

## Suicide and Chinese Culture

Maxine Hong Kingston's essay "No Name Woman," is a gender focused story describing some of the behavior and beliefs of the Chinese culture. It entails Kingston's mother revealing to her her unmentionable aunt. Her mother tells her of the tragic story of her aunt's suicide. She explains that her aunt became pregnant by a man other than her husband. She took the life of her and her child as a result of the community's reaction to her adulterous pregnancy. In the essay, Kingston illustrates several behaviors and traditions that took place in her culture. One that stood out the most was the impression that her society had of women. For instance, the way a woman appeared exteriorly could distinguish her personal disposition as well as her marital status.

The fact that women could be so easily judged is described in Kingston's quote: "On a farm near the sea, a woman who tended to her appearance reaped a reputation for eccentricity. All married women blunt-cut their hair in flaps behind their ears or pulled back in tight buns. No nonsense. Neither style blew easily into heart-catching tangles. And at their weddings they displayed themselves in their long hair for the last time." (328). In other words a woman was viewed as strange if she primped and fussed over her appearance. If she wore clothes of certain colors or styles it said something about her personality and demeanor. Furthermore, men could tell if a woman was available for marriage if her hair was long and flowing. If a woman was already married it was expected she should pay little attention to her appearance.

This perception in Chinese culture endorses that a person can be judged simply by the way they look. In our society this same notion is relevant in the adolescent subculture. In this day and age there are several ways of dressing and expressing yourself. Many of these ways of dressing are named. One example of this named fashion would be what teenagers call a prep, meaning the wearer looks as if they attend a preparatory school.

When someone is distinguished as a prep generally the clothes they wear are from particular stores such as J. Crew, Abercrombie and Fitch, American Eagle, Gap, or Aeropostale. The clothes are very preppy, hence the name of the group these teenagers are categorized under. The universal view of preps is that they are more than likely athletic in some way. Their personality is deemed sophisticated. Expensive private schools where uniforms are worn are commonly where these teenagers are educated. They usually come from rich families. The type of families that are members of elite country clubs. They almost always drive a nice vehicle that their parents bought for them. Preps are also expected to be very popular. Many preps probably haven't dressed like a prep their entire adolescent lives. Usually if they attend a new school or meet new friends that are preppy, they become preppy as well. When they are seen wearing the attire that fits the description, they have officially "displayed themselves..." as a prep. Just like every other group of teens, preps hang out in a crowd of people that share the same interests, shop at the same stores, and wear the same type of clothing.

Boys in this category dress impressively. They look as if they are always going on a job interview and they expect "no nonsense" when it comes to their clothing. They can be

recognized as wearing baggy, but not too baggy jeans, khakis, or corduroys. Most of the time you see them wearing sweaters, sweater vests, or polo shirts. They usually wear baseball caps or visors with the name brand of where they bought it across the front of it. When they don't wear hats their hair is usually gelled and spiky. Many of these boys play sports. Typically they play soccer and tennis, but some may play football. They pay close attention to their physique by going to the gym frequently. Thin with a washboard stomach is the notion one gets when they think of a prep's body. Staying in shape is a key priority. Although the public looks at them as being classy, their attitude can be somewhat cocky or arrogant at times.

The girls of the prep group dress conservatively and tastefully. Their apparel consists of three-quarter length-sleeved shirts or form fitting tees. Their pants are boot-cut jeans, khakis, or corduroys. A Chinese woman "...reaped a reputation for eccentricity" if she "...tended to her appearance..." as does a prep girl when it comes to fretting over her looks. They wear their hair plain and long and depending on if they have any on at all, their makeup is extremely natural. Sometimes they will wear name brand baseball caps with their long hair pulled through the back of it. Like the boys, they are more than likely athletic. Soccer and tennis would have to be their sports of choice. Girls are also extremely concerned with their bodies. They make sure to watch their weight and take good care of themselves. Their legs are normally the feature that is most prominent because they are so muscular and defined. Girls of the prep crowd come off snobby. They usually don't associate with anyone other than the girls on their sports team. Many people think that they believe they are better than everybody.

Kingston's description of her culture relates to our society by the fact that both judge people by physical appearance. A woman in Chinese culture with short hair is automatically assumed to be a married woman, even though it may not hold true. It is the same in our culture, only different assumptions. A person wearing a name brand sweater may not necessarily be a prep, but in an instant people will be sure to characterize them as one. It is like it has become a reflex to know exactly what kind of person someone is or where they stand in humanity by looking at how they style their hair or what they are wearing.

Cultures may look at separating people into groups as a way to simplify society. People may put themselves into categories, such as the preps, to be easily distinguished from another group. Although people are not alone in the groups they put themselves in, being recognized as a member of one of them has become ultimately important in establishing a sense of individuality. Unless people all over the world start wearing the same clothes and identical haircuts, everyone will always be assessed by their appearance. It is an essential factor of our culture, as well as other cultures.

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