My Big Fat Greek Wedding Movie Analysis

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My Big Fat Greek Wedding, produced by Goetzman, Hanks & Wilson (2002), is a movie about Fotoula “Toula” Portokalos who is discovering herself, falling in love, and deciding to go against typical tradition. This movie focuses on the difficulties of her marriage, with Ian Miller, that they face together. While watching this film, viewers watch the comical struggles and all of the values that come with planning a wedding when the family of a strong belief is involved. Throughout the story the characters experience many examples of interpersonal communication and many that have been discussed in the Interpersonal Communication course and throughout the book Contemporary Issues in Interpersonal Communication book by Orbe and Bruess (2005). Throughout this essay there will be an analysis of different interpersonal concepts that happen throughout the characters and relationships throughout this entire movie.

Orbes and Bruess explain ethnocentrism as the belief that your own cultural group is better to all other groups. Kostas “Gus” Portokalos, Toula’s father, has a strong belief that Greeks are superior to all that around him. He communicates this to everyone around him, especially when he is around his very own family, because of how proud he is of his heritage. This is shown throughout the movie when he talks about how every root of words are somehow Greek or what success the Greeks have. You clearly see this when he states, “There are two kinds of people – Greeks, and everybody else who wish they were Greek.” Throughout the film you can see how proud he is of his culture, and believes they are better than other cultures.

The next interpersonal concept that was in the film My Big Fat Greek Wedding was collectivism. According to Contemporary Issues in Interpersonal Communication this is,
“cultural values that emphasize group identities, concerns, and needs over individual identities, concerns, and needs” (pg 226). Like displayed with the concept of ethnocentrism use, this is another belief that the family uses throughout the film with being Greek. It is very important from a young age that the practice of Greek heritage and to do everything based on the culture beliefs. This includes the ideas of only marrying Greeks, learning the Greek language, sticking to gender roles in this culture, going into the family business, and many other things that are a part of the Greek heritage. The family culture values focuses more on carrying traditions rather than what the individual feels.

Another theory that is used throughout the movie was the use of stereotypes. According to Orbes and Bruess stereotypes is a generalizing a group of things and assuming all to be true about one general category. Ian’s parents use this after Toula announces to them that she is Greek. The parents think back on a former co-worker and believe the co-worker’s heritage is Greek, based on their looks, and realize in the end they are actually Guatemalan. The stereotyping that is used in this scene is the ideas of all of these different non-European heritages are close together because they look like one another. Without the knowledge of other culture looks, Ian’s parents are unable to identify specific culture identities of others and group them together.

Compromising is when two or more people resolve a conflict by giving up something of some sorts to gain agreement from the other according to the textbook Contemporary Issues in Interpersonal Communication. Ian communicates compromising to Toula, and his love for her, throughout the movie. A time that he displays this and compromises is through baptizing himself to be Greek. He gives up any other one of his beliefs to be Greek in order to allow her
parents to approve of him. Another time that Ian performs this is preparation of the wedding. He allows her family to plan the wedding, Greek themed, even though he has other ideas himself. Without the baptism or wedding, her parents would not allow the relationship or marriage.

Bypassing is another interpersonal concept that is used a lot during this movie. Orbes and Bruess define this term as when a person assumes that words have an incorrect meaning. There are many instances in My Big Fat Greek Wedding where this is displayed, especially within the Greek family. One example of this would be when Ian’s family is invited over to the Portokalos house for dinner. When Toula plans this event, she tells her mother that it will only be a small get together dinner. Although when she talks to her right before the dinner, she finds out her mother thought it meant that the entire family is coming over for dinner. Her mother uses bypassing by not understanding what Toula actually meant by a small family dinner. This happens frequently in the film, mostly in instances of when her parents hear her say something but they do it their own greek way because that is the way they wanted to hear whatever she had said. Other instances that bypassing occurs in the movie include the family planning the wedding, when Ian’s parents are offered drinks, when Toula asks for things and many other moments throughout the film.

Orbes and Bruess define breadth as the range of topics included when self disclosing yourself to someone else. Throughout the film Toula has many relationships that she decided on how she self disclose herself to each individudal. Towards the beginning of the film you can see the lack of disclosure presented to her father about her personal life. This includes the topics of using computers and when she is dating Ian. These are subjects she has thought about
and breadth of what topics would be appropriate. She does not mention these topics to him because of his disapproval and the fact that she is not close enough to him to share some personal information with.

A final concept used in this movie that displays some sort of interpersonal communication is the concept of blind self. This is defined as information that others know but you are unaware of according to Contemporary Issues in Interpersonal Communication. This concept is shown throughout the movie because you allowed to hear what others say about Toula without her hearing, everything. An example of this occurred in the beginning of the movie when Toula’s family is talking about her behind her back. They speak about her never leaving the home or marrying. During this instance of time, she hears her family members saying this about her and she realizes that she is alone and is in need of some sort of change in her life. This is displayed because she is greatly unaware of what other family members think of her or expect of her in the future.

There are many interpersonal communication concepts that are used throughout My Big Fat Greek Wedding. Some of the ones that were further explained and analyzed throughout this movie included ethnocentrism, collectivism, stereotypes, compromising, bypassing, breadth and blind self. Without any of these concepts that were displayed in the movie, the sense of communication through characters and to the audience would be weakened. Interpersonal communication is part of daily lives, and is very lively in entertainment we see as well. Being able to see it and analyze it is very important as well.
Bibliography
