those who still refuses to get outside help is because they do not know where to go and get the help they need, language barriers may be problematic, cultural barrier, and not wanting to cause shame to them and their families are all reasons they will not ask for help. Also,

Hmong women do not want the person who is providing for the family to go to jail because they heavily rely on his financial income. Without him, the family would not know how to survive. These and other factors that impact the decision stay in a toxic relationship of get a divorce.

There is a need for a culturally-specific women's shelter in La Crosse. The reason for this is that Hmong women are social beings and have children, they need a place where they would feel comfortable in their own skin. They want their children to be able to feel comfortable being with their own race, to interact, play without other mothers yelling at their children. They do not want to go to a traditional shelter where there are strict rules set in place, rules that Hmong people do not enforce in their own homes (Magdalena and Kaia). While living a life of rules that are new to them, and being taught what you can and cannot do, how will these women gain any self-empowerment? Hmong women have to leave the comfort of their homes to be in another. It is more different and difficult for them to stay at a white shelter than a culturally specific women's shelter. The lack of connection is present at the traditional shelters because the feelings of being inferior are present (Magdalena). When this happens, Hmong women will isolate themselves even more.

Moreover, a white shelter would expect for Hmong women to have goals. If one of the goal is to find jobs, who is going to help them go out there and apply for those jobs? Who will help them fill out the paperwork? The local shelter will direct women to the appropriate resources and/or places, but, when it comes to actually doing the work, a lot of the traditional Hmong women would need assistance. They might even need a translator. When getting counseling, how are the counselors from a white shelter going to understand the Hmong culture and be able to help them? The American culture believes that if one is unhappy in the relationship, one can leave. Hmong women need advocates who will tell them that they have choices. They need to hear that it's not their fault. They need to know their rights and understand it. Advocates from a white shelter may tell all these things to Hmong women, but it is not the same thing when it comes from them than from a Hmong person. Hmong women need to feel that they have made a good decision in coming to a shelter, as if they made a good decision to come home, meaning a Hmong shelter.

Cultural sensitivity is an issue that must be addressed at shelters. Educating not only the diversity staff but all staff is essential. Recently, the local shelter in the La Crosse area has made changes as far as staffs learning about cultures and traditions. The diversity staff has taken on a responsibility of encouraging others who work at the shelter to research about and understand ones' culture and accept some of the behaviors of other race (Sevena). But what happens when a previous victim is matched up with their previous advocate who has not received cultural sensitivity training? Wouldn't it be best to have all multicultural victims go to the multicultural advocates? On encouraging other staff members to research, how does a person figure out if that staff member is even taking their time to do the extra work of research so that they can better serve the diverse population? Shouldn't all staff be culturally educated to be able to be culturally sensitive towards others? These are the types of questions that need to be addressed, for these are the questions that swirl in the minds of Hmong women.

Hmong victims thought it was in the best interest of abused Hmong victims to seek shelter for help, in that way, they can find self-empowerment and identity. Shelter is a way they can learn more about their life choices and have a better education in learning about domestic violence. A shelter is a way to save a life, a place for Hmong women to get away from the problems happening at home. Shelters give them time to think about what they want in life and seek counseling. Hmong women need to find solutions and a way to get out of the situation. This is really important and Hmong women often do not have that. Shelters give Hmong women empowerment to have a voice and speak out when need to. Shelters are able to give women to become self-sufficient, identify their needs and wants, and give them the confidence in executing those decisions they never been able to make before.

The victims say that it would have made a difference if it was a Hmong shelter than a traditional mainstream shelter. They feel that if they are seeking help at the traditional shelters, how are they going to get the help they need when those people who work there does not understand the depths of Hmong culture? If Hmong people were working for the traditional shelters, they would work under the White people, under their rules and this brings a discomfort to the Hmong women (Magdalena). Then we have women who are hired under the traditional shelters do not have the understanding of acting as an appropriate advocate for Hmong women who seek help. They questioned Hmong women in the way that makes them feel even guiltier. They asks questions like, "Are you sure you made the right decision; do you think that if you did that, he wouldn't have hit you?" These questions re-enforce guilt (Kaia).

Some personal experiences with shelters for some of the victims have been a negative. They felt that the local shelters they have gone to were not culturally competent to serve Hmong women. One of the reasons that were brought up for discussion was that the advocates did not take the time to get to know the women. They felt that their needs were not met. One of the victim said that all she needed was a place for safety and nothing else however she was clueless as to who she needed to connect if she needed something. The shelter did not make them feel as if it was home. Feeling like another place is like home is very important in the Hmong culture. Hmong people are very

good with extending their hospitality and to experience a White shelter and how staff at these shelters extend hospitality was uncomfortable for Hmong women. Keep in mind that these are Hmong women who had to abandon some of the ways of how they live. They found it difficult and hard to adapt to the western culture's way of living.

Since the Multi-Cultural Resource Advocate has started in November of 1999 at New Horizons, there has been a tremendous change. Hmong women are coming more frequently for services because of the culturally appropriate advocacy it provides, the support group, and mentoring program. Its service collaborates with the La Crosse Area Hmoob Cultural Center, and Family Resources in La Crosse. Hmong victims of domestic violence and Hmong women feel more comfortable seeking services and support from New Horizons. New Horizons helped Hmong clients to understand the western culture, legal system, medical procedures, and social policies and provide the best services to the Hmong families and the La Crosse community. The services provided to domestic violence individuals include: attending legal/court hearings, helping clients with divorce papers, file for no-contact and domestic violence injunction orders through formal court procedures or written requests, intake forms, follow-up on clients, translating for attorneys and clients, providing phone and/or in person individual counseling, information and referrals such as crime compensation, Social Security, divorce, and flooding procedures, coordinating services between agencies, reopened cases, fill client's papers because they don't know how to read English, unemployment inquiries, and provide information to clients and other agencies. Most of the time, clients are in need of food, clothes, housing, house wares, and furniture assistance on an on-going basis. New Horizons is able to help with some of these needs through donations.

Each day, there is something new going on that requires the Advocates' services and support. The agency has a vital resource coordinator for an ever-widening people in the La Crosse community. It is imperative that earning trust is the foundation of leadership. Even people with a highly developed sense of integrity must take certain steps to ensure that their competence and character are obvious to those whom they manage. New Horizon is very well structured, in which, they serve as a bridge between other organizations, universities, and community members/leaders to promote new ways of thinking, working, assisting, and coordinating work with diverse people in the community. It is concentrated on a social change resource center that aims to strengthen diverse people centered public advocacy, so as to empower diverse people who are struggling for the creation of a just and humane society. Its work overall acts strategically to secure equality and justice for all women across the country of La Crosse as well as anyone who comes in at New Horizons for any assistance.

The advocacy center envisages a creative and collective learning process that had combined concepts, perspectives, experiences and skills to their staff. It serves the social settlement and public education and awareness to the growing community of the Hmong population in La Crosse as well as diverse group of people. It helps provide self-advocacy instruction and technical assistance that can start me on the road to becoming a stronger self-advocacy. The agency is an instrument of democracy and adopts non-violent and constitutional means in a democratic culture. It promotes public good and attempts to bring about social justice in which my focus in life is just that. It focuses attention on furthering the well-being of the victims of domestic violence and lower class families of the community. This leads to its goal as directing public policy towards the betterment of those who have a weaker voice and lesser power in existing political systems.

Hmong minority women typically do not turn to the white majority for help unless if there was a Hmong shelter. Abused women and their familial social connections, although this may seem largely contradictory to outside readers, largely tolerate this sexual and domestic abuse. This blind acceptance to domestic abuse stems from the tradition that women, especially the submissive women of the Hmong culture, are viewed as property of men since she has agreed to the relationship arrangement. He, therefore, can in essence do whatever pleases him, she must obey and do as told; otherwise suffer drastic consequences for her actions. Other Asian women from different cultures, not just the Hmong culture, live and operate under these contractual agreements as well. In their world, male dominance, or patriarchy, remains at the top of the social ladder.

With that said, women feel as if they have no way out of an abusive relationship. Women of older generations specifically struggle with language, and are unable to seek help effectively due to the communication barrier regarding the circumstances of their home environment. Furthermore, vital information regarding where to seek helps, whom to talk to, or how to obtain economic and living resources is withheld. Other barriers women face is the lack of support from families, mental health issues, unemployment, lack of education, and homelessness. Being able to go to a culturally specific shelter will provide these individuals with the opportunity to become self-sufficient, and be confident in making positive and effective decisions regarding empowering their children and their lives as opposed to the traditional patriarchal dependence. The domestic violence shelter would provide Hmong women a safe environment to live in, educate women of their choices in both their current and future decisions. However, if a shelter does not have the resources or up to date training on cultural competence, it can have dire consequences.

What Can Be Done/Resolution

There is much demand for social service domestic violence case manager for the minority population in La Crosse and for metropolitan areas nationwide. I have a vision that people from domestic violence background are able to a life of freedom, care, and belonging. That people with domestic violence experience will become educational and vocational success, and successful transition to life after a horrible experience with their spouse, partner, relative, or friend. There should be ongoing programs that provide state-of-the-art knowledge about issues and legal policies or in general, policies related to domestic abuse, and to develop participant competencies to become more effective in influencing legal policies to domestic abusers to restrict their future abuse to the victims of domestic abuse. There should be a more proactive organization that works towards a participatory, people-centered policy environment and a transparent and accountable governance; so as to advance equitable social change and distributive justice to the victims of domestic violence. If the community want to improve the life conditions of the people and to make basic human rights meaningful for them, it is necessary to train brands of social activists and citizens in the art of public advocacy for the advancement of the interest of the vulnerable victims of domestic abuse. As a shelter and center like New Horizons, there should be more services that focus on emphasizing a multi-generational and cross-sectorial approach to bridging the gap between men and women, men and men, and women and women experiencing domestic violence. Victims of violence should have a creating vision where the innocence are guided through a process of articulating a long-term vision for themselves or their family member and deciding what steps are necessary to realize that vision. There are choices now or choices for life that emphasize the important of teaching children, men and women to make choices as a precursor to self-determination. These are what our community and any community needs to further go on domestic violence prevention.

Some ways that Hmong domestic violence can overcome abuse is by educating young Hmong boys and men. Just like how daughters are taught from a young age of the role they have to portray, Hmong boys have to be taught that domestic violence is unacceptable because they are inflicting pain on others. It does not resolve any issue. Things can be corrected when two people can have a communication. Young boys need to be taught that if they end up beating on their wives or girlfriends, chances are, they will end up in jail and with a record that will affect them for the rest of their lives. Keep reiterating this fact to them. For centuries, Hmong women have been taught many things of what is right from wrong. Hmong women should be taught to have a voice, have the courage to call the police or seek shelter when in need. They should be taught not to tolerate the abuse and learn to stand up for themselves (Lee). The education can be on legal, laws, consequences, remedies as such support groups provided for victims and family members of follow by treatment program/intervention for perpetrators/abusers, and aggressive family advocacy.

In embracing change, people's learning and development occur through interactions between the others and his/her environment. Learning is more than the mastery of an academic discipline. Learning occurs in the home, workplace, classroom, and outside of these spaces, and can be both deliberate and accidental. Understanding the role of the environment and the effects professionals provide effective opportunities and challenges for student to learn about and apply effective ways of dealing with the tasks of becoming a successful and confident individual, responsible human being and a respectful community member. An underlying premise of most development models is that earlier experiences help to shape subsequent changes. People learn and grow in understanding their own personal sense of self (identity) and cultural identity. Furthermore, we develop a sense of autonomy and understanding of the relationship between independence and interdependence. We learn ways to participate as responsible members of our communities and society and become involved as responsible community members. We become aware and accept, understand, appreciate many different cultures, values, life styles, cognitive styles, etc. of others.

Hmong people develop ideas about what constitutes a successful life reflect the tension between, and their attempts to integrate American values of individualism and self-determination with the Hmong values of economic self-sufficiency and kinship. For them, the clan and the family are all important and their social organization determines the worldview of each Hmong person. Community clan involvement is necessary for respect of their cultural norms, values and beliefs. Cultural influences human behaviors because it affects the norms, values and beliefs by which Hmong people behave in their respective cultures. A balance of maintenance behavior helps individual maintain their own cultural sense of identity and sense of well-being and enables Hmong individuals to reestablish those vital aspects of one self that is being lost in the cultural setting.

There should be work on infrastructure, including training programs to accommodate sincere relationships with people of different cultures. By focusing on ethnicity, people are understanding multicultural groups—who they are and how they can share their culture with others. Institutions like UW-La Crosse and New Horizon should focus even more effort on developing the institutional infrastructure in order to facilitate learning, training and an

environment conducive for multi-culturalism. There are needs for more bilingual and even multi-lingual educators. Those working at UW-La Crosse and New Horizon need to be aware and sensitive of different cultures on campus. People working with Hmong individuals must be aware of diversity among Hmong themselves, and of the specific plights faced within the Hmong community. A Hmong faculty member/staff on board, with his/her interpretation skills, could play a more active role in the education of Hmong students. The institutionalized programs like the one at CDCR, in which training Hmong students in the skills needed to work in societies, institutions, including schools, government, business, etc., is a key step toward fighting the stereotypes the La Crosse community still holds about Hmong people. It is also crucial to ensuring that Hmong children and a parent of do not grow-up hating an educational system that has failed them. Universities and non-profit agencies needs more programs such as Hmong/diversity initiative courses, which are more advanced Hmong language, history, and culture curriculum and other ethnic languages, history, and culture courses which may lead to their being more valued and supported on campus/social non-profit agency.

Currently and on-going, further advocacy should be in placed to bridge between other departments and agencies to promote new ways of thinking, working, assisting, and coordinating work in the campus environment to better serve students. The advocacy should serve as a vital resource representative for an ever-widening people in the college campus and the community. To advance and use knowledge, a society needs the right mix of chaos and order. Too much order does not work. Too much chaos does not work. Successful societies create and manage a dynamic tension between the two opposing forces without letting either of them get out of hand. New ideas are easily frustrated if societies are not receptive to the chaos that comes from change, yet they have to maintain an appropriate degree of order to take advantage of those creative breakthroughs. Knowledge allows new things suddenly to be done in new ways. We need to understand the workflow and legal and social decisions that resonated from domestic violence through the echelons to the individual victims of domestic abuse and people in need of assistance serving in various billets throughout the La Crosse County. There should be inspiration to be a part of this vehicle for counseling and guidance multicultural people.

Clear communication is critical to success. One reason is that teamwork and other new models in the workplace will require communication ranging from face-to-face to messages exchanged through sometimes-faceless electronic systems like email. In the marketplace of ideas, the person who communicates clearly is also the person who is seen as thinking clearly. Oral and written communication is not only job securing, but also job-holding skills. There are conflict resolution and negotiation skills that are critical to the performance delivered between one another to avoid violence. When people know how to work out their differences, they often experience breakthroughs in mind-sets and can resolve problems more easily. These skills may even save lives. Within families and organizations, people will need skills in negotiation. These skills will become increasingly essential for everyone. Finding “win-win” solutions will be part of seeking common ground and dealing with our differences. There are negotiations discussed with the lawyers and social services representatives to help assistant the client’s needs successfully and efficiently. There is an ability to communicate with others, orally and in writing, in order to deal effectively with subordinates and management, coordinate work efforts. The ability to provide guidance and advice to victims of domestic abuse, family or women who need social, medical, housing, educational assistance. The ability to work within appropriate committee structures to promote/coordinate necessary reports, ideas, and resources are keys to a successful front. A wise man once reminded his children that “Self-education is inherently limited, education is knowledge.” Progress requires systematic social processes for educating the young. We must appreciate that emotions can be modes of understanding, and that ambiguity presents not just confusion, but real opportunities to propose well-crafted solutions, especially in unpredictable situations. In order to effectively work with the Hmong community and students, the majority of people in the La Crosse area, there should be a need to educate on the Hmong people, Hmong culture, and why the community is fortunate to have this group in the La Crosse. It is everybody’s duty to educate one another and promote more awareness about the Hmong in the La Crosse community.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hmong minority women will not turn to the white majority for help unless if there was a Hmong shelter. Abused women and their familial social connections, although this may seem largely contradictory to outside readers, largely tolerate this sexual and domestic abuse. This blind acceptance to domestic abuse stems from the tradition that women, especially the submissive women of the Hmong culture, are viewed as property of men since she has agreed to the relationship arrangement. He therefore can in essence do whatever pleases him, she must obey and do as told; otherwise suffer drastic consequences for her actions. Other Asian women from different cultures,

not just the Hmong culture, live and operate under these contractual agreements as well. In their world, male dominance, or patriarchy, remains at the top of the social ladder.

With that said, women feel as if they have no way out of an abusive relationship. Women of older generations specifically struggle with language, and are unable to seek help effectively due to the communication barrier regarding the circumstances of their home environment. Furthermore, vital information regarding where to seek helps, whom to talk to, or how to obtain economic and living resources is withheld. Other barriers women face is the lack of support from families, mental health issues, unemployment, lack of education, and homelessness.

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