

Maasai culture v american culture

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In the tribal villages of eastern Africa the Maasai marriages are arranged by the elders without ever first consulting the bride or the mother of the bride to be. Unlike, that of my own culture in the United States of America, where I am free as a citizen to choose whomever I may choose to marry and when and if I may marry. Polygyny is that of which is practiced in the Maasai culture, as an ideal that is achieved only by that of the elder men of the tribe. Unfortunately, as a result of the men being much older at the time of marriage, most women become widows, knowing that it is understood that they should never remarry again.

Although, I myself practice monogamy, as it is tradition in my culture and that of what is expected by me, my community, and my family. A young girl's childhood in Maasai culture is dominated by a strict avoidance of her father and other elders. Her marriage prospects and her family's reputation hinges on her ability to develop an accurate sense of respect in her community. She is socialized from birth to accept her service to her future husband as an elder and to all other elders in the community. The father is the key figure in the patriarchal family. Theoretically, his control is absolute only to the interference by close senior elders.

It is tradition in Maasai culture that as long as the father is alive, no son has final control over his cattle or over his choice in marriage. It is practiced that as the younger men of the community age, the older men begin to rely on their sons to take over the management of the family. After a husband's death, the widow is then subordinate to her sons in the management of her herd. If she has no sons; she is unprotected. As this idea is not practiced in

my own community, where typically the roles of the head of household is shared among husband and wife equally.

Inheritance of property and land is dispersed through the doctrine of a will written out before death or handled in the courts of law. Although, respect is greatly admired and sought out upon in my community, it does not determine the stance of potential marriages and families in the community. A young girl's childhood is shared by the love and affection of a girl's father and elders, not that of fear and solitude. Love, high morals, and affection is that of which typical childhoods are instilled with upon their growing up in my society.

Similar to that of my own culture, the marriage ceremony is one of the longest and most celebrated ceremonies in the Maasai community. It begins by a man showing interest in a woman and giving her a chain, called an *olpisiai*, similar in retrospect as that of an engagement ring in American society. Likewise, as the word of this proposal circulates the family as well as the community waits for the initial proceedings to begin. The Maasai man does this by finding women of his own age who will bring a gift of alcohol to the mother of the girl. This first stage called *esirit enkoshoke* indicates to everyone that the girl is now engaged.

After some odd time, the man has to make his intentions clear again once more. By presenting a gift of alcohol to the girl's father, the man has shown this once again, as the alcohol will be brought by the same women who brought the other gift of alcohol to the women earlier. The gift of alcohol is called *enkiroret*, which the father of the intended bride drinks with his

brothers and then summons the man asking him to declare his initial interest and to speak of the woman he wishes to marry. If the family agrees to the man's request, both parties officially establish a relationship, and the wedding planning begins to take foot.

In the Maasai community and as in mine, marriage is considered very important. However, when two people are brought together to become a husband and wife in the Maasai community, the newlyweds are expected to live with each other forever; divorce is not an option. Once the Maasai man has chosen and paid for his wife he is then allowed to bring gifts to the woman's family. By first giving the presents as he sees fit, to a final point where it will become clear to those in the community that he has taken an interest in the well-being of the girl's family and that she is not to be readily available.

These gifts the Maasai man has given to the girl will create the bride-to-be's dowry, the purpose of which is not to create wealth for the bride's family, but rather to legalize the marriage. By the man putting his mark on that family, he is making it so that if anyone else tries to approach the family and offer a bride price, it will have been made clear that the girl has already been given away to another family and is spoken for. Like that of an engagement ring or wedding band worn by both the men and women in my community, as it is displaying to everyone that they are spoken for and are not available to others in the community.

As the wedding day begins in Maasai culture the groom brings the bride price, including three cows, of which two are female and one is male and all

are black, and two sheep, one female and the other male. The male sheep is to be slaughtered during the wedding day to remove its rich fats and oils, which will then later be applied to the wedding dress. The remaining's of the oil is put in a container for the bride to carry to her new home after the wedding in her husband's kraal. The morning of the wedding, the bride's head is shaved and anointed with lamb fat.

She is decorated similarly to that of my own culture by beautiful beaded decorations, and her wedding dress. Although unlike wise, her dress is made by relatives in the community and her mother, making the wedding dress an expression of community, not individuality. The bride is also blessed by the elders using alcohol and milk, and she is led from her family's kraal to her new home, in the kraal of her husband. There, she will enter the house of her husband's mother, where she will stay for the next two days, during which time the groom may not sleep with her or eat food in the house she is staying in.

Finally, after those two days, the wife's head is shaved once more by her husband's mother, and the wedding ceremony is finally over; the man and woman are married elders. Concluding that although both cultures differ greatly in their practices and expectations there are still similarities to be understood. Both cultures dually express and display their affection towards one another in some public manor or display. Even if our ideals and morals are different, the feelings that everyone wants to be with their true love forever is evident.