

Different cultures, ethnocentrism and culture shock in my big fat greek wedding

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Introduction

When you come from a different culture, especially when you are so attached to that culture, it becomes very difficult to have to go against your usual cultural ways. Trying to please your family and yourself can even become a challenge, when the two of you want alternative things, and have such contrasting point of views. “ My big fat Greek wedding” is a romantic comedy; which tells a story about a young American woman of Greek descent named Toula, who lives in Chicago with her big family. Coming from a very traditional upbringing, she faces the deep questions of priorities in life. Ranging from the role of family in a contemporary society, to the pressures placed upon her by her cultural norms. Things are not going well because her eccentric father insists on her finding a good husband obviously of Greek origin. One day Toula meets a young American – Yan and they fall in love. Toula’s father does not like the idea of his daughter not being happy so he gives in and blesses their union. In this movie we find out what the young American has to learn and understand to get to know more about the Greek the culture. The concepts that I will cover in this analysis are of Ethnocentrism/Cultural Relativism, Individualistic and Collectivistic cultures and Culture Change.

Collectivistic/Individualistic Cultures

We can clearly trace the concepts of collectivistic and individualistic culture in this movie. Toula’s family represents the Greek collectivistic culture.

Collectivism is the one in which people tend to view themselves as members of groups (families, work units, tribes, nations), and usually

consider the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of individuals, they are very vertical where a lot of power and respect is given to elders. Individualistic cultures on the other hand, are those that stress the needs of the individual over the needs of the group as a whole. They are horizontal and the decision making in the individual's hands as oppose to the elders. In this type of culture, people are seen as independent and autonomous. Social behavior tends to be dictated by the attitudes and preferences of individuals. Cultures in North America and Western Europe tend to be individualistic, whereas most Asian cultures tend to be collectivist. However, in this film we come across the example of Greek collectivistic culture where every member of a large family is up with doings of others relatives. Everybody is very interested in kinsman's life. We can observe it in the scene where Toula's parents are talking about their daughter's life with Toula's aunt. Aunt showed an enormous interest in Toula's life and in life of all her family. She asks questions, gives advices. And she speaks about Toula like about her own daughter. It means that all family members are very close and important to each other. During the movie, she struggles to get her family's acceptance while struggling with her own internalized Issues about her cultural identity, and her struggle with the rules and values. She faces the clash between her collectivistic culture and with that of the American individualistic culture, which are poles apart.

Ethnocentrism/Cultural Relativism/Culture Shock

Ian receives a culture shock when he finds out the type of family Toula is from. Compared with Toula's big family he comes from an only child

American family. In her family not only is there a Mom and Dad and brother and sister, there are aunts and uncles, endless no. of cousins and a live-in Grandma as well. There is a scene depicting just this when Toula asks Ian, "So, you have only two cousins, I have 27 first cousins. Just 27 first cousins alone! And my whole family is big and loud. And everybody is in each other's lives and business".

Another example is a scene where Toula's father comes through with a plate of meat, and Ian's parents turn it down, he looks seriously hurt, as if turning down food is something you just don't do in Greek culture. That is definitely a case of culture shock, because while Ian's parents meant it innocently, Gus took it offensively. You can tell that abundance of people, the loud music, the endless foods and drinks, and the jests of the guests are too much for Ian's parents, and they are overwhelmed by the experience because it is something they had never been through before.

Despite being from such opposite backgrounds, they are willing to look past all the differences and love each other and be together. When Toula tells him that it won't work out because of our cultural difference, he says, "So what? We are not a different species". This shows cultural relativism where you regard the beliefs, values, and practices of a culture from the viewpoint of that culture itself. They were accepting and learning each other's differences.

Ethnocentrism is a major reason for divisions amongst members of different ethnicities, races, and religious groups in society. Ethnocentrism is the belief

of superiority is one's personal ethnic group, but it can also develop from racial or religious differences. Ethnocentric individuals believe that they are better than other individuals for reasons based solely on their heritage. Clearly, this practice is related to problems of both racism and prejudice. The entire movie showcases about how Toula's Greek family thinks that being Greek is the only acceptable way of living. They are ridiculously obsessed with Greek being the best and how Greeks should only be with Greeks to breed more Greeks. There are numerous scenes in the movie where the father shows his strong ethnocentrism. Talking to Toula, he says, " There are two kinds of people: Greeks and everybody else who wish they were Greeks". Toula's father also constantly states that he can trace any word back to Greek origins. He says, "Give me a word, any word, and I show you that the root of that word is Greek".