

Angie Vang

Professor McCarthy

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Your Family Cares

"If you keep eating that much, nobody will marry you." Hearing that at the age of five made me question if eating was a bad thing. My grandmother is just trying to look out for me, right? Should I stop eating the food that is given to me? I was born as a 10-pound baby and only continued to rack up my weight as I grew up. Being overweight in a charter school as a kid, I was bullied about being chubbier and not as athletic as other girls. My grandmother stuck to how the Hmong wanted things enforced, how her parents forced these things on her. I needed to grow up as the most perfect daughter who knew how to cook, clean, and look pretty for her husband. She would imply that I was merely raised to be sold off to another Hmong family as their son's wife because that was what every Hmong daughter's fate was. I was bigger than other girls my age and my grandmother would complain about how I did not know how to make myself look attractive by using makeup. My relatives would agree with her when she would say I was too chubby and ugly to get a boyfriend or a husband. Though they have their own exact standards for being pretty, I know that I am healthy and pretty, I am an amazing girlfriend and will be a good wife, I can do anything the other boys in my family do, and I have been successful on my own.

I have been told many times that because I am overweight, I could never be healthy and pretty. I understand that people instantly assume that if somebody is overweight, they are unhealthy but, that is not always the case. I am overweight and I am healthy. The unrealistic beauty standards all circle around ridiculously low body weight and body images. Even without

that high standard of low body weight, I know I am healthy. I take care of myself and my well-being carefully, I make sure to stay active and go to the gym, and I make sure to watch what I eat and drink. I do not get sick as often as others. When I do get sick, I heal quickly and am not affected for exceedingly long. Although most people say that overweight people do not care for their well-being or how they present themselves, I maintain how I present myself, all while taking care of my well-being. I find myself attractive and healthy and have a lot of self-love. I have grown to tell myself that anything anybody says about my weight or appearance does not matter because it should not be any of their concern. When it comes to self-love, I have spent a lot of time being proud of my progress and I learned to enjoy time on my own. I continue to hype myself up on how I look every day because I look beautiful. I know my worth and I understand what is not good for me, so I make sure to protect myself and defend myself from toxic things. Practicing self-love is something very important in understanding self-worth and simply loving yourself. You should be looking in the mirror and telling yourself that you are amazing and gorgeous. You should not let negative comments affect you and how you think about yourself, the only person who can change how you think about yourself is you. Never put yourself down and always love the person you are.

In addition to not being seen as good enough, my relatives say that I could never be a good wife or girlfriend because I am not good enough at anything. In Hmong culture, traditional marriage is seen very differently from modern marriages and relationships. They believe that Hmong people should only ever marry other Hmong people, which unlike relationships today, you can see different races and ethnicities mix in relationships. The Hmong also believe that the husband will always be the dominant one in the marriage, where everything he says and believes goes and the wife is only there to care for him and make sure that everything he needs in life is done for him. In modern relationships we see a lot of different types of people that want different

things. Relationships are made to be fair to both people involved. The Hmong elders in my family say I need to know how to cook and clean to be a perfect wife or girlfriend. I agree that I am not that proficient in cooking, but I always have the time to grow and learn, and that is the same for many things. I have practiced cooking for so long that I am confident enough in my skills. I have been cleaning my whole life and genuinely enjoy it now, so I know I am good at keeping things neat and organized. I understand and know how to do simple life skills like starting a fire, doing laundry, and managing money. But I do not need those things to be a good wife or girlfriend. I do not do a lot of those things for my boyfriend, and he still assures me that I am an amazing girlfriend to him simply because of how I care for and love him. When it comes to equality in contributing to a relationship, we are always putting in our all for each other by helping and supporting improvements. I believe that there are no certain requirements or anything to becoming a good girlfriend, and from my experiences, I know that you can learn to become a good girlfriend as your relationship continues. Everybody is different and wants different things from their significant other. You do not need to know how to do everything to become a good girlfriend or wife.

As I was only to be raised a perfect daughter to be married off, I was not allowed to do things the boys in my family did. Growing up, I was very intrigued in the video games that I would watch my older brothers play. I was never allowed to play them because my parents would tell me that I needed to focus on staying in the kitchen to help my aunties cook or clean. The younger girls were not allowed to play or have fun. At Hmong parties I was always sent to help in the kitchen, to clean the house, or to watch the babies. I watched the younger boys run around and have fun instead of having to work like the mothers and older sisters in their family. I felt so disconnected with the child inside of me because I never had the chance to have fun or do anything I found interesting. As I grew older, I began playing video games and fell in love with

them. I played every single day and had fun with my brothers, instead of constantly learning how to cook and watch babies like my grandmother urged me to. I played a lot of first-person shooter (FPS) games because I feel like they helped me release a lot of my suppressed emotions. The Hmong elders judged and ridiculed me over it, but I knew that I liked playing video games no matter what. As I went more into the world, I saw that it became a very normal thing for girls to be interested in many things the boys liked. It is okay to like anything, no matter what my family told me was right, I began becoming more interested in other things, and that is something that made me happier.

I was told that I would never be successful in anything in the outside world on my own. I was told that I only needed my family, and they would be the ones to help me succeed in everything I would ever need. There was not much I could pursue as a Hmong daughter. There were few girls within our relatives that went to pursue careers or education, so I was not educated much. My parents were quite absent, trying to make money for my family and my grandmother would only teach me how to be a good daughter and wife. I had an older cousin that I really looked up to, she was smart and beautiful. She was the cousin that my grandmother would tell me to be like, she set the expectation of high intellect in school on our families. I tried harder in school and brought home good grades. I made my family proud and raised their expectations of me. When I met older relatives, they would say that education was not meaningful enough to pursue and that I would be unsuccessful in life without them. A lot of the Hmong elders agreed among themselves that education is not needed for daughters when their husbands would be the ones with actual careers to make money for their future families. I still tried anyway. I succeeded in school, and I did much of it on my own. I got this far, and I am proud of myself and proud to prove them wrong. I am in college now and I have been making money. I am successful in my own eyes, and it does not matter to me anymore if they do not

think I have not been successful enough on my own, I have my own goals that I would love to achieve and I know that if I never give up, I will be succeeding in them one day.

Briefly, I am, in some people's eyes, an overweight and unattractive Hmong daughter, I am healthy and pretty, I am a good girlfriend and can be a good wife one day, I can do what I want even if it is "only for boys," and I have been successful on my own. I started to understand why my grandmother was so strict and harsh on me at an incredibly early age, she just wanted what was best for me and she loved me a lot. She understands that things are hard and difficult in life, but that my family was always there for me to lean and rely on. She wanted to make sure I knew that I am never alone in everything I do. My family will always care and support me. No matter what stereotypes and problems you are challenged with, you should always do what your heart believes in and do what you enjoy, not worrying about what people say to bother you and keep you down. Your family may seem hard on you, but they really care about you and will always look out for you, to bring out the best of you.