

In a family studies perspective: my big fat greek wedding

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In a Family Studies Perspective: My Big Fat Greek Wedding The movie “ My Big Fat Greek Wedding” is a comedy film about the comparison of the typical American family, and of another ancestry, in this case, from Greece. This is a movie that portrays a kind of family that is very vocal and open as well as being large, which is not often seen in the usual context. It gives the viewer a new perspective on the dynamics of different family systems as well as to the adjustments most of the immigrant children would have to eventually face, in meeting up with the person they would eventually marry as well as reconciling the traditions and customs that they grew up with.

In a Family Studies Perspective: My Big Fat Greek Wedding The role of the family in the society has not changed so much since the dawn of human civilizations. It is an accepted fact that the family shapes an individual’s overall personality as well as his or her choices, beliefs, values as well as responsibilities to the family and to the state. But what is a “ family”? Although the term is almost always exposed everywhere, from mass media to simple coffee shop conversations, there are many ideas in relation to the word “ family”. In the traditional context, the family is defined as a group of two or more people that are tied together by marriage, by blood, or through adoption (Knox & Schacht, 2010). In a sociological perspective, a family is also said to be made up of a kinship system of a person’s relatives, and is recognized as a social unit in its own right. However, in recent times the original definition of family has been challenged by the changing times and choices of the people in a society. Due to the weakening of the structure of the family mainly due to the increase of individualism, families are also being defined based on their function, for example foster parenting and cohabiting of either heterosexual

or same-sex partners. In other culture's perspectives, a family can also be composed of all kin, regardless of how far the relationships really are. In the movie "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding", the definition of "family" has not only been confined to what people believe is, but it also consists of other people of the same race, same ideas, as well as the inclusion of distant relatives and even the elderly, which is atypical in the Westernized idea of defining a family. In the story, Fotoula "Toula" Portokalos is regarded as a "failure" due to her personal choice of opting to study and define what she wants, instead of the typical idea in their family that "women have only three roles in life: marry a Greek boy; make Greek babies; and cook for everyone else till they die" (Zwick, 2002). Due to the pressure of her father and other older relatives, she felt miserable and sad for her unending fate and distaste for marriage, until she met an upper-class American, Ian Miller. They fell in love and eventually planned on getting married but not without the shock and the disdain of her whole family, which included her household and her numerous relatives, and also the eventual shock of Ian's parents when they get to meet the loud and boisterous overly-extended family of Toula. But as the story progressed, the couple were able to meet half-way, for Toula, accepting who she really is and her ancestry, and for Ian the adjustments of having a big and noisy family which was in reality a warm and close-knit group that helps everyone in need, whenever or whatever it is. This movie is able to show viewers many insights as to how families work in different ways. For one, in the prologue of the movie, Toula has to balance between being Greek and wanting to belong to the popular girls in school. Her father as well as her whole family is very proud of the fact that they are Greek, which she could

not accept until she met Ian, who loved her for being Greek and all that (Zwick, 2002). For Ian, the novelty and liberating feeling of being in a new environment made him a changed man, because he came from a very quiet family and he is an only son. This already shows how a person's family can affect an individual strongly, which can be either negatively or positively (Knox & Schacht, 2010). Another is that compared to a typical Western family that has individualistic approach with regards as to how to function and live within a society, other kinds of families, especially those with extended kin tend to base their choices on a consensus of the ideas of the patriarchs, or of the family elders. Another strong topic in the movie is the acceptance of both families and their merging into one. In typical Western fashion, during marriage, only the two parties, the husband and wife would accept each other in creating a new family, and although the parents and some close relatives would be involved in the decision, the final say would still be from the marrying couple (Knox & Schacht, 2010). In the movie's setting however, the merging of the Millers and the Portokalos (as the father of Toula, Kostos states: we may be different, but we are all fruit) was not just a very joyous occasion that must be celebrated, but also lived not just during weddings but everyday as well (Zwick, 2002). Due to the acceptance of the families of the sons' and daughters' wives or husbands, the typical family becomes overly-extended, in the sense that since there are more members, there is more fun, and also more help to count on when the need arises. On more than one occasion, there is a party or a get-together which involved eating and socializing in the family's house, which shows how important the ties were in the female protagonist's side. The last strong point in the movie

is the weight of marriage itself. While in the typical Western fashion, marriage is just an option, in some cultures it is THE only option (Knox & Schacht, 2010). Toula was eventually married, and her family was able to accept it wholeheartedly, since they never really expected her to marry in the first place. For many cultures, the price of being married is heavier other than following a person's dreams, especially among women. Although it seems a bit unfair, a culture that values marriage as well as building a family is very central because it is the family that a person can run to during times of trouble, as well as during one's old age, as shown by the presence of Toula's grandmother staying at their household (Zwick, 2002). In a nutshell, the movie " My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding" was able to show a side of family that is not typical, but is very traditional in a sense. It was able to show two perspectives in an interracial marriage and at the same time making people laugh. It was able to define family in two different but uncommon contexts and making it seem possible in reality. References Knox, D., & Schacht, C. (2010). Choices in Relationships. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. Zwick, J. (Director). (2002). My Big Fat Greek Wedding [Motion Picture]. Canada: IFC Films